'Somewhere I Had to Go' :

The Postmodernist and Posthumanist Gothic Transmutations of Ramsey Campbell's Longer Fictions, 1981—2016

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'Somewhere I Had to Go' : The Postmodernist and Posthumanist Gothic Transmutations of Ramsey Campbell's Longer Fictions, 1981—2016

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I certify that this Thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis redresses the critical neglect of British horror writer Ramsey Campbell within Gothic studies and, more generally, within contemporary horror literature. Despite respect from peers, Campbell's work has not been accorded substantial attention or theoretical contextualisation. Focussing on Campbell's largely ignored longer fictions, this study establishes the author's unique style and distinctive mediation of the Gothic tradition, and interprets his work through postmodernist paradigms drawn from Baurillard and Lyotard as well as emergent posthumanist theory. It discloses not sensationalism or apolitical parochialism, but a liberal and interrogative perspective engaged with cultural, aesthetic and broader philosophical concerns.

The thesis employs textual analysis of eleven representative texts from Campbell's oeuvre to expound the development of a nuanced and iconoclastic vision of the status of the subject, writer and writer as subject in contemporary Britain. Campbell's work, denoted by scepticism and agnosticism, is first shown to deconstruct prevailing religious metanarratives as a means of interpreting the experiential world. The thesis goes on to demonstrate how Campbell's critique of prevailing secular metanarratives within capitalist society, articulated as psychological horror via the generic serial killer trope, both anatomises causes of violence and satirises the horror fiction industry and the relationship between author and audience. Close readings of two poioumenomic novellas then showcase Campbell's engagement with literary form and concepts of writers, readership, fiction, time and reality – all stable concepts challenged by postmodernism. Campbell's work is shown to combine paranoia as predictive response with scepticism towards associated notions of debilitating simulacrisation and impotence of the subject. Finally, the thesis examines the extension of both traits presented by Campbell's metaleptic postmillennial narratives, in which digital technology is, simultaneously, source of fear and of life. The late fictions show incursion of an alterity conferred with sentience upon the subject, whilst simultaneously precipitating debate as to the ontological status of these transformed or new posthuman lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: BENEATH THE SURFACE: CAMPBELL, 'TRADITION' AND LIMINALITY

1. A Neglected 'Poet': Campbell and His Audiences

This thesis seeks to recuperate the British author Ramsey Campbell as an important figure within Gothic and contemporary literature, and to interrogate his relationship with both literary postmodernism and discourses on posthumanism. Both within and beyond the field of Gothic studies, Campbell presents a number of contradictions and challenges for the literary scholar. From one perspective, he is difficult to ignore. Born in Merseyside in 1946, Campbell has been described as 'Britain's most respected living writer' of horror fiction by the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*.[1] Campbell was a precocious author: what was to become his first published work, 'The Church in High Street', was accepted by August Derleth at Arkham House in 1962, and his first collection of short stories, originally entitled *The Inhabitant of the Lake and Less Welcome Tenants* (1964) by 'J. Ramsey Campbell', followed from the same publisher, when the author was only eighteen.[2]

In an ensuing career now spanning over half a century, Campbell has also been extremely prolific. His output, to 2020, has included around three hundred short stories, the form for which he remains best known, and, beginning with *The Doll Who Ate His Mother* (1976), some forty original novels and novellas.[3]

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[1] Anonymous, 'Horror Fiction', *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 7th edn, ed. by Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 499.

[2] Ramsey Campbell, *The Inhabitant of the Lake and Less Welcome Tenants* (Sauk City, WI: Arkham Press, 1964). A 2011 reissue, by genre specialists, PS Publishing, used the title Campbell had originally intended, *The Inhabitant of the Lake & Other Unwelcome Tenants*. Campbell also subsequently dropped the initial 'J.' (for John) after this first volume.

[3] Campbell has also authored several novelisations of 1930s and 1940s Universal horror films using a pseudonym 'Carl Dreadstone' in 1977, and, under his own name, a novelisation of the screenplay for *Solomon Kane* (M. J. Bassett, 2009) in 2010.

Campbell was recognised at an early stage by Stephen King, his almost exact

contemporary and fellow luminary of the 1970s and 1980s boom in horror writing,

for both 'lucid' prose and a keenly delineated 'sense of place'. [4] Although

adaptations of Campbell's work to other media have not been undertaken on

anything like the industrial scale as they have been for King's, three of his novels

have been filmed, all in Spain: the 1981 text *The Nameless* (as *Los sin nombre*,

2005), 1988's *The Influence* (as *La influencia*, 2019), and 2001's *Pact of the*

Fathers (as *Second Name*, or *El segundo nombre*, 2002). In addition, Campbell

has been an active professional commentator and a meticulous scholar in his own

right. He served as a film and later DVD critic for BBC Merseyside radio for nearly

forty years, from 1969 until 2007, and has been an assiduous editor and

anthologist. In the latter capacity, he has promoted the work of both established

authors such as M. R. James, and emergent or forgotten ones like Thomas Ligotti

or Adrian Ross, whose 1914 novel, *The Hole of the Pit*, was reprinted for the first

time in Campbell's anthology, *Uncanny Banquet* (1992).[5] A frequent and candid

interviewee, Campbell has also produced a trove of other paratextual material in

the form of stand-alone reflective essays, introductions and afterwords. Finally,

over the years, Campbell has been the recipient of numerous honours, from the

British Fantasy Society, the Horror Writers' Association and the International

Horror Guild amongst others. Recognition seemed to reach a new zenith when, in

2015, Campbell was awarded both the World Fantasy Award for Lifetime

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[4] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012 [1981]), pp. 405, 402. King was born in 1947.

[5] See, in particular, *Meddling with Ghosts: Stories in the Tradition of M. R. James*, selected and introduced by Campbell (Boston Spa and London: British Library, 2001); Campbell's introduction to Thomas Ligotti: *Songs of a Dead Dreamer* (Albuquerque, NM: Silver Scarab Press, 1986), reprinted in Campbell, *Ramsey Campbell, Probably: On Horror and Sundry Fantasies*, ed. by S. T. Joshi (Harrogate: PS Publishing, 2002), pp. 266—7, as well as *Uncanny Banquet: Great Tales of the Supernatural*, ed. by Campbell (New York: Little, Brown, 1992).

Achievement and an Honorary Fellowship from Liverpool John Moores University for outstanding contribution to literature.

However, despite this level of productivity and acclaim, one is struck by the contrasting reception accorded to this author compared with King, unquestionably the world's most famous contemporary writer of horror fictions, or indeed with Clive Barker, Campbell's fellow Liverpudlian. The discrepancy is glaring in two respects. One is obviously commercial: Campbell's name recognition outside the field of horror fiction and his sales are not on the same scale as King's, whilst Barker, since his spectacular debut with the *Books of Blood* collections (1984— 85), has both relocated successfully to the United States and diversified widely into other forms of media and genre.[6] In terms of prominence in wider popular culture, 'John Horridge', the antagonist in Campbell's novel *The Face That Must Die* (first published in 1979, revised in 1983) has enjoyed nothing like the iconic status of Thomas Harris's 'Hannibal Lecter', in spite of Campbell's novel having anticipated the enduring proliferation and popularity of serial killer-related literature since the late 1980s by almost a decade. The second disparity relates to academic scholarship. For whilst both King and Barker have now received substantial attention from critics, any major academic project on Campbell can make some claim to what has been, comparatively, neglected territory.[7] Campbell seems content with a label: 'I write horror stories', he has declared baldly, 'and I make it

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[6] Sales of King's books, in particular, have been cited as being in the region of 350 million copies. See, for example, Karen Heller, 'Meet the elite group of authors who sell 100 million books – or 350 million', *Independent*, 28 December 2016 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/meet-the-elite-group-of-authors-who-sell-100-million-books-or-350-million-paolo-coelho-stephen-king-a7499096.html> [first accessed 9 June 2018].

[7] On King, see for example, John Sears, *Stephen King's Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), and, in a more explicitly postmodern context, Clotilde Landais, *Stephen King as a Postmodern Author* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013). For Barker (b. 1952), *Clive Barker: Dark Imaginer* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), ed. by Sorcha Ní Fhlainn, offers a recent collection of essays.

public that I do.'[8] Yet even within the parameters of Campbell's chosen field, the exact status of this author incarnates the vexed paradox of auteurship. Although the term is French for 'author', I am aware that in critical parlance 'auteur' originates and is more generally used in a *cinematic* context. However, I accord with Alexandre Astruc's cross-media interpretation and application, implicit in the notion of the caméra-stylo **(**camera pen**)** proposed in his essay, 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo' (1948), and contend that Campbell's evocative prose style, acute visual sensibility and his distinctive philosophical vision warrant its application in discussion of this author. [9] His fictions have been simultaneously both lauded and, at least thus far, comparatively overlooked and marginalised. In brief, to date, the Academy has not known quite what to *do* with Campbell.

For an appreciative but select group of fellow horror writers and critics within Gothic studies, Campbell's careful craftmanship, economy of style and bleak imagery have helped earn him admiring sobriquets such as 'the poet of urban squalor and decay'.[10] This 'poetic' quality is exemplified in the following description of a dystopian Liverpudlian street in 'Concussion' (1973), one of his early short stories. Of this landscape, Campbell writes:

> [t]hat image was dearest of all: the humps of spewed earth, the ruts and
> folds of bulldozer treads like the gums of a toothless mouth, a dog urinating

[8] Campbell, 'Why I Write Horror Fiction', *Necrofile* 2, Fall, 1991, repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, (pp. 301—5), p. 301.
[9] See also footnote 15, below.
[10] Joshi describes Campbell as such in *The Modern Weird Tale* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, 2001), p. 148, and again in his study of the author, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), p. 97.

brightly in the sunlight against the noticeboard which claimed the

wasteland; the abandonment, the disorientation.[11]

Campbell's speciality throughout his career has been the evocation of

horror amidst the urban, the contemporary, the quotidian, even the drably

mundane: council estates, modern offices, shopping centres, railway stations and

underpasses. Arguably, few writers could combine, as here, metaphors of vomit

('spewed' earth), similes of ageing and mortality ('like the gums of a toothless

mouth') and depictions of prosaic canine bodily function with such crispness and

elegance. In contrast to his more commercially successful peers, most obviously

King, the critic S. T. Joshi places Campbell among the 'literati' of contemporary

horror writers, alongside the American authors Ligotti and T. E. D. Klein.[12] By his

own acknowledgement, Campbell's work appeals to the connoisseur, a mature

and 'fairly literate' audience.[13] Initially highly imitative of H. P. Lovecraft, Campbell

quickly followed the advice of Derleth, his first editor and early mentor. He

replaced an initial, and highly derivative, Lovecraftian New England setting with

the postwar Merseyside and Severn Valley locations with which he himself was

more familiar: 'my personal Gothic landscape', as he has described it.[14] This

imagined terrain was developed to maturity in *Demons by Daylight* (1973),

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[11] Campbell, 'Concussion', in *Demons by Daylight* (London: Star, 1980 [1973]), pp. 134—161 (p. 152). All subsequent references for 'Concussion' and 'The Franklyn Paragraphs' (pp. 39—61) are to this edition, and page references are given within the main thesis text.
[12] Joshi, *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*, 2 vols. (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2014), II, p. 662.
[13] From an interview with Campbell by Mark James Kermode, July 1990, in Kermode's 'The Radical, Ethical and Political Implications of Modern British and American Horror Fiction' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Manchester, 1991), p. 35.
[14] Campbell, 'My Roots Exhumed', prefatory essay in Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, pp. 1—5 (p. 4).

Campbell's second collection, in which 'Concussion' appears. It is one that the writer has largely, although not exclusively, remained in ever since.

Campbell's narratives have, for the most part, recognizable urban settings, often Liverpool or Manchester, or fictitious rural ones. These latter locations, isolated and beset by darkness, literal or metaphysical, allow the author to evoke a rich tradition of folklore. As Stacey McDowell describes, folklore has been of significance 'in constructing a sense of national identity', and Campbell's works, up until at least *The Wise Friend* (2020), repeatedly draw upon the same well of inspiration as BBC television screenplays of the 1970s such as John Bowen's *Robin Redbreast* (1970) and David Rudkin's *Penda's Fen* (1974).[15] Whether urban or rural Gothic, Campbell has created a distinctively British landscape. He does *not*, however, specifically identify himself as a British author with a national identity or particular national agenda, or as a writer devoted to and working exclusively within folk horror in the way, for example, that Andrew Michael Hurley, at least to date, may be described. Rather, Campbell's preoccupations are with, as this thesis demonstrates, wider and transnational. He has praised Terry Lamsley as an 'inheritor of all the qualities of classic English supernatural fiction' and R. R. Ryan as 'one of the earliest British novelists to specialise in the horrific', but these valedictions of largely forgotten 'homegrown' authors need contextualisation alongside equally laudatory pieces on American writers like King, Ligotti and Poppy Z. Brite.[16] Campbell is concerned with exploring the liminal boundaries of

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[15] Stacey McDowell, 'Folklore', in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, ed. by William Hughes, David Punter and Andrew Smith, 2 vols. I, (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), pp. 252—4 (p. 252). I address the associated subgenre of 'folk horror' and Campbell's relationship with it in my discussion of pagan and Christian belief systems in Chapter One.

[16] Campbell, 'Terry Lamsley', combination of 'Introduction' to Lamsley's *Conference for the Dead* (Ash-Tree Press, 1996) and entry in *St. James Guide to Horror, Ghost & Gothic Writers*, ed. by David Pringle (St. James Press, 1998), repr. in *Ramsey Campbell Probably*, pp. 154—159 (p. 159);

the horror genre, for which he fulfils the dual function of historian and ambassador. Within his chosen field, he is also strongly engaged with the aesthetics of authenticity. Repeatedly, the author has emphasised the importance of and satisfaction with 'sound[ing] like myself'.[17] These pre-occupations take precedence over his sense of English-ness or British-ness. My project, accordingly, does not take a national approach.

Nonetheless this keenly delineated sense of place, together with his fiction's 'literary' quality, may, in themselves, go some way to explain Campbell's relative lack of fame and wider commercial success outside the horror genre. It is also the case that the sheer breadth and scale of his productivity has also been accompanied by, and has denoted, a certain independence and resistance to categorisation. Campbell has frequently used specialist houses in horror, science fiction and fantasy such as PS Publishing, but has never had a regular publisher. To what degree this peripatetic history has been entirely of the author's own volition is perhaps open to conjecture. In contrast to the multimillionaire King, and despite being a full-time professional writer with more than thirty published books and over a dozen awards to his credit, Campbell could still be found working in a bookstore as late as 2003.[18] Whatever economic circumstances or contingency this may suggest, for Xavier Aldana Reyes, Campbell is a member of a group of what he deems as contemporary 'auteurs', artistes who have operated entirely on

'R. R. Ryan', *Necrofile*, 27 (Winter 1998), repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 228—33 (p. 233).

[17] As, for example, Campbell states explicitly, relating to his own development as a writer in the Afterword to the novel, *The Parasite* (1980), repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 370—3, (p. 370), or to his striving after prose effects in the essay, 'Horror Fiction and the Mainstream', *Necrofile*, 12 (Spring 1994), also repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 39—43 (p. 43). See also footnote 49 in this introduction, and footnote 34 in my first chapter.

[18] The author was to draw upon the experience in his later novel, *The Overnight* (2004) and novella, *The Booking* (2016), the latter discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

their own terms as advocates of the horror field, and who are 'foundational to the growing cachet of horror as literary, resourceful and polymorphic'.[19]

Nevertheless, like the landscape described in 'Concussion', Campbell remains somewhat 'disorientating'. For such a prolific and garlanded writer, there remains a relative dearth of the substantive scholarship on the author, even from Gothic specialists, that one might have expected. His fiction is absent, for example, from Catherine Spooner's survey, *Contemporary Gothic* (2006), or her later study of the mode's comedic tendency, *Postmillennial Gothic: Comedy, Romance and the Rise of Happy Gothic* (2017) – despite, as will be elucidated, a frequently darkly humorous tonality within the writer's work.This is not to deny that, as with Lovecraft before him, there has been much laudatory and critical attention, both print and online, from amateur enthusiasts and critics in the form of book reviews and weblogs.[20] Campbell himself is a regular on the conference circuit, and has his own website.[21] With Joshi and Stefan Dziemianowicz, the author produced a bibliography and reader's guide to his own work in 1995.[22] However, it is still the case that, after two minor publications, Michael Ashley's sixty—two page *Fantasy Reader's Guide to Ramsey Campbell* (1980) and an almost equally brief introductory study by Gary Crawford, *Ramsey Campbell* (1988), his work has generated only one full length academic monograph to date: Joshi's *Ramsey*

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[19] Xavier Aldana Reyes, 'Post-Millennial Horror, 2000—16', in *Horror: A Literary History*, ed. by Xavier Aldana Reyes (London: British Library, 2016), pp. 189—214 (p. 196).
[20] Amongst many examples of reviews, the social website *Goodreads* at <www.goodreads.com> yields over 530 'hits' using the search term 'Ramsey Campbell', and the more specialist website *Vault of Evil! Brit Horror Pulp Plus* has nearly 40 threads dedicated to the author at <http://vaultofevil.proboards.com/board/ 46/ramsey-campbell> [both first accessed 9 June 2017].
[21] Campbell, <http://www.ramseycampbell.com> [first accessed 9 June 2017].
[22] Campbell, Stefan Dziemianowicz, S. T. Joshi, *The Core of Ramsey Campbell: A Bibliography and Reader's Guide* (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1995).

Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction (2001), from Liverpool University Press.[23] By virtue of its greater length and later appearance, Joshi's study naturally provides a more substantial biographical and thematic introduction than either Ashley's or Crawford's books. Thematically, Joshi usefully groups together the varied content of Campbell's output to that date, with chapters devoted to the fictions most obviously inspired by Lovecraft; his oneiric narratives and treatments of urban horror, paranoia, the child and Gothic motifs such as the haunted house. For this critic, Campbell is a 'sincere author' working in the 'tradition of horror literature', and especially the weird tale.[24] A diffuse mode of supernatural fiction that had been championed by Lovecraft in *Supernatural Horror and Literature* (1927), for Joshi, the weird 'frequently compels us to address directly such fundamental issues as the nature of the universe and our place in it'.[25] It is a 'tradition' in which Joshi perceives Campbell as an heir to figures like Algernon Blackwood and Arthur Machen and, in fact, as one of the 'two leading writers' since Lovecraft.[26] However, the breadth of Joshi's enterprise is not equalled by its depth. Inevitably, by virtue of its publication date, the book cannot cover Campbell's sizeable twenty-first century corpus. This aside, most space is also accorded to simple plot exposition for the various short story and novel narratives, with limited room for, and a varied level of, critical analysis. Eschewing a theoretical perspective, Joshi often makes value judgements without referents with which to justify his conclusions, so that these often pithy assessments are therefore themselves contentious. In any case,

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[23] Michael Ashley, *Fantasy Reader's Guide to Ramsey Campbell* (Wallsend: Cosmos, 1980); Gary William Crawford, *Ramsey Campbell* (Mercer Island, WA: Starmont House Inc., 1988).
[24] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 162.
[25] S. T. Joshi, *The Weird Tale* (Austin, TX: Texas University Press, 1990), p. 11.
[26] Joshi, *Modern Weird Tale*, p. 13, the American author Shirley Jackson (1916—65) being the other.

Joshi's stands alone, thus far, as the only full-length study devoted to Campbell and his work.[27]

Aside from Joshi's service to scholarship, various chapters in books surveying the Gothic, horror and fantasy fields have addressed Campbell's fictions. These essays, though, have tended to focus on the earliest works, or upon short stories or individual novels.[28] As of 2020, there had also been two festschiften dedicated to the author. An early, and laudatory, collection edited by Joshi, *The Count of Thirty: A Tribute to Ramsey Campbell*, was published by the Necromicon Press in West Warwick, Rhode Island, in 1993. Again, though, this is a slight volume. It offers a short essay on Campbell's concept of evil by Simon MacCulloch and two short general surveys by Joel Lane of his early and later novels, from *The Doll Who Ate His Mother* to *The Count of Eleven* (1991), although Joshi's collection does include a more substantial and wide-ranging interview with the writer by Dziemianowicz, conducted in July 1991 and updated in December 1992. This interview, and MacCulloch's essay, are repeated in Crawford's own more recent and critically uneven collection, *Ramsey Campbell: Critical Essays on the Modern Master of Horror* (2014).[29] The nine other entries in this latter book cover various subjects in Campbell's output, from *The Inhabitant of the Lake* to the novel *The Seven Days of Cain* (2010), but these studies are,

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[27] Joshi has also edited and published the early correspondence between Campbell and Derleth, which provides a useful insight into Campbell's early creative processes. See S. T. Joshi, *Letters to Arkham: The Letters of Ramsey Campbell and August Derleth* (Hornsea: PS Publishing, 2013).

[28] In addition to Joshi, see, for example, Giles Menegaldo, 'Gothic Convention and Modernity in John [sic] Ramsey Campbell's Short Fiction', in *Modern Gothic: A Reader*, ed. by Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 188—197, or Adam L. G. Nevil, 'Wonder and Awe: Mysticism, Poetry and Perception in Ramsey Campbell's *The Darkest Part of the Woods*', in *21st Century Gothic,* ed. by Daniel Olson (London: Scarecrow Press, 2011), pp. 149—157.

[29] *Ramsey Campbell: Critical Essays on the Modern Master of Horror,* ed. by Gary Crawford (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2014).

again, of varied depth and rigour. For example, Andy Sawyer offers a copiously

referenced historical contextualisation of the novel, *Creatures of the Pool* (2009), a

narrative that is in part Campbell's rewriting of, and homage to, Lovecraft's short

story 'The Shadow over Innsmouth' (1931). Sawyer's essay thoroughly retraces

Campbell's own extensive research for that novel. This meticulous scholarship on

Sawyer's part, though, compares with Lane's own contribution on the story

'Skeleton Woods' (2005), an essay without references which is a mere three

pages in length.[30] In summary, it is fair to claim that a definitive study of Campbell

remains to be written. This thesis therefore aims to, at least in part, redress the

undeserved critical neglect into which the author has fallen.

2. **'Knowing Your Tradition': Campbell's 'Horror' and the Gothic**

The relative lack of attention that Campbell has received from critics is partly

attributable to his own self-description, and thus, it is arguable, self-delimitation, as

a 'horror' writer. He is working within what has always been a marginalised and

disparaged genre. For an instance of such discrimination and prejudice, one

perhaps need look no further than the opprobrium meted out from some

mainstream scholars to the National Book Foundation for conferring a National

Book Award for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters upon King in 2003.

This recognition for a commercially successful 'horror' writer was a decision

famously criticised by Harold Bloom as 'another low in the shocking process of

dumbing down of our cultural life'.[31] Bloom's opinion on the citation given to

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[30] Andy Sawyer, 'That Ill-Rumoured and Evilly-Shadowed Seaport', in *Ramsey Campbell: Critical Essays on the Modern Master of Horror,* pp. 1—22, and Joel Lane, 'A Local Afterlife', in the same source, pp. 155—157.

[31] Harold Bloom, 'Dumbing Down American Readers', *Boston Globe*, 24 September 2003, archived: <http://www.public.asu.edu/~atsjd/bloom.html> [first accessed 9 June 2017]. Bloom's distaste had not prevented him from editing an earlier volume of essays on the author, *Stephen*

Campbell by Liverpool John Moores University for his 'outstanding contribution to literature', if it exists, has not been recorded, but may, one hazards, be extrapolated from his reaction to the recognition bestowed upon King.[32]

Reflecting a continuing and hierarchical separation of what is considered literary and genre fiction, theorists of postmodernism and its wake, from Patricia Waugh in the 1980s to Irmtraud Huber and Wolfgang Funk in the past decade, have privileged a canon of by now familiar high cultural Anglo-American authors and texts. Usually classified under the umbrella of 'contemporary literature' rather than generic labels, these are exemplified by Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) or, closer to the present and in a British context, Julian Barnes's *England, England* (1998).[33] Recognisaby Gothic works have latterly received some analysis, notably Mark Z. Danielewki's ergodic *House of Leaves* (2000).[34] However, as noted, King has, until recently, received scant academic attention from theorists or critics, and Campbell's work has been totally ignored. Moreover, in addition to oversight, Campbell's problematic status is equally attributable to what I argue is a misreading and some degree of miscategorisation by leading critics operating *within* the field of Gothic studies. For example, David Punter, in the updated second edition of his seminal survey, *The Literature of Terror* (1996), gives Campbell notably short shrift, according the author scarsely a paragraph. For Punter, who defines the Gothic by its 'general opposition to realist aesthetics', Campbell's work lacks intellectual depth in comparison with 'more complex

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King (New York: Chelsea House Publications, 1998). Since then, of course, King has also been the 2018 recipient of the prestigious PEN America Literary Award.
[32] Bloom died in 2019.
[33] For example, Funk discusses Barnes's novel in *The Literature of Reconstruction: Authentic Fiction in the New Millenium* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).
[34] Danielewski's novel forms a case study for Huber's *Literature after Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), However, I speculate upon the potential to consider Campbell's work in the context of such 'post-postmodern' paradigms in my conclusion.

assertions' about the nature of fiction made by other twentieth-century writers such as John Hawkes, Al Purdy or J. G. Ballard.[35] He cites only a single Campbell text, the novel *The Long Lost* (1993). This transposition of the Celtic sin-eating tradition to a contemporary setting is denigrated for what Punter deems as its 'cardboard cutout' characterisations, lack of suspense, and 'remarkably incoherent' ending, in which the opaque enigmatism of the sin-eater is ascribed to confusion on the writer's part.[36] 'We do not know *exactly* what Gwen is', Punter states, then adds, witheringly: 'but, to be honest, it's not clear that Campbell does either'.[37] However, there is evidently a marked difference in attitude between critic and author here with respect to the merits or otherwise of such ambiguity. Campbell has acknowledged the influence of Robert Aickman, the subtle creator of oblique short stories, upon his own work.[38] Aickman, writing of the ghost story, had extolled the merit of its 'offer[ing] neither logic nor moral'.[39] On the contrary, according to him, and of great relevance to Campbell, a successful narrative 'must open a door, preferably where no-one had previously noticed a door to exist; and, at the end, leave it open, or, possibly, ajar'.[40] Campbell's admiration for the auteur Alain Resnais's mystery film, *Last Day at Marienbad* (1959), which 'convinced' Campbell 'that an enigma could be more satisfying than any solution', is also revealing.[41] In

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[35] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, 2nd edn, 2 vols. II: *The Modern Gothic*, (Harlow: Longman, 1996), pp. 182, 183.

[36] Ibid, p. 163.

[37] Ibid, p. 163, emphasis in original. Joshi, interestingly, offers a diametrically opposed and positive reading of this text, praising what he describes as the novel's 'deft' fusion of supernaturalism and the psychological, and its 'vividly and vitally realised characterisations' (*Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 121; *Unutterable Horror,* II, p. 703).

[38] Campbell, 'My Roots Exhumed', p.5.

[39] Robert Aickman, Introduction, *The Second Fontana Book of Great British Ghost Stories,* ed. by Robert Aickman (London: Fontana, 1966), pp. 7—10 (p. 7).

[40] Aickman, Introduction, *The Third Fontana Books of Great British Ghost Stories,* ed. by Aickman (London: Fontana, 1966), pp. 7—11 (p. 7).

[41] Campbell, 'My Roots Exhumed', p. 5. The original French title of Resnais's film is *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*.

the context of these influences, I contend that the often ambivalent endings of

Campbell's fictions, denoted by a resistance to formal closure, should be

interpreted not as being symptomatic of creative weakness or of muddled thought,

but as signifying a deliberate and exploratory strategy. It is a strategy that

resonates with literary postmodernism's disregard for metanarratives and

teleological conventions of time and culture. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that

ambiguity in fact provides Campbell's fictions with much of their fascination and

richness, and that, far from lacking 'complexity', the apparent irresolution decried

by Punter demonstrates interrogative engagement with contemporary social,

political and philosophical concerns.

By contrast with Punter, Katarzyna Ancuta includes Campbell alongside

King and James Herbert, his fellow emergent horror writers of the 1970s, in her

categorisation of a new 'Modern Horror' writing tradition, or, in her terminology,

'syndrome'.[42] In Ancuta's schemata, 'Modern Horror', in contrast to a

'Contemporary Gothic', exemplified by writers like Anne Rice, that focuses on

disease, is defined by the 'body objectified to its physical representation: the

meat'.[43] This positioning, which is made very much in passing (for Ancuta, like

Punter, also accords Campbell less than a paragraph), seems at immediate odds

with the sources and representations of horror in much of Campbell's work, which

are generally strongly interiorised and psychological as opposed to externalised

and physical in nature. As Joshi notes, perceptively, 'the weird is most frequently

used by him as a vehicle for the examination of a wide array of psychological

states and the probing of an individual's relationship with others or with his or her

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[42] Katarzyna Ancuta, *Where Angels Fear to Hover: Between the Gothic Disease and the* Meat*aphysics* [sic] *of Horror* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 37, 2.
[43] Ibid, p. 117.

own environment'.[44] In a 2012 interview, Campbell notes his own creative

development, 'from imitating Lovecraft to a more contemporary style of

psychological horror'.[45] His oeuvre shows a progressive concern with challenges

to autopoiesis, the system by which the subject can independently maintain

itself.[46] For these evocations of interior enervation and aberrant psychology,

Campbell has drawn repeatedly upon his own traumatic childhood and

adolescence. This was an early life marked by parental estrangement, in which

Campbell's father, a policeman, continued to share the Catholic family's household

as an unseen, but frequently heard, presence upstairs, and his mother descended

into paranoid schizophrenia. Further, despite his self-description as a writer of

'horror', and his endorsement of horror fiction's role as 'the branch of literature

most often concerned with going too far', and of its being 'in the business of

breaking taboos', Campbell has rejected what he sees as a 'more recent teeming

of writers bent on outdoing each other in disgustingness'.[47] He has opposed what

he views as 'pornographic' and 'misogynistic' exploitation fiction that 'drags horror

into the gutter', and has been vociferously critical of popular authors like Shaun

Hutson, whom he describes as 'cynical'.[48] This makes the somewhat sweeping

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[44] S. T. Joshi, 'Ramsey Campbell: Alone with a Master', in Joshi's *Classics and Contemporaries: Some Notes on Horror Fiction* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2009), pp. 109—131 (p. 110).
[45] David McWilliam, 'Ramsey Campbell Interviewed' (24 September 2012), <http://www.gothic.stir.ac.uk/ interviews/ramsey-campbell-interviewed-by-david-mcwilliam/> [first accessed 9 June 2017].
[46] The term is appropriated from Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*, 2nd ed. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980), p. 16.
[47] Campbell, 'Dig Us No Grave', *Fantasy Review*, 9.3 (March 1986), repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 29—34 (p. 33); 'My Roots Exhumed', p. 4.
[48] Campbell, quoted in interview with Kermode, 'Radical, Ethical and Political Implications', p. 32; 'Shaun Hutson', *Necrofile*, 3 (Winter 1992), repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 171—177 (p. 177). This reticence and distance is despite Campbell's own experimentation with more sexually explicit themes in some short stories during the 1970s, collected as *Scared Stiff: Stories of Sex and Death* (Los Angeles: Scream/Press, 1987). Driven by commercial impulse, these works may also exemplify, like Campbell's early novel *The Parasite*, what the author describes as 'pretty well exactly the opposite of the kind of fiction I'd been writing since I began to sound like myself'. Afterword to *The Parasite*, repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, p. 370.

categorisation of his fictions by Ancuta alongside Hutson's in the pantheon of

'Modern Horror' seem all the more problematic.[49]

Campbell is also, at least superficially, clearly *not* part of the less 'cynical',

more considered but still explicit, splatterpunk tendency associated with Barker in

his early writings, nor with the latter body horror, avant pulp, surgical horror or

slaughterhouse movements. Aldana Reyes reads these various tendencies as 'a

contemporary update of the Gothic genre for a generation that has largely left the

spiritual world behind, and prioritised the material reality of the body'.[50] Indeed,

Campbell's work occasionally parodies, in an undifferentiated manner, the shift in

horror fictions towards what the writer perceives as a visceral excess centered on

corporeality. This is seen, for example, with the character of Andrew Minihin, the

self-admitted writer of 'crap' in Campbell's novel, *Ancient Images* (1989, p. 75).[51]

The plot of *Ancient Images* concerns the hunt for a fictional lost 1930s horror film

based upon an equally fictional Victorian text, 'The Lofty Place', by one 'F. X.

Faversham'. Deliberately, title and author evoke, respectively, elevated, masculine

status and quintessential English-ness, Faversham being a market town of pre-

Roman origins in Kent. Indeed, to complete Campbell's literary pastiche, a mock

review of 'The Lofty Place' states that the novel 'may be favourably compared to

Mr [Algernon] Blackwood in its sense of landscape, and touches on the darker

sources of English tradition' (p. 56). In stark contrast, the titles of Minihin's works,

lovingly listed by a teenage gore fan, exaggerate to the point of absurdity: '*The*

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[49] Ancuta, *Where Angels Fear to Hover*, pp. 124—127 - although King, Herbert and Clive Barker, all of whom Campbell has admired, are also included in Ancuta's categorisation.
[50] Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film* (Cardiff: Cardiff University Press, 2014), p. 27.
[51] Campbell, *Ancient Images* (London: Arrow Books, 1990 [1989]). This text also exemplifies Campbell's engagement with folk horror, again a tradition and subgenre discussed in my first chapter.

Flaying. The Slobbering. It Crawls Up You. It Crawls Back Up You. Entrails that they wouldn't let him call *Puke and Die,* that was the best yet' (p. 75).

What is notable in deliberately hyperbolic passages like this is the declamatory self-reflexivity on Campbell's part - that is, of a 'horror' writer who appears to reject the strong physiological affectivity associated with the genre. According to Gina Wisker, for example, horror fictions deal with 'discomfort, terror, violence, disgust', and are 'more likely to use violence, terror and bodily harm'.[52] Campbell's works, however, retain the 'terror', but incline toward the subtle and covert, reflecting an acute awareness of, and haunting by, the past. These are all traits that are more associated with the Gothic mode within the horror genre. In one interview, the author alludes to what he deems as ''knowing your tradition', so that a writer 'can see what there is to work with and then take a subject and do new things'.[53] Moreover, Campbell's works ally with an onus to disturb psychological equilibrium with discretion, with 'showing just enough', rather than explication, and to generate fear, rather than revulsion.[54] In part, this reticence reflects the influence of M. R. James, and a shared aversion to what the latter deemed a 'charnel house' tendency towards what is seen as an excess of explicitness in the representation of viscera in modern writing.[55] Campbell, though, is more of an engaged theoretician with respect to his chosen field than his learned but famously (or notoriously) laconic predecessor. 'Despite its name', Campbell has argued, horror 'is most often concerned to produce awe and terror

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[52] Gina Wisker, 'Horror Fiction', in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, I, pp. 328—3 (p. 329).
[53] Stefan Dziemianowicz, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell', in *The Count of Thirty: A Tribute to Ramsey Campbell*, ed. by S. T. Joshi (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1993), pp. 7—26 (p. 26).
[54] Campbell, 'My Roots Exhumed', p. 2.
[55] M. R. James, 'Ghosts – Treat Them Gently', *Evening News*, 17 April 1931, republished in *M. R. James: Collected Ghost Stories* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Library, 2016) as section (vii) of Appendix, <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/j/james/mr/collect/appendix.html> eBook [first accessed 9 June 2017].

in its audience, but it is not unusual for a horror story to encompass a wide emotional range'.[56] The reference to 'awe and terror' here, rather than 'horror', with its associated reactions of recoil and disgust, is important. It recalls Edmund Burke's seminal definition of the sublime, ruled and sourced by a principle of 'terror', to 'produce the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling'.[57] More pointedly for consideration of placement within the Gothic or other literary modalities, reference to 'awe and terror' echoes Ann Radcliffe's defining preference given in the posthumously published essay 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' (1826), for the subliminal potentiality of 'terror' over 'horror', the former 'expand[ing] the soul and awaken[ing] the faculties to a higher degree of life'.[58] Campbell's qualifier regarding 'emotional' breadth also infers a sophistication in textual and narrative practice. So, it follows logically that, for Campbell, 'horror' writing should be both informed by an awareness of a history of the literary Gothic 'tradition' in its conception and marked by a conscientious attention to nuance in its performance.

It is this deliberate and experimental deployment of the various forms that the literature of terror can take that lends Campbell's fictions a degree of complexity. This protean tendency renders their exact categorization as problematic. The author, as noted, describes himself as a 'horror' writer. However, even a cursory analysis of Campbell's work reveals a consciousness and profound knowledge of the history of all aspects of the Gothic, and, aesthetically, an

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[56] Campbell, 'To the Next Generation', in *L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future, IV*, ed. by Algis Budrys (East Grinstead: New Era, 1988), repr. in Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 49—54 (p. 49).

[57] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. by David Womersley (London: Penguin, 1998 [1757]), p. 86.

[58] Ann Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', *New Monthly Magazine*, 16.1 (January 1826), reprinted in *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook, 1700—1820*, ed. by E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 163—172 (p. 168).

inclination towards staples and tenets associated with the classic Gothic: the sublime, subtle, inexplicit, covert, haunted and uncanny. Simultaneously, Campbell's self-labelling is also, as observed, self-delimiting: his allusive and sophisticated style precludes him from competing commercially with authors like King, Barker (at least in the early, more corporeally explicit stages of that writer's career) or Hutson in the contemporary horror market, while conversely the label of 'horror writer' excludes him, as I have discussed, from being taken seriously by scholars as an author of contemporary literature. Critically and canonically then, Campbell does not 'fit'. His work has been marketed as belonging to, and partly conforms to, a particular generic set of expectations, that of 'horror', yet it is also inherently personal and intentionally nonconformist. Ultimately, it is this author's personal vision and unique perspective upon the world that distinguishes him from other writers of the period, and which colours most of his fictions. This personal vision and worldview, alongside his awareness of 'tradition' and the onus that he places upon the capacity to make 'new', to inspire 'awe and terror' and to convey a sense of 'enigma', I contend, are all vital to understanding the meaning and significance of Campbell's fictions.

3. Short Stories and 'Growing At Ease' with the Novel

Informed by a consciousness of tradition, and drawing upon an equally keenly felt autobiography, Campbell's works appear to exemplify what Spooner describes as the 'new self-consciousness' of the contemporary Gothic about its own nature.[59] Such metatextuality has been a consistent feature of his writing from the beginning. As outlined, Campbell was a prolific writer of short stories before

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[59] Catherine Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p. 23.

turning to the novel form in the mid-1970s. Two key short stories in the *Demons by Daylight* collection encapsulate this quality of self-inflection. They are worth noting briefly here, as they form a template for the later, and, I will argue, at least as relevant, longer fictions that were to follow.

Firstly, the short story 'Concussion' itself, alluded to above, demonstrates a subtle self-awareness. In this complex narrative, which shifts between time frames in a series of reveries, an elderly man, Kirk Morris, remembers a former lover from his youth. Believing that he sees her as a young woman again in the present, he tries to precipitate a reunion through engineering a fatal accident. In one such memory, the girl , Anne, who may herself be a dream of Kirk's, ruminates on the true nature of 'ghosts' after sharing a ghost train ride with Morris at a fairground. She argues:

> But ghosts aren't really like that […] I think they'd be just like people, and you wouldn't know what they were like until afterward. Those things in there are straight out of a Gothic novel. Mind you, I don't mind Gothic novels. Being carried away by a horseman in a black cloak over the mountains under the moon to a castle! – No, I'm only joking, I'd rather be with you. (p. 141—2)

The allusions to 'Gothic' novels and settings and to mysterious cloaked figures obviously betoken authorial consciousness of tradition. Here, Campbell's tale, one within a collection of tales self-defined and marketed as 'demonic' and thus macabre, playfully ironises its own perceived mode. Yet 'Concussion', thematically, is an extraordinarily multilayered text. Displaying an awareness of different forms of media, its oblique narrative also presents a series of elisions.

'Concussion' is at once a self-conscious 'journey into nostalgia' (p. 134); an exploration of both the tensions between past and present and between 'a lovely dream' (p. 148) and a yearned for reality, and an attempt to express the sensation of being or of not-being. Lest there be any doubt as to its thematic preoccupations, Alfred Hitchcock's seminal film *Vertigo* (1959), a text about the male subject's desire to covet, recapture, and relive, is even referenced. However, the past and dreaming are presented as being as threatening as they are benovolent. Kirk at one point senses his body 'fighting to correlate the illusion of movement with the conviction of stasis, as if he was in a Cinerama film' (p. 157) - feeling as if one is in a 'film' being a recurrent metaphor in the story for displacement and alienation. Underlying the protagonist's quest narrative is a fear of ontological negation, or of 'fall[ing] through his memories' of his past love into a 'void' of non-existence: '[s]ometimes,' Campbell narrates, 'he felt that he'd dreamed Anne, and sometimes, on the rim of the void, that she'd dreamed him' (pp. 157—8). Through such passages, in which the boundary between reality and dream is presented as liminal, both opaque and unstable, Campbell's story becomes an exploration of spatial and temporal otherness. Equally deliberately, the narrative leaves unresolved the question as to whether its protagonist is psychologically delusional or whether his experiences of time travel are real, for his near-victim feels finally as if 'she'd met him' and finally, like a mourning lover, 'begins to weep' (pp. 160—1). This co-existence between supernaturalism and realism was to be, as will be discussed, repeated in later works.

However, as significant a forerunner for what was to follow is 'The Franklyn Paragraphs'. Like 'Concussion', this tale was originally composed in 1967. The story is an overt transposition and updating of Lovecraft's documentary 'warning'

style regarding invisible and malign 'forces […] lurking in daylight' (p. 60). The

narrative, in the form of an epistolary collage, purports to reconstruct the

circumstances surrounding the disappearance of a writer, Errol Undercliffe. It is

not just rich in intertextual allusion – the wallpaper of the ill-fated Undercliffe's

apartment has 'a Charlotte Perkins Gillman look' (p. 41) – but is even more

explicitly metatextual than 'Concussion'. Anticipating recognised postmodernist

texts like Brett Easton Ellis's *Lunar Park* (2005) by decades, the author

interpolates himself into the narrative in the persona of 'JRC', a recipient of letters

from Undercliffe. Undercliffe's first epistle to JRC refers to, and critiques,

Campbell's real, Lovecraftian short story, 'The Insects from Shaggai' (1961), which

the author had originally submitted to Derleth for inclusion in *The Inhabitant of the*

Lake. Campbell's character, Undercliffe, in 'The Franklyn Paragraphs' writes that:

> [t]he implicit theme of your story *The Insects from Shaggai* is interesting,
>
> […] but you never come to grips with with the true point of the plot: the
>
> horror story writer who is skeptical of the supernatural and finally is faced
>
> with overwhelming evidence of its reality. What would be his reaction?
>
> Certainly not to write of "the lurid glow which shines on the razor lying on
>
> the table before me"!! (p. 42)

Campbell here appropriates the language and detachment of the critic, most

particularly his earliest professional reader, Derleth. Such awareness is also

echoed in a self-critical 'Afterword' to the reissue of *The Inhabitant of the Lake,*

where, of 'The Insects from Shaggai', Campbell remarks that it was a

misinterpretation on his own part of Lovecraft's recording of a dream: '[t]he guilt of

my mistake', Campbell writes, 'haunted me for decades'.[60] Of course, in 'The Franklyn Paragraphs', the character Undercliffe is not just a fellow writer. He is a doomed, Lovecraftian seeker after forbidden knowledge, in this case researching, unwisely, into the mysterious fate of a cult leader. Campbell sets the contemporary artistic scene drily early on, with a reference to Roland Barthes and bourgeois dinner party gossip: 'All bow ties and "God, Bernard, surely you realize the novel is absolutely *dead*"' (p. 41, emphasis in original). 'The Franklyn Paragraphs' is, in short, a deeply refracted text. It is as much concerned with the act of writing; with the status of its practitioners and the relationship of creativity with reality, as it is with the supernatural themes of the occult, reincarnation and predatory entities. 'The peril of the writer', Undercliffe's final, hysterical letter to 'JRC' rambles, is that 'he can't stop thinking. He may survive by writing, but he doesn't really survive…' (p. 60).

Similarly to 'Concussion', 'The Franklyn Paragraphs' constitutes an interrogation of philosophical and formal norms: '[n]o longer', Undercliffe laments, 'could I trust the surface of the world' (p. 60). Thematically and artistically, both texts anticipate and demonstrate the major preoccupations, the delving beneath a conventionally accepted 'surface', that were to characterise Campbell's fictions throughout his ensuing career. Aware of diverse and proliferating media, his work increasingly centres on the author as protagonist and the individual psyche of professional or amateur wordsmiths, be they writers, editors, booksellers, literary agents or librarians; with their relationships with readers and reality, and with the processes and consequences of creativity. Spooner, as stated, does not include

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[60] Campbell, *The Inhabitant of the Lake & Other Unwelcome Tenants* (Hornsea: Drugstore Indian Press/PS Publishing, 2013), p. 329. This reissue includes reproductions of several of Derleth's letters proffering advice to the younger author which, tonally, anticipate Undercliffe's appraisal of JRC's literary endeavours.

Campbell in her own survey of contemporary Gothic. However, the interiorised focus of 'Concussion' and Campbell's later works surely suggests a specific affinity with what the critic defines as the mode's newfound 'self-consciousness' about aesthetic and philosophical concerns. It is a tendency that can only, I contend, have been intensified in Campbell's case, with the writer's lengthy career running in tandem with the very developments in global consumer culture, erasure of interdisciplinary boundaries and rapid growth of global mass communication that Spooner describes.

This said, longer fictions - novels and novellas - rather than short stories have constituted most of Campbell's output since the early 1980s. Yet, in stark contrast, what scholarly attention there has been on this author to date has tended to award higher status to the short stories, as the field in which, to quote Nicholas Royle, Campbell 'most consistently performs to his very best'.[61] Joshi has been most emphatically critical of Campbell's shift away from the short story towards longer fictions from the 1980s onwards, describing Campbell as being 'only indifferently successful in the [form of the] novel'.[62] Underlying such consensus is a fidelity to the formalist tradition exemplified by M. R. James's short stories: that of a belief in the inherent superiority of the short narrative's depiction of a single macabre incident and an undistilled concentration of psychological terror, either in terms of representation or of evoked, physiological response. For Joshi, historian and advocate of M. R. James and the Lovecraftian weird tale tradition, Campbell's novels are, narrowly, 'compelling only when told from some twisted perspective,' or when 'they suggest that human beings are symbols for vaster phenomena'.[63]

[61] Nicholas Royle, 'Ramsey Campbell', in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, I, pp. 105—106 (p. 106).
[62] Joshi, *Modern Weird Tale*, p. 9.
[63] Ibid, p. 136.

The critic regrets what he perceives as an increasing focus upon nuclear families and 'normal, middle class characters' in Campbell's work.[64] However, as understandable as a concern with the 'cosmic' scale may be for Joshi, as a chronicler of the weird tale, I contend that such an approach also misinterprets and oversimplifies the nature of Campbell's longer fictions, in which, increasingly, there is no sense of 'normal' reality.

Campbell, as inferred above, has been a frequent and conscientious critic of his own work, and his paratextual writings can illuminate his fiction. Eschewing an overt political agenda or philosophical stance of the kind exemplified by Ligotti in his anti-natalist treatise, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror* (2010), Campbell's writing is intuitive rather than self-consciously intellectual, and there is a sense of exploration and self-discovering journeymanship in his longer works. 'All that structural thing', he remarked of his novel, *The Nameless*, 'pretty well composed itself'.[65] Of the substantial later work, *Incarnate* (1983), written at an emotionally fraught time, Campbell has admitted that:

> [t]his was being written in the period of the last year of my mother's life, that terrible nightmare period. And here I was writing this immensely elaborate book, pretty well on instinct. And I can only assume the book was somewhere I had to go in order to let go in a way, and that was how the structure came about, composed itself'.[66]

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[64] Ibid, p. 136.
[65] Dziemianowicz, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell', p. 16.
[66] Ibid, p. 16.

Strikingly, a cathartic value in the process of novel-writing is here linked to an imputation of autonomy and near sentience to the form itself. Far from its being '*dead*', Campbell has spoken repeatedly and approvingly of the inspirational nature of the novel, as the form 'acquires some impetus and actually goes off into places you never would have thought of'.[67] He has also hightlighted 'growing at ease' with the novel as his greatest satisfaction as a writer, its larger scope 'generat[ing] the most energy and inventiveness'.[68] For the critic then, rather than regret, a response that can only truncate full understanding through a dismissal or marginalisation of much of Campbell's output, there is an alternative approach. This approach takes the writer's preference for the longer fictional form on his own terms, and opens the possibility of exploring the meaning and significance of those 'places never thought of'.

Campbell's candour in such interviews, the choice of the language of imperative such as 'had to go', and the aforementioned wealth of paratextual writing, all also suggest a confessional tendency. This trait may reflect the author's personal history as a lapsed Catholic. The 'confessional' narrative is, obviously, an established trope of the Gothic text, familiar from such seminal works as James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Asked in a 2016 interview about the simultaneous presence of the personal, humanistic and the cosmic or numinous in his own work, Campbell has admitted that 'my only excuse is agnosticism, however timidly or vaguely I define mine'.[69] In contrast to the pessimism and nihilism ascribed to Ligotti, this thesis seeks to present Campbell's fictions as representing a genus of what is, in essense, a haunted and

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[67] Ibid, p. 22.
[68] Simon Best, 'Interview: Ramsey Campbell', 19 October 2016, *This is Horror*, <http://www.thisishorror.co.uk/ interview-ramsey-campbell/> [first accessed 9 June 2017].
[69] Ibid.

experimental agnostic vision. The attribution by Campbell of a level of autonomy to his own work also affords to the reader licence to interpret texts on multiple levels and, to a liberal degree, to derive and ascribe meanings unencumbered by authorial didacticism. Indeed, Campbell himself has championed more broadly the 'right to question'.[70]

Authorial self-consciousness and the explicit metatextuality present in the two texts already discussed is also a recognised trait of *postmodernist* fictions as considered by critics such as Waugh and Brian McHale. Within Gothic studies, Allan Lloyd Smith's comparison of the affinities between postmodernism and the Gothic afford useful reference points that seem particularly germane to interpreting stylistic features and themes within Campbell's work: for example, a common pastiche and self-reflexivity, as demonstrated above; the featuring of taboo and criminality; the use of the comedic; resistance to formal closure, and a sense of 'paranoia' with respect to science and technology.[71] The 'web of independent semiotic systems' that so animated Waugh and other premillenial critics has since grown, wildly, into the World Wide Web, and other manifestations of a 'virtual reality' on a scale even then not foreseen.[72] As relevant is the increased tendency towards an ontological rather than epistemological dominance in the themes of contemporary literary discourse noted by McHale, an ascendency leading to a focus upon the 'self' and upon the subject's integrity, or otherwise, in a 'reality' which has itself become a contested site.[73]

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[70] Dziemianowicz, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell', p. 18.
[71] Alan Lloyd Smith, 'Postmodernism/Gothic', in *Modern Gothic: A Reader*, pp. 6—19 (Lloyd Smith lists common connections between the two throughout this chapter).
[72] Patricia Waugh: *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1984), p. 9.
[73] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (Ashgate: Routledge, 2003 [1987]), p. 10.

Punter notes that Gothic may indeed be considered a 'forerunner' of postmodernism in its manifestation of self-awareness and, in some cases, 'a certain playfulness that resists being drawn into the fold of seriousness'.[74] Despite these affinities, critics and theorists have taken divergent views on the aesthetics of their relationship. The emphasis on veneer and surface in postmodernism has led Fred Botting, for example, to categorise certain texts like *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1992) as 'candygothic', while Fredric Jameson dismisses Gothic as 'a boring and exhausted paradigm', dependent on representations of 'the emptiest form of sheer Otherness [evil]'.[75] In noting common 'absence of absolute meaning' and interrogation of notions of the subject ever inhabiting a 'coherent, rational world' manifested in stylistic experimentation, Mario Nagatani argues that authors like Angela Carter and Toni Morrison critique postmodernism's 'empty representations'.[76] Nevertheless, as Alex Link argues, there remains between Gothic and postmodernism a shared sense of 'terror' and 'threat' experienced by the subject.[77] This perception of oppression in Campbell's fictions, together with the author's iconoclastic flexibility and cultivation of the power of suggestion and of the imaginative sublime rather than visceral horror, suggests a logical affinity with Maria Beville's densely argued attempt to marry postmodernism to the Gothic in *Gothic-postmodernism* (2009). Beville's concept of a distinct literary mode within postmodernist literature is based specifically upon the terror implicit within the experience of postmodernity. According to Beville, this

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[74] David Punter, 'Theory', in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, II, pp. 686-93 (p. 688).

[75] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 134; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 289, 290.

[76] Mario Nagatani, 'Contemporary Fiction: Postmodern Gothic', in *The Future of English Studies,* ed by Takao Fujita, Shigeyuki Suzuki and Nobuyuki Matsukura (Tōkyō: Dītīpīshuppan, 2010), pp. 249—58 (pp. 250, 256).

[77] Alex Link, 'The Mysteries of *Postmodernism*, or Fredric Jameson's Gothic Plots', *Gothic Studies*, 11.1 (May 2009): 70—85 (p. 70). Link argues that this sense is inescapable and in fact pervades Jameson's *Postmodernism* as a text itself.

mode 'merely hints at the evil and grotesque and opens up a space for fundamental human curiosity and ontological enquiry'.[78] She defines postmodernist works in themselves as 'experimental, radical and often metafictional literature which problematises the relationship between reality and fiction, reader and text'.[79] Beville's thesis covers a range of writers from Paul Auster to Kurt Vonnegut and postmodernist texts, including detailed readings of *Lunar Park,* Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and Mikhail Bulgakov's satirical narrative *The Master and Margarita* (1967/1973). Like Spooner, Beville omits Campbell from her literature survey. This, by now predictable, absence underlines not so much disregard on the part of the theorist as, again, the unfortunate dichotomy of this author's position, combining simultaneous denigration as being a generic 'horror' writer and resistance to easy categorisation. It is apparent that Campbell's narratives such as 'Concussion' or 'The Franklyn Paragraphs' are not as overtly 'experimental' in form as any of the examples cited by Beville, or for instance, Ligotti's story 'Notes on the Writing of Horror' (1986), which foregrounds its own fictionality and explicates 'realistic', 'traditional Gothic' and 'experimental' techniques in a pseudo-treatise written by a fictional, and finally monstrous, murderer.[80] Nevertheless, they demonstrate a level of complex, sui generis hybridity already present in Campbell's work at an early stage, one which, I will show, developed substantially in his later and longer fictions. This hybridity is demarcated by the presence of postmodernist tenets

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[78] Maria Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p. 42.
[79] Ibid, p. 7.
[80] See Thomas Ligotti, 'Notes on the Writing of Horror: A Story', in the author's *Songs of a Dead Dreamer* and *Grimscribe* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), pp. 91—110. As much as the placing of Auster et al within canons of contemporary or postmodern literature, the appearance of Ligotti's work in the 'Penguin Classics' series, in itself, rather serves to underline Campbell's comparative marginalisation to date.

within what remains, for the most part, although not exclusively, a realist narrative paradigm. Campbell's fictions also increasingly centre upon what Beville, drawing from Burke's concept of the sublime, aptly describes as the very 'lingering emotion of terror as it relates to loss of reality and self'.[81] It will be seen that Campbell adopts the depiction and evocation of terror as creative strategem.

Beyond Campbell's simple (re)habilitation, the aims of this thesis are evaluative. I seek to position the writer within and relation to a pre-existing Gothic tradition. The project extols Campbell as a unique practitioner within, variant of and commentator upon the contemporary and postmodern Gothic. Further, I intend to elucidate the meaning of his work. The thesis will address its position both within Gothic studies and contemporary literature and attempt to demonstrate how such analysis may contribute to furthering knowledge of the status of literature within contemporary, technologically-driven societies.

4. **Methodology of Thesis: Texts, Theorists and Paratexts**

This project seeks obviously to be interventive: to contribute to and expand upon extant scholarship on Campbell's works – in itself, an overdue undertaking – and, particularly, to redress the paucity of the same as it relates to his longer fictions. Such focus upon Campbell's novels and novellas is justified not simply because they have been the obvious subject of prior neglect. Rather, it is the case that, because these texts have presented their author with a broader, deeper and richer canvass to explore ideas – in Campbell's words, 'to go off into places you never would have thought of' (as quoted above) – they also disclose more with respect to his aesthetic, philosophical and ontological perspectives for the purposes of

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[81] Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism*, p. 10.

critical analysis. Specifically, I examine Campbell's longer fictions in the context of postmodernism and, latterly, posthumanism, a school of thought emergent in the late twentieth century that, in challenging anthropocentrism, also interrogates the ontological status of the subject and its relation to reality. I employ close textual analysis throughout and deploy paradigms associated with these major and (in the case of posthumanism) still dynamic theoretical trends to illuminate the writer's distinctive, unique and evolving development of specific motifs and thematic concerns. With respect to postmodernism, I draw eclectically from Jean Baudrillard's major writings, principally from *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1970) to *The Perfect Crime* (1995), and from Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) and the later collection of speculative essays *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (1988).[82] For posthumanism, I mainly turn to key works by N. Katherine Hayles, Stefan Herbrechter and Pramod K. Nayar.[83] There may seem to be a philosophical contradiction in deploying some inherently aestheistic paradigms, particularly from postmodernism, to evaluation of works infused by an agnostic and humanist, if sceptical and secular, worldview. Nevertheless, such analyses, disclosing a complex and reflexive relationship between Campbell's fictions and both the postmodern and posthumanism, is invaluable in elucidating his distinctive and unique status as an iconoclastic author.

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[82] For simplicity in reading, I have used the English language translation in citation of Baudrillard and others' written works.

[83] These are, respectively, N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics,Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), and Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014). However, as I also note below in Chapter Four, the literature on this field of enquiry is both substantial and expanding.

An immediate challenge with respect to Campbell's novelistic output has been the purely logistical one of negotiating a pathway through and selecting from such a large and varied corpus of work. As exemplied in the shift within one year from a social realist suspense thriller, *The One Safe Place* (1995), to a haunted house narrative, *The House on Nazareth Hill* (1996), the writer has alternated between supernatural and non-supernatural subject matter throughout his career. Campbell has also frequently revisited themes and even characters, and has striven continually for innovation. For example, the late novella *The Revelation of Gla'aki* (2013) revives a Lovecraft-inspired entity first encountered in his first book, *The Inhabitant of the Lake*, while the novel *Thirteen Days at Sunset Beach* (2015) sees Campbell's first sustained engagement with the 'vampire' trope. While comparable prolificacy (and often great individual length), have not impeded King either commercially or, latterly, critically, Campbell's apparent heterogenity and hence resistence to categorisation partly accounts for this British author, thus far, experiencing the same combination of an artiste's respect but minority, niche appeal that Lovecraft, Campbell's early and enduring influence, experienced during his lifetime.

Comparison between Campbell and Lovecraft is germane to my overall argument, for the similarities between the authors, in terms of both their self-positioning and status, are striking. As described by Joshi, Lovecraft was also somewhat of a conference fixture; one who strove a middle path between 'high' and 'low' culture; a figure who had an ambivalent, at best, attitude toward popular magazines, and a writer whose work 'was not commercial enough for the pulps,

but not daring enough (or daring enough in the right way) for the modernists'.[84]
Despite a temporal shift from modernity into postmodernity which has been
accepted by most commentators, including Baudrillard and Lyotard, Campbell to
an extent shares his forebear's philosophical vision.[85] I shall elucidate this
perspective as being fundamentally interrogative and nonconformist even if not, as
it is with Lovecraft and postmodernist theory, overtly atheistic in nature. Campbell
has created a literature of rigorous enquiry and dissent.

The eleven texts that I have chosen to focus upon, necessarily longer
fictions as they afford the space for exploration and expansion by both author and
scholar, are those which I have judged particularly foreground elements of this
vision. They cover what I demonstrate is a significant and representative thirty-five
year period of Campbell's career, from 1981 to 2016. My approach is thematic and
accumulative, rather than chronological, although in each chapter earlier texts are
discussed first prior to later ones. The priority throughout is analysis of Campbell's
development and evolution as a writer within the contemporary Gothic mode of the
horror genre, and the responses to social, ethical, technological and ontological
challenges that afford comparison with the canons of postmodernism and, latterly,
posthumanism.

This thesis takes as its starting point Campbell's professed if bashful
agnosticism. The literature on agnosticism itself is indisputably voluminous, but I

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[84] S. T. Joshi: *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H. P. Lovecraft in His Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), pp. 355—6.

[85] I recognise that, much like 'Gothic' itself, temporal and other parameters of this mid- to late twentieth-century term remain contested and have dominated much debate about culture from the late 1980s. However, a plethora of premillennial discourses such as Ihab Hassan's *The Postmodern Turn: Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1987) and David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) can be drawn upon in addition to those I cite here, to suggest coalescence, if not always consensus.

accept the definition of the term offered by Robin Le Poidevin as a state of mind

defined by 'uncertainty' and 'doubt about once unquestioned beliefs'.[86] Logically,

this manifests in Campbell's worldview as a humanist statement of dissent,

demarcated by scepticism and resistence to all forms of dogma. Up to a point, this

unsentimental outlook suggests an affinity with Lovecraft's more overtly aestheistic

'mechanistic materialism', and places Campbell, again, at odds with the

Manichaen opposition between good and evil exemplified by King.[87] Further,

Campbell's vision appears to align itself with a number of traits that Lloyd Smith

and others have identified as characterising the postmodern.[88] In literary terms,

these include a mistrust of explanatory metanarratives such as law or organised

religions. In addition to the negation of such ethical and moral codes, texts

identified as postmodern often feature depiction of paranoia as the default

psychological response to a world perceived as encroached upon by surveillance.

This paranoia is frequently represented by a nervous, self-conscious use of

humour and parody, denoted by a mixing of registers and tonal dissonance.

Postmodern texts also frequently portray an ontological threat to the integrity of the

subject, and, increasingly, in this technologically advanced era, a concern with an

understanding of the self and the reality that the self inhabits which is informed by

interpretations of posthumanism. Comparing such tenets to Campbell's novelistic

output, it is clear that a number of comparable and symbiotic pre-occupations can

be identified. These include a recurrent fascination with cults, magic and religious

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[86] Robin Le Poidevin, *Agnosticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 118, 6.
[87] Joshi, *A Dreamer and a Visionary,* p. 131. The polarity between, and unambiguous portrayal of, good and evil in King's fictions may also partly account for the stark difference in commercial reception between King and Campbell, particularly in nominally 'Christian' territories such as the United States.
[88] In addition to Lloyd Smith, Hassan and McHale, see, for example, Dino Franco Felluga's list of features distinguishing postmodern aesthetic works from modernism in Felluga's *Critical Theory: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 227—9.

belief; psychopathology, both social and individuated, within urban settings; the consistent portrayal of writing and authorship, and the roles of and implications posed by information technology in a multimedia and digital age.

These pre-occupations or themes form the subject of the four main chapters of the thesis. In exploring these various elements, alongside close textual readings, I deploy the works of numerous critical and cultural theorists. For the most part, in Chapters One, Two and Three their paradigms have been associated with postmodernism, and their use here serves a hermeneutic function. For example, Baudrillard's melancholic concept of the simulacrum helps to articulate the theme of struggle for self-definition and autonomy that permeates Campbell's fictions. Similarly, Lyotard's mistrust of metanarratives is found useful in exploring Campbell's eviscerating portrayal of belief systems as dogmatism. Although I concur with Linda Hutcheon's view that Jameson's seminal analysis of postmodernism is over-pessimistic in relating it to the empasse of late capitalism, a link that entails aesthetic stultification, Jameson also provides an effective vocabulary for analysis of Campbell.[89] This extends from Campbell's urban landscapes, bearing the scars of capitalist 'progress', to instances of fragmentation of the subject, the disorientating erasure of boundaries between high and low culture, and discourse, parody and pastiche. Where considered appropriate, however, I have not adhered exclusively to concepts proposed by theorists associated with postmodernism or posthumanism. For example, the idea of the numinous explicated by the early twentieth-century theologician Rudolf Otto has a relevance in my discussion of Campbell's religious agnosticism, as mediated

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[89] Hutcheon engages with Jameson in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989).

particularly in the meditative and enigmatic novel, *Obsession* (1985). Also

predating postmodernist theory, the work of R. D. Laing can shed insight into

Campbell's recurrent portrayal of mental illness, alienation and displacement. Like

postmodernism, Laing's existential psychiatry represents a challenge to science,

the dominant Enlightenment metanarrative. It critiques the conventions

surrounding 'normalisation' within society and, moreover, embraces the notion of

multiple, pluralistic perspectives [90] Although I have not here adopted the broader

psychoanytical approach that may be suggested by the substantial

autobiographical element within Campbell's fictions, Julia Kristeva's concept of

abjection, especially as extrapolated to social and national contexts, has also

proven to be fruitful. The science fiction writer A. E. van Vogt's non-generic *A

Report on the Violent Male* (1956) is cited in discussion of Campbell's mediation of

societal violence. King's own frequent and substantial meditations on authorship,

both fictional, in a line of narratives from *Misery* (1987), and non fictional, from

Danse Macabre (1981) onwards, afford useful points of comparison and contrast

to Campbell. Michel Foucault's concept of the heterotopia is deployed in my

explication of the singular and unique world depicted in Campbell's novella, *The

Booking (*2016). Lastly, I make reference to the media theorist Marshall McLuhan's

pioneering work on the mass media in engaging with Campbell's increasing

concern with information technology and the posthuman threats and possibilities

posed by the Internet and World Wide Web.

  None of these writers, bar King, actually cite Campbell or his work in their

own analyses, and in the cases of Otto and Laing, for example, such referencing

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[90] See, for example, Tony B. Benning's undated essay, 'Was R. D. Laing a Postmodern
Psychiatrist?' <http://www.soteria.freeuk.com/Laingpostmodern.htm> [first accessed 8 May 2021].
In challenging the cartesian conception of mind and body as distinct categories, Laing's stance
arguably also anticipates and aligns with posthumanist theories.

obviously would have been impossible. My point is that such discourses, diverse

as they are, provide the foundations of a language with which to articulate

Campbell's vision as one of peculiar relevance in the contemporary postmillenial

world, both in the context of postmodernity and its aftermath and challenges to

concepts of 'the human' posed by digital technology. This thesis employs a critical

materialist approach, insofar as my analysis shares and starts from the premise

that literary works reflect, mediate, reinforce or affect the various discourses and

mores of the culture from which they emanate. With respect to the longer fictions,

it is my intention to go 'beneath the surface' with respect to Campbell's 'agnostic'

perspective; to delineate its contours, analyse its content and explicate its

meaning. In examining the contribution Campbell makes to the Gothic, the

postmodern and the posthuman, placing him in or aligning him with the firmaments

of all, my reading therefore seeks to legitimise Campbell's fictions in relation to a

contemporary cultural context. This established, I hope to promote further

understanding of the complex reality that Campbell's fictions present and to ignite

discussion about the value of his work to the expansion of Gothic studies.

Despite the dearth of critical writing on Campbell, my research is aided by

the fact that, like King, there has been no lack of commentary from the subject

himself.[91] Many of Campbell's nonfictional essays over three decades have been

usefully anthologised by Joshi in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably* (2002), and there

are also numerous interviews, both in print and latterly online, in which the author

elucidates his methodology and views on the horror genre, past, present and

future.[92] Campbell's own copious paratextual discourses, as exemplified above

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[91] As evidenced by King's *Danse Macabre* and, as said, subsequent works, both non-fictional and fictional. I compare King and Campbell explicitly in Chapter Three.
[92] A revised and expanded edition, again edited by Joshi, appeared from PS Publishing in 2020.

with his reference to a 'timidly and vaguely defined' agnosticism, eschew

theoretical terminology or perspectives or an overt alignment with philosophical

positions. Such disavowals notwithstanding, these paratextual discourses

constitute, usefully, a parallel autobiographical commentary. I align with Paul de

Man's perspective, which maintains that language retains a fundamentally

figurative function irrespective of fictional or autobiographical mode. In de Man's

schemata, the latter represents both 'a figure of reading or understanding that

occurs, to some degree, in all texts', and a demonstration 'of the impossibility of

closure and of totalization […] of all textual systems made up of topological

substitutions'.[93] In this spirit, I have throughout the thesis referred to Campbell's

nonfictional writings and utterances where I have found these appropriate for the

purpose of illuminating fictional texts.

5. Outline of Chapters: Towards (and Beyond) Nightmares of Autopoiesis

The first two chapters of the thesis examine how Campbell's texts mediate,

provide metaphors for and critique a secularised culture of postmodernity denoted

by crises of faith, both religious and sociopolitical. Religious and sociopolitical

belief systems are examples of what Lyotard terms a 'grand narrative', a totalising

metadiscourse that serves to provide ideological legitimacy and ensure cultural

cohesion.[94] Chapter One, on cults, magic and belief in supernaturalism, examines

three major novels of the 1980s and utilises theories by Lyotard, Baudillard,

Kristeva and Otto. After discussion of Lovecraft's influence on Campbell, it analyes

Campbell's *The Nameless* as a noviciate work of urban and female Gothic defined

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[93] Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *MLN*, 94.5 (1979): 919—30 (pp. 921, 922).
[94] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington, Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984 [1979]), p. 37.

finally by its inner ideological irresolution. I then consider *The Hungry Moon* (1986), for three decades Campbell's richest and most overt, but also most conflicted, transposition in novel form of Lovecraftian cosmicism. In contrast with the panoramic scope of this text, the 'fake' occult thriller *Obsession*, with its eventual focus on a tragic villain, introduces the central theme of integrity and control of the subject, complicated by a tension between a foregrounded secularism and the numinous. Some twenty titles to date, over half of Campbell's novelistic output from *Doll Who Ate His Mother* to *The Wise Friend*, feature cults or magic, and he was to return to the 'cult' theme early the next century, beginning with another Lovecraftian novel, *The Darkest Part of the Woods* (2002) and the non-supernatural *Pact of The Fathers*. However, my focus here is upon how these relatively early texts reflect the epistemological and ethical challenges posed by their markedly polarised social and political contexts, and to what extent they demonstrate Campbell's creative advancement, especially the establishment of his agnostic and sceptical vision.

My second chapter, again deploying Baudrillard and Lyotard in addition to discourses by Jameson, Kristeva, Laing and van Vogt, focuses on Campbell's presentation of aberrant psychology as an expression of distrust of secular, sociopolitical metanarratives. This critique finds its apotheosis in the Gothic trope of the sociopathic murderer or serial killer. The depiction of antisocial mental dysfunction, above all paranoia, pervades postmodernist fictions, and has been recurrent in Campbell's oeuvre. It first assumes centrality with the portrayal of Horridge in his second, groundbreaking work of long fiction, *Face That Must Die.* Analysis of this text and two other key non-supernatural novels across succeeding decades, *One Safe Place* and *Secret Story* (2005), trace Campbell's distinctive

treatment of sociopathy. This chapter contextualises Campbell's work alongside now iconic texts by Harris (*The Silence of The Lambs*, 1988) and Ellis (*American Psycho*, 1991). It is suggested that antisocial behaviour, respectively individual and societal, in the first two novels, *FaceThat Must Die* and *One Safe Place,* has cultural origins rooted in late capitalism, simulacra and consumerism. There is obvious affinity here with Jameson's discourses on spatial and social confusion, the erosion of idealism, and despair. I thus demonstrate how Campbell's distinctive transmutation of Gothic develops from a complex sociopolitical critique. I then show how *Secret Story,* with its self-inflecting structure and murderous author as protagonist, displays a destabilisation of ethical and aesthetic boundaries, including the relationship between authors and readers – redolent features of postmodernism.

My third chapter considers the increasing pre-occupation with authorial status and practices as a theme in Campbell's fictions. I explore how the author functions as a surrogate for the contemporary subject, in what amounts to a challenge to those metanarratives which hold that history is teleological and narrative is, as Lyotard terms it, 'the quintessential form of customary knowledge'.[95] It is posited that Campbell's self-reflective, ironising and disorientating texts can subject norms regarding epistemological and ontological certainties, including assumptions regarding the integrity of the subject and extra-textual phenemological 'reality', to contradiction and slippage. I begin by contrasting Campbell's portrayal of the author-protagonist with that offered by King in the latter's more familiar writings. Such comparison serves to demonstrate the distinctively paranoic, self-haunting quality of the British writer's narratives. I then

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[95] Ibid, p. 17.

discuss Campbell's deliberate use of the novella form and analyse two key

examples, published some twenty-six years apart: the semi-autobiographical

Needing Ghosts (1990), in style his most overtly postmodernist long fiction to date,

and a late work, *The Booking*, texts which foreground, respectively, distinct

interpretations of the author and of literature. They highlight, in concentrated form,

Campbell's developing interpretation of, and response to, central issues within

postmodernism, including interrogation of notions of moral absolutes and 'truth',

and a formal tendency towards final open-ended irresolution rather than resolution.

Moreover, I look at how both novellas address Campbell's evolving engagement

with artistic and philosophical questions regarding the nature of creativity, selfhood

and autonomy - concerns which, in turn, betoken engagement with posthumanist

enquiry.

From texts to intermodality, my final chapter focuses upon Campbell's

representation of the implications of digital technology for the subject. I align with,

and develop, arguments proposed by Herbrechter on a linkage between

postmodernism and posthumanism, and by Anya Heise-von der Lippe on a

commonality between the latter and Gothic, especially anxieties around the

subject's subsumation and transformation by and into the 'other'.[96] The 2007

coulrophobic novel, *The Grin of The Dark*, with its plethora of media forms and

malevolent electronic mail presence channelling an ancient malevolent force, is

shown to be a harbinger of what was to follow. Since that text, the personal

computer has become, for Campbell, both a creative tool and a recurring theme. It

is, therefore, also a Gothic motif for the postmillenial era , an updated synthesis of

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[96] Stefan Herbrechter, 'Postmodern', in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 54—68; Anya Heise-von der Lippe, 'Introduction: Post/human/Gothic'[sic], in *Posthuman Gothic,* ed. by Heise-von der Lippe (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017), pp. 1—16.

the found manuscript and the haunted house or 'Bad Place' archetype.[97] The

chapter then examines the 'virtual reality' constituted by weblogs and websites in

two more of Campbell's late novels, *Think Yourself Lucky* (2014) and the

aforementioned *Seven Days of Cain*. Both ostensibly revisitations of the serial

killer theme, they explicate the nature of virtual lives, respectively malign and

benevolent, created by the Internet. Whilst the former shows fidelity to Gothic

tradition in reviving the doppelgänger trope and evoking monstrous alterity, it also

draws out the isolation and vulnerability of this 'other'. *Seven Days of Cain* is

shown to develop this preoccupation with interdependencies in its rewriting of

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). This late novel foregrounds science-fiction

elements implicit in the other two texts, in particular the consequences wrought by

an emsemble of artificial, posthuman characters' consciousness of their own

fictionality. Campbell's narratives are shown to enact what Baudrillard has

identified as a 'deep-seated virtualization of human beings'.[98] The chapter

completes the proposition that Campbell's longer fictions, by progressively

engaging with inconclusive metanarratives and recent posthumanist discourses,

create a unique epistemological and ontolological critique. His fictions reflect and

mediate conflicts within the contemporary world concerning the subject and its

ethical choices and the 'reality' that selves, whether real or articial, inhabit.

In totality, the thesis articulates Campbell's distinctive and unique

contribution to Gothic studies. Attention is drawn to the author's style, which

combines a highly personal 'poetics', to appropriate Joshi's term, with a markedly

intense evocation of paranoia, Campbell's long fictions offer unsettling portrayals

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[97] The term used by King in *Danse Macabre*, p. 296 passim.
[98] Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, trans. by Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 1996 [1995]), p. 27.

of psychological disturbance and social dissonance. As horror texts, they are shown to display pronounced liminality, generic hybridity and consciousness of form, ranging from Lovecraftian cosmicism to social realism, comedy and science fiction. In critiquing the maxims of contemporary western culture, they reflect the concerns of a perspective that is religiously agnostic, politically liberal and ethically humanist. Further, Campbell's long fictions are shown to satirise the author's own publishing industry, and to trace the challenges posed to the subject, author and author as subject posed by mass media and information technology. Perhaps most profoundly, they illustrate the possibility of literary works simultaneously displaying strong alignment with some implicitly aestheistic and apolitical postmodernist and posthumanist paradigms without abandonment of liberal humanist stance or ethical commitment. The very possibility and practice of applying such paradigms illustrates that Campbell's long fictions, in being both generic 'pulp' and serious literature informed by tradition, can be instrumental in precipitating and contributing to debates on canons – a discussion that I return to in the conclusion of the thesis.

CHAPTER ONE: IMPRACTICAL MAGIC: SECULARISM AND TRANSFIGURATION IN CAMPBELL'S EARLY CULT FICTIONS

1.'How We Live Now': The Insecurities of Postmodernity

> Ritual and dogma are merely the framework of organised religion. They do not touch on religious experience itself, which is the experience of mystery, of the indescribably enigmatic.
>
> Lesley Hazleton, *Agnostic: A Spirited Manifesto* (2016).[1]

To refrain a point made in my introduction, a degree of agnostic scepticism towards 'ritual and dogma' has remained with Campbell throughout his career. The writer has described himself as 'a sceptic who mostly writes about the supernatural'.[2] In his 1991 interview with Dziemianowicz, the author admitted to being 'deeply worried that so many people are going to find some kind of total system of belief which will set [sic] away all of their fears, as long as they give up the right to question'.[3] At that time, Campbell was expressing a sense of anxiety about the then approaching millennium. However, the writer's views have displayed remarkable consistency since. In interviews given a quarter of a century later, Campbell was still lamenting what he perceived as a widespread propensity for succumbing to authoritarianism, with its accompanying suppression of intellectual freedom. In one such exchange, Campbell neatly pathologises aspects of contemporary Western societal praxis, commenting that:

> I don't think I'm likely to stop looking in my work at how we live now […] Themes keep recurring: gullibility, the human eagerness to find

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[1] Lesley Hazleton, *Agnostic: A Spirited Manifesto* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2016), p. 103.
[2] Campbell, 'Horror Fiction and the Mainstream', p. 39.
[3] Dziemianowicz, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell', p. 18.

> scapegoats, the willingness to embrace belief systems that purport to
>
> give you all the answers as long as you give up the right to question;
>
> the vulnerability of children, the increasing unwillingness of people to
>
> intervene when they see or suspect wrong doing.[4]

I will be returning to all these themes, but for the present it is sufficient to note that the manifestation of scepticism in Campbell's literary texts is an equally consistent iconoclasticism. As a writer of fictions, Campbell practices what Hazleton describes as 'the agnostic's faith: not in answers, but in possibilities' and 'inquiry'.[5] The principal targets of his nonconformist approach are these metanarratives, or what Campbell describes as 'belief systems'. My second chapter will examine the author's treatment of late capitalist and neoliberal political orthodoxies which both reflect and mould social norms and personal behaviours. However, here my focus is upon the representation of *religious* belief systems, whether those sets of principles are marginalised in the form of cults; polytheistic and pre-Christian survivals; entirely orthodox and centred upon conventional church-based worship, or modelled on more general and less sectarian lines of enquiry addressing issues of magic, spirituality and supernaturalism.

For clarity, I have accepted the commonly understood meaning of 'occult', derived from the Latin word occultus, that is, the clandestine, hidden or secret.[6] 'Magic' is broadly interpreted as referring to both the associated use of ritual to harness what are perceived to be supernatural forces, and the result or

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[4] Jeffery Klaehn, 'Reaching for the Awesome and Numinous: An Interview with Horror Author Ramsey Campbell', *New Writing* 13.2 (2016), 308—14 (p. 314). See also Matt Cardin, 'An Interview with Ramsey Campbell', October 2016, in *Horror Literature Through History: An Encyclopedia of the Stories That Speak to Our Deepest Fears*, ed by Cardin, 2 vols., I, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Inc. 2017), pp. 269—72, in which Campbell again decries a 'willingness to espouse belief systems that deny the right to question' (p. 270).

[5] Hazleton, *Agnostic,* p. 79.

[6] See, for example, the definition of the term given at *Oxford Living Dictionaries Online*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/occult> [first accessed 28 February 2018].

consequences of such ritual upon the phenomenological and experiential world.[7]

Whatever definition is accepted, the recurrence of secretive, self-marginalised

groups and their leaders in Campbell's oeuvre is, as noted above, striking. A pre-

occupation with cults, magic and questions of religious faith and doubt was well

established by the end of Campbell's first decade as a novelist. Specifically, the

'magic' invoked is almost invariably of the 'black' variety, that is, malevolent and

associated with diabolism or evil spirits.[8] The cult leader figures themselves are

invariably flawed or villainous, and Campbell, creating his own mythos,

occasionally re-uses them. For example, Peter Grace, the antagonist from

Campbell's early novel *The Parasite* (1980) is referenced almost three decades

later in *Thieving Fear* (2008), and even Roland Franklyn, from the early short story

'Concussion', reappears in the much later novel, *The Kind Folk* (2012).

   This chapter examines the representation and critique of heterodox and

orthodox belief structures in three of Campbell's novels from a specific, and as will

be seen, pivotal, decade, the 1980s: *The Nameless*, *The Hungry Moon*, and the

early transitional and reflective work, *Obsession*. I will delineate a clear

development of the author's distinctive, agnostic vision. This is defined through

showing the early points of influence upon Campbell exercised by Lovecraft, and

through analysis of the affinity of Campbell's work with postmodernist and other

paradigms. In the course of this study, I utilise theoretical concepts drawn from, in

particular, Lyotard, Baudrillard, and, later, the theologian Rudolf Otto.

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[7] See, for example, the principles of Law of Similarity and Law of Contagion, outlined in James Gordon Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic in Religion*. Abr. ed. (London: Macmillan, 1922 [1890]), p. 11. Frazer's text was an influence for Lovecraft and many other writers.
[8] There are, of course, numerous definitions of 'black magic', as given, for example, in Merriam-Webster Dictionaries, as 'magic that is associated with the devil or with evil spirits' <www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/black%20magic> [first accessed 12 October 2020].

The philosophical, socio-historical and literary contexts for Campbell's engagement with occultism are multifaceted, but it is fairly straightforward to outline their contours. Campbell's emergence and development as a professional writer in the 1960s and 1970s coincided with profound and sometimes traumatic paradigmatic shifts within Anglo-American and European culture and discourse. As Lyotard maintains, this was a period in which the totalising 'grand narrative' appeared to have 'lost its credibility'.[9] In the religious sphere, this insecurity was symbolised by the iconic 'Is God Dead?' issue of *Time Magazine* (8 April 1966).[10] In contrast to Enlightenment values, there were no longer guarantees of epistemological or ontological certitudes - that is, the encompassing metanarratives such as human emancipation, Freudianism or Marxism – or orthodox forms of religious beliefs, with their hierarchical structures and doctrines. Naturally, such crises of meaning and of identity stimulate a quest for amelioration and solutions by way of response. For Lyotard, this entails the replacement of a universal, totalising metalanguage by what he terms as 'a *plurality* of formal and axiomatic systems capable of arguing the truth of denotative statements', a plurality 'described by a system that is universal but not consistent'.[11] In the context of the 1960s, such an enactment can be seen in the reframing by popular or so-called 'counter-culture' of pre-existing belief systems within parameters afforded by manifestations of the then new social liberalism. These substitutes included various avant-garde ideologies, sexual liberation and recreational drug use. For example, writing of the United States in the 1960s, Hugh McLeod notes a

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[9] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition,* p. 37.
[10] Douglas E, Cowan and David G. Bromley, in *Cults and New Religions* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), for example, note 'a profound crisis of meaning and identity' (p. 7) that developed from the mid-1960s onwards in response to such varied events as political assassinations and the 'Watergate' crisis (1972—4) in the United States.
[11] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 43, emphasis added.

growth in alternative religious movements, especially amongst highly educated demographic groups, devoted to 'new ways of thinking and behaving'.[12] Both there and in Britain, such a 'quest culture' for something to invest belief in, has continued, and indeed proliferated, to the present day.[13] The British scholar Christopher Partridge takes a positive view of such new religious movements, seeing them as evidence of a benign cultural shift that has been 'both helping people to think through theological and metaphysical issues', and 'also providing resources for the construction of alternative religious world views [sic]'.[14] However, where Partridge sees empowerment, it is clear, and demonstrable, that Campbell has seen malign contradiction, control and abjection, and thus grounds for scepticism.

Campbell's work both reflects its socio-historical context and mediates its literary antecedents. In their sweeping survey, *A Short History of Fantasy* (2009), Farah Mendleson and Edward Jones describe his fictions as symptomatic of a growing 'conspiracy element' affecting British and American culture in the 1970s.[15] For Mendleson and Jones, Campbell's narratives, to an even greater degree than King's, focus upon the 'nature of evil', and upon 'exploiting the cracks in the moral order that was emerging as organised religion was losing its hold and New Age religions were increasingly visible'.[16] Fleeting though its reference to Campbell is, *A Short History of Fantasy* raises two important elements to consider regarding the writer's inheritance and influences, interpretation of the concept of 'evil' and

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[12] Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 15.
[13] Steven J. Sutcliffe, 'The Dynamics of Alternative Spirituality', in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, ed. by James R. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 460—90 (p. 467).
[14] Christopher Partridge, 'Alternative Spiritualities, New Religions and the Re-enchantment of the West', in *Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, pp. 39—67 (p. 46).
[15] Farah Mendleson and Edward Jones, *A Short History of Fantasy* (London: Middlesex University Press, 2009), p. 114.
[16] Ibid, p. 14.

emergent value system. The zeitgeist from which Campbell emerged, and from which he would draw or 'exploit' as a writer, was certainly rich in a paranoid 'conspiracy element' - from the post-Manson trials 'cult controversy' of the 1970s that drew upon fears of abduction and brainwashing onwards. To appropriate Hayden White's argument regarding the fictional quality of factual representation, the 1970s and 1980s were a period in which '[h]istory could be interpreted as 'no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation', and, accordingly, the notion of 'value neutrality' in discourse was 'an illusion'.[17] The boundary between reality and fiction became opaque. For example, the journalist Kenneth Wooden's purportedly documentary account, *Children of Jonestown* (1981), co-existed with anonymously written memoirs of abuse such as *Michelle Remembers* (both 1981) and the reports, subsequently discredited, of a secretive but vast Satanic network operating in pre-schools and day centres in the United Kingdom and United States.[18] There was thus a concurrent matrix which both created and reinforced a prevailing narrative of social disaffection and unease, or, as Beville was to describe later, a 'culture of fear'.[19] Whatever one's view on the veracity or morality of these discourses, such a climate of ennui and paranoia would have been creatively fertile for a writer to utilise – particularly one as sensitive to prevailing mores and as well read in the horror genre as Campbell.

In negotiating his own pathway in his chosen field, Campbell, as discussed in my introduction, drew upon literary forebears. Most relevant at this point is

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[17] Hayden White, 'The Fiction of Factual Representation', in White, *Topics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 122—134 (pp. 122, 134).
[18] Philip Jenkins provides a succinct, if highly critical, summary of these various discourses in his essay, 'Satanism and Ritual Abuse', in *Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, pp. 221—42 (see, especially, pp. 232—40). The discredited far-right 'QAnon' conspiracy theory of Satanic abuse (2017—present) constitutes an interesting contemporary refrain and mutation.
[19] Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism*, p. 24.

Lovecraft. Campbell's own 'timid' agnosticism contrasts with the American writer's assertive and consistent atheism. 'In theory I am an agnostic', Lovecraft avowed in a key letter, 'but pending the appearance of rational evidence I must be classed, practically and provisionally, as an atheist'.[20] As Joshi has described in two important studies, Lovecraft's philosophy is a form of non-teleological 'mechanistic materialism,' and, if not pessimism, an evolving 'comic indifferentism'.[21] In Lovecraft's schemata, humanity is insignificant in the cosmos: there is no God or gods, soul, or afterlife, and religion is dismissed as 'an opiate dream', and 'a pompous formalisation of fantastic art'.[22] Such uncompromising views seem to preclude any accommodation with an agnostic perspective, which, in Le Poidevin's opinion, for one, affords a positive quality for 'uncertainty' in 'promot[ing] creativity, theoretical progress, [and] social tolerance'.[23] However, I propose that Campbell's fictions, in essence, and drawing upon Lovecraft and other writers, reinterpret Lovecraft's materialist philosophy, which was itself partly a reaction against modernism, for a postmodern era.

The historian Philip Jenkins, in his critical account of the so-called 'Satanic panic' of the 1980s, suggests that Herbert S. Gorman's novel *The Place Called Dagon* (1927) influenced Lovecraft and other authors for the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*.[24] It is not hard to see why, with the novel's supposition of the survival of devil worship through the practice of going 'underground in the modern world', and nor is it difficult to perceive an indirect influence upon Campbell. Insofar as

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[20] Letter in H. P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters*, *1911—1937*, 5 vols ed by August Derleth, Donald Wandrei and James Turner (Sauk City, WI: Arkham Press, 1965—1976), IV: 1932—1934, p. 57, quoted in S. T. Joshi, *A Subtler Magick: The Writings and Philosophy of H. P. Lovecraft* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Wildside Press, 1999), p. 33.
[21] S. T. Joshi, *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H. P. Lovecraft in His Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), p. 131; Joshi, *A Subtler Magick*, p. 29.
[22] Lovecraft, *Selected Letters*, IV, pp. 417—8, quoted in Joshi, *A Subtler Magick*, p. 48.
[23] Le Poidevin, *Agnosticism*, p. 118.
[24] Jenkins, 'Satanism and Ritual Abuse', p. 228.

Campbell's fictions are concerned, one may also detect the influence not only of Lovecraft but of his fellow British writer Dennis Wheatley's *The Devil Rides Out* (1934) and its successors.[25] Virtually all Campbell's work, like Wheatley's eight 'black magic' narratives, employ a contemporary, rather than period setting. It is reasonable to ascribe some pragmatic as well as artistic influences accounting for this. The commercial success of King's novels, Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) and William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971) and their lucrative cinematic adaptations, together with later imitators such as David Seltzer's *The Omen* (film and novel, 1976), all of these texts anchored firmly in the present day, had an undeniable bearing on authorial strategy. Campbell admitted to a commercial drive dictating the writing of one early novel in an interview given in 1991:

> I tried to do what appeared to be the perceived model of the contemporary horror story, which is characters in an ordinary environment and something *out there* which is attempting to get them for whatever reason.[26]

However, of greater relevance here are the common themes indicating a loss of consolatory metanarratives: the deconstruction of the family unit represented by lost, demonic or possessed children, and degenerate and threatening forces at large within what had been 'an ordinary environment' of safe, domestic space. So far as the alterity, the 'something' that threatens or encroaches upon the protagonist is concerned, Campbell draws no distinction between the inhuman, the demonic, and human agents. The externalisation, as being 'out there', is also

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[25] Wheatley's *The Devil Rides Out* was followed by seven more 'black magic' novels: *Strange Conflict* (1941), *The Haunting of Toby Jugg* (1948), *To the Devil A Daughter* (1953), *The Ka of Gifford Hillary* (1956), *The Satanist* (1960), *They Used Dark Forces* (1964), and *Gateway to Hell* (!970). Campbell would continue to acknowledge the author in texts as late as *The Searching Dead* (Hornsea: PS Publishing, 2016), Wheatley even has a minor 'walk-on' role in that novel in being quoted by doomed journalist Eric Wharton (p. 243).
[26] Stephen Jones, '*Weird Tales* talks with Ramsey Campbell', *Weird Tales*, 301 (Summer 1991), quoted in *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 66, emphasis in original.

crucial. The term 'cults', as opposed to the more benign sounding 'New Religious Movements', has negative connotations. Cults have been described as seeming to represent 'all that is evil and dangerous and deviant in the compass of religious belief and practice'.[27] Campbell's stance as a writer towards these groups aligns with the pejorative. In the course of his exploration of 'evil', the function of the supernatural generally has been as much internal, as 'an excuse we invent for things we do or want to do ourselves', as external.[28] He has sought to define 'evil' in relation to society, so that it may be better understood as being socially constructed rather than as non-human and metaphysical in origin.[29] For Campbell, the 'cult' represents the abject: an abnegation of independent thought, and thus freedom, an abandonment and surrender which is oppressive and invidious. In this hostility, Campbell is obviously following but also expanding upon a view held by Lovecraft, for whom cults also represent a consolatory pseudo-mythology and, as Joshi describes, 'emotion, brainwashing'.[30] Repeatedly in Campbell's fictions, as in the short story 'The Depths' (1978), the writer returns to what he calls 'the central metaphor of giving up your name and with it your responsibility for your actions and your right to choose'.[31] The quintessential example of Campbell's negative portrayal of the sect phenomenon as almost morally unspeakable is the deliberately named *The Nameless*, to which 'The Depths' is described by Campbell as 'a companion piece'.[32] This early long fiction, a complex example of the urban and female Gothic presented as an occult suspense thriller, also

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[27] Cowan and Bromley, *Cults and New Religions*, p. 1.
[28] Dziemianowicz, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell', p. 18.
[29] Campbell, 'To the Next Generation', p. 51.
[30] Joshi, *A Subtler Magick*, p. 102.
[31] Campbell, 'Introduction: So Far', in *Alone with the Horrors: The Great Short Fiction of Ramsey Campbell, 1961—1991* (New York: Tor, 2005), pp. 11—20 (p. 16).
[32] Ibid, p. 16.

represents an important dialogue with, and departure from, Lovecraft, Campbell's

chief literary forebear.

2. Home to Mother: *The Nameless* and Unquiet Domesticity

Campbell's 1981 novel is set in contemporary London and Glasgow. The third

person narrative relates the desperate attempts of the guilt-ridden protagonist,

literary agent Barbara Waugh, to trace her missing daughter. Angela Waugh had

been abducted years previously, Barbara discovers, by the eponymous cult, an

elusive and shadowy group responsible for numerous disappearances since the

1940s. *The Nameless* thus obviously articulates its author's concern regarding the

'vulnerability of children'.[33] Not only a familiar generic staple, as exemplified by

Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), anxiety for and about the child was

to be a recurrent preoccupation for Campbell, as other novels from that decade,

The Claw (1984) and *The Influence* would exemplify. In an afterword to *The*

Nameless, Campbell, then a new father of an infant daughter himself, is aware

and wary of autobiographical influence and its attendant 'pitfalls' of exhaustion and

self-indulgence (p. 275).[34] The group of child abductors in this novel, with whom I

am predominantly concerned with here, are, nevertheless, the quintessence of

parental nightmare. Dedicated to torture, sadism and murder, the Nameless

symbolise monstrous alterity: the external, secretive and clandestine presented as

a wholly malevolent force. In a deliberate conflation of paganism, satanic ritual and

antisocial practices, there is no attempt at nuances of character for this collective.

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[33] It is of note that the three cinematic adaptations of Campbell's works to date have all been of texts centring on the child in peril – this novel, *The Influence,* and *Pact of The Fathers* – suggesting its enduring saliency as a transcultural phobic pressure point.

[34] Campbell, Afterword to *The Nameless* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1992 [1981]), pp. 273—8. All subsequent references are to this edition of the novel.

Campbell's 'Nameless' are practitioners of undifferentiated 'very bad things – black magic and torture and that sort of stuff' (p. 215). As such, the depiction of the cult phenomenon echoes Lovecraft's in, for example, the story, 'The Call of Cthulhu' (1927). However, Lovecraft's lurid descriptions of this 'voodoo' cult's activities, 'free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and men shouting and killing and revelling in joy', convey a neo-Nietzschean hedonism.[35] For the American author, cults represent what he was to describe as a misguided but understandable attempt by a vulnerable and fearful social unit to pursue a consolatory credo against an indifferent universe: 'a principle of freedom or irregularity or adventurous opportunity against the eternal and maddening rigidity of cosmic law'.[36] Campbell, I suggest, goes further in presenting the cult as not only delusional, but as oppressive, and as representing a destructive, anti-natal perversion of the life cycle.

A Lovecraftian concern with verisimilitude is established in the novel's prologue, set in San Quentin prison, California, in 1940. This introduces Kaspar Ganz, the enigmatic cult leader, who is posing as a psychiatrist to visit an inmate on Death Row. Ganz, although he is dead during the text's principal diegesis, serves as the novel's principal antagonist via his malign posthumous influence. As such, he is another in the mould of Campbell's charismatic occultist Roland Franklyn that 'haunts' the author's long fictions, after the similarly deceased John Strong in *The Doll Who Ate His Mother* and Peter Grace in *The Parasite*. Likened to 'a praying mantis', Ganz refrains some of the classic 'aristocratic' vampire traits

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[35] H. P. Lovecraft, 'The Call of Chulhu'. In *The H. P. Lovecraft Omnibus 3: The Haunter of the Dark and Other Tales* (London: Grafton Books, 1985), pp. 61—98 (pp. 80—1).
[36] Lovecraft, letter quoted in Gerry Carlin and Nicola Allen, 'Slime and Western Man: H. P. Lovecraft in the Time of Modernism', in *New Critical Essays on H. P. Lovecraft*, ed by David Simmons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 73—90 (p. 86).

popularised by John Polidori and Bram Stoker in the nineteenth century, being

described as tall, dressed in black, gleaming-eyed, and possessed of a 'sharp

ageless face' and effortlessly aloof manner (p. 10).[37] The prison guard thinks that

Ganz should be 'locked up himself', and, indeed, another character later confirms

that such prejudice and trepidation is well-founded, for the cult leader has long

held a 'morbid fascination with sadism and mutilation' (pp. 14, 220). Although

Ganz's credentials as a doctor and psychiatrist are entirely bogus, the

connotations for health and 'caring' professions are obviously negative. A critical

portrayal of medics and social workers in fact typifies Campbell's work.[38] In this

sense, Campbell's interpretation of the contemporary Gothic mode aligns with

Punter's description of the 'obsessed' attempts by a 'therapeutic culture' to both

obtain resolutions for its problems of 'sociopsychological abuse' and,

simultaneously, to find 'ways of invalidating them'.[39] The text thereafter alludes to,

and invokes memories of, the 'Moors Murders' trial (1966); the Scientologists

suing the Olympia Press over publication of the journalist Robert Kaufman's critical

expose, *Inside Scientology: How I Joined Scientology and Became Superhuman*

(1972), and the Tate and La Bianca murders carried out by the Manson 'family'

(1969). In accordance with this documentary approach, one character even

announces that 'I did some research', before confiding to Barbara:

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[37] My references are, obviously, to Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) and Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).
[38] Campbell's earlier novel *The Parasite* had featured a psychiatrist who transpires, like the doctor in Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby*, to have been part of the cultist conspiracy. Such negative portraiture of health professions may originate in Campbell's own experiences during his mother's mental decline, documented in an essay, 'Near Madness'. This memoir first appeared as the foreword to the revised edition of his second novel, *The Face That Must Die* (1983), repr. in Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 273—85. In it, for example, Campbell balefully recalls an interview with a social case worker: '[o]nce she told me that perhaps my mother's hallucinations were company for her. Her colleagues praised her professional competence' (p. 283).
[39] Punter, *Literature of Terror*, II, pp. 146, 158.

You remember the Manson trial obviously. One of his women said

something to the effect that maybe people thought the Family was bad, but

there was a group that made them look like Disneyland. They were people

with no names who were into things even Manson wouldn't touch. (p. 113).

Campbell is here imitating familiar Lovecraftian verisimilitude: validation of the

imaginary through its juxtaposition with the real, in the process blurring the barrier

between them. Overt comparison of the Manson trial with 'rumours' (p. 112) and

reports of the activities of the Nameless from London and Manchester in the 1940s

and 1970s, in which 'kids were lured away by other kids who said they had no

names, to see their parents who didn't have names either' (p. 113), are intended to

confer authenticity upon the latter, to create, in effect, a new urban myth.

Like Gorman's modern-day worshippers of Dagon, Ganz's group of

followers operates 'underground'. Through its London and Glaswegian settings,

The Nameless thus accords strongly with conventions of urban Gothic, as the sub-

mode is described, for example, by Emily Alder. In Alder's interpretation, the

metropolis evokes the uncanny, that is, 'a sense of the buried past that shapes

experience of the city and re-emerges as repressed secrets, desires and histories

marginalised by a culture formed by capitalist dynamics'.[40] Campbell's text

signposts a number of overt references to Gothic forebears other than Lovecraft,

as in the deliberate evocation of Machen's story 'The Inmost Light' (1894) in use of

the title, 'the Undying Light', for a meeting for seekers of 'someone better than the

Spiritualists' (p. 163). In this revealing scene, Campbell portrays vividly the social

malaise, enervation and moral vacuum in which an extremist group may gain

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[40] Emily Alder, 'Urban Gothic', in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, II, pp. 703—6 (pp. 704—5).

purchase amidst an audience seeking a consolatory 'grand narrative'. Barbara observes that the crowd of attendees at the 'Undying Light' gathering:

> looked like people who worked in dingy offices or in shops in half-derelict streets if they worked at all, people who grew old looking after their parents and who would die unmarried and almost alone in their parents' senile houses. They were here tonight because they were starved for faith, for anything that would explain their lives. (p. 167)

Campbell's novel is permeated by the presentation of personal isolation and social alienation, and the desperate desire to ameliorate both. As such, this pre-occupation symptomatizes what Hazleton describes as the social drive for the 'illusion of knowing' that underlies theism.[41] Campbell's text critiques such an imperative, suggesting that societal atomisation and the entailed abnegation of self has invidious consequences. It does so through deployment of familiar Gothic tropes. Various anxieties are evoked regarding the family unit; violence against women, especially in the context of maternity; the afore-mentioned vulnerability of (but also the danger posed *by*) children, and the threat to ideation of the nuclear family posed by strangers, manifestations of alterity and 'otherness'.

As a group, the Nameless themselves incarnate social abjection. Members of this cult have not only given up their 'right to question': they have also forsaken individual identity altogether. Ganz's disciples are in pursuit of 'the ultimate atrocity', a state of antisocial and depersonalised alterity on behalf of 'something outside themselves' (p. 216). This 'something' is a force or entity that is never identified or defined, but which the reader is encouraged to assume is 'evil', in that it is destructive and life-negating. Amongst numerous criticisms of the novel, Joshi

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[41] Hazleton, *Agnostic*, p. 52.

argues that the significance of 'namelessness' itself is never even addressed, appearing to be 'merely a device for the cult to evade detection'.[42] However, Joshi's comment somewhat misreads or at least downplays Campbell's intention with this 'central metaphor', rather ignoring the fact that the text discloses that the 'Nameless' have deliberately given up their names, in order for group members 'to show that they were only the tools of what they were doing' (p. 224). I suggest that Campbell has clearly taken some inspiration here from Aleister Crowley's *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1913). For the successful practice of 'magick', Crowley prescribes 'first and foremost the destruction of the individuality' posed by the ego, for 'each of our ideas must be made to give up the self to the Beloved'.[43] Yet in Campbell's sceptical reconfiguration the abnegation of self has taken a negative and destructive turn, rather than a joyous, life enhancing or enlightening one. By interpreting the '[r]eplacement of physical life and death by an evil dream' as the 'keynote of the Gothic', MacCulloch has also equated occultism in Campbell's works to a rejection of fertility and Darwinian evolution, a 'collectively imagined' equivalent of seizing and finally 'perverting' the imagination.[44] In *The Nameless*, the eponymous cult's abduction of children represents a 'perverted' alternative to the traditional family unit and notions of reproduction. As such, it reproduces, in a contemporary postmodern context, what Gerry Carlin and Nicola Allen describe as a characteristic of modernism: the simultaneous 'horror and allure of primitivism, otherness and historical annihilation', which paradoxically allows a 'rebirth'. [45]

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[42] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 131.
[43] Aleister Crowley, *Magick* [sic] *in Theory and Practice* (New York: Castle, 1960 [1913]) p. 57.
[44] Simon MacCulloch, 'Glimpses of Absolute Power: Ramsey Campbell's Concept of Evil', in Joshi, *The Count of Thirty*, pp. 32—38 (pp. 36, 35).
[45] Carlin and Allen, 'Slime and Western Man', p. 83.

Applying a postmodernist paradigm, the 'Nameless', I argue, represent an overarching tension or anxiety over the moral implications implied by lack of definition through anchorage or alignment with referents. The sense of ethical and spiritual crisis expressed in this text is symptomatic of a culture which has experienced a collapse of viable metanarratives. That culture is characterised by a loss of confidence in the existence of what Baudrillard describes as 'truth, reference and objective causes'.[46] Such truth, referents and causality have been replaced by a 'current procession of simulacra'.[47] Simulacra are non-hierarchical and non-dialectical, so there is, thus, no moral hierarchy or promise or assurance of progress. In Baudrillard's schemata, such nullification of the real and attendant notions of structure and of progress results in 'evil':

> It is not desire that we cannot escape, but the ironic presence of the object, its indifference and indifferent interconnections, its challenge, its seduction, its violation of the symbolic order […] In short, it is the principle of evil that we cannot escape.[48]

The proximity of 'seductive' chaos, the fear that moral and social norms and widely held assumptions are somehow in the unmaking, I suggest, energises and haunts Campbell's narratives. Yet such traps constitute an invidious situation against which his work seeks to posit, however tentatively, a humane alternative.

With *The Nameless*, the apotheosis of this chaos and 'evil' is, naturally, represented by the titular cult. Conventions of natalism and parenthood are amongst those assumptions or guarantors of cultural cohesion that are subject to

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[46] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Phillip Beichmann, in Baudrillard *Selected Writings*, 2nd edition, ed. by Mark Poster (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001 [1981]), pp. 169—187 (p. 171).

[47] Baudrillard, *Perfect Crime*, p. 2.

[48] Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* [1983], trans. by Philip Beichmann and W. G. J. Niesluchowski, in *Selected Writings*, pp. 188—209 (p. 202).

the threat of deconstruction by this antagonistic force. These are credos for which

the text endeavours to articulate a defence, as a reassertion against the cult's

negation of the life cycle. It does so, I argue, in a self-reflexive and inconclusive

manner which aligns the novel with the postmodern, thematically if not stylistically.

The Nameless is an early example of the complex hybridity achieved by

Campbell's long fictions. The novel clearly qualifies as, as discussed, an instance

of urban Gothic. However, it can also be described as an example of female

Gothic, in the sense described, for example by Diana Wallace, that is, as a male

writer's appropriation of 'key elements' associated with this sub-mode.[49] Foremost

amongst these constituents is a female lead character and representation of the

experience, especially the trauma, incurred by motherhood. Campbell has

admitted that a working title for the novel, alongside *The Loud Houses*, was *Home

to Mother*.[50] Indeed, the worst fates that are depicted in any detail in the narrative

are reserved for women who assume maternal roles. Margery Turner, the mother

of another abductee, is killed, apparently consumed in a derelict house by an

entity that is 'hardly formed, a foetus covered with cobwebs and dust or composed

of them' (p. 87). This explicit association of the foetus with mysophobia recalls

Kristeva's identification of the abject with unclean waste matter, as something

which 'disturbs identity, system, order'.[51] Similarly, Gerry Martin, an undercover

journalist, is later lured to torture and death in the cellar of another deserted,

'Gothic' house, whilst an unnatural 'something the size of a child' (p. 146), possibly

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[49] Diana Wallace, 'Female Gothic', in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, I, pp. 231—6 (p. 234).
[50] Campbell, Afterword to *Obsession* (London: Futura, 1990 [1985]), pp. 281—3 (p. 281). All subsequent references to *Obsession* are also to this edition of the novel.
[51] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, trans by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4. There is also, perhaps, an echo of 'indefinability' being a source of horror noted by Joshi in relation to Lovecraft in narratives like 'The Colour Out of Space' (1927). See Joshi, *Dreamer and A Visionary,* p. 256.

the same supernatural entity, traverses across the ceiling overhead.[52] Amongst the many discourses contained within this text is a half-'formed' meditation on foetal development. Barbara, the grieving mother, is described as having a dream, in which she is climbing an escalator and perceives her lost daughter 'waiting against a darkness that looked impatient to take shape', but, on second glance, 'a snake with a frozen head, pink and moist as a foetus, was waiting' (p. 155). The connotations here are not only foetal, but, with the references to 'snake' with a head being both 'pink' and 'moist', phallic and sexual. Even the independent minded and androgynously named 'Gerry' is given a sudden protective, maternal instinct – 'she knew only that she had to save the child' (p. 145). Gerry is being used to articulate her creator's view, given in the novel's Afterword, that the 'strongest fear is parental' (p. 278). Yet the parental 'fear' is both for and *of* the child, for Angela, the daughter, like Carrie White in King's novel *Carrie* (1974), transpires to be a powerful psychic.[53] Names in Campbell's fictions often have some symbolic resonance, instances of what Beville describes as 'language drawing attention to itself as means of creative expression'.[54] Here, the name 'Angela', like 'Gerry', is no exception. It conveys the ambiguity of the angel, a supernatural being whose message or motives may be either benign or destructive. Barbara's daughter, coveted, mourned, recovered and finally feared, is incorporated into the novel's overall suggestive matrix of meaning. The text

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[52] Both female victims suffer their grisly fates, moreover, in traditional, enclosed, urban 'Gothic' spaces.

[53] The Gothic lineage of child as victim *and* villain extends even further back of course, as the ambiguous Miles and Flora in James's *Turn of the Screw* exemplify. However, Campbell is, consciously or unconsciously, following the trend for psychically gifted children popularised by King with this novel, *The Shining* (1977) and *Firestarter* (1980).

[54] Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism*, p. 48.

seems balanced between an ideological validation of the maternal instinct and the equation of maternity with danger and death.

The contradictions within this positioning become apparent at the novel's conclusion, a densely packed and apparently rushed denouement in which protagonist, child and the Nameless cult are united on a boat. Typifying a recurring feature of Campbell's earlier longer fictions, the ending seems to attempt to resolve issues quickly, and, in doing so, raises more intellectual problems and reveals more than it resolves. A literal manifestation of the many textual 'loose ends' in Campbell's fiction is the undefined supernatural entity, the cobweb creature, described in the novel's finale as having 'an unstable head' and 'flapping' skin (p. 259). The entity is an overt element of supernaturalism in what is otherwise a predominantly realistic narrative of psychological suspense. Beyond drawing upon a long Gothic tradition of arachnophobia and associated repulsive corporeality to evoke fear, the creature's exact relationship to Ganz or to the living members of the Nameless, as Joshi points out, is unclear.[55] Whether it is intended to be a spectral manifestation of Ganz, or an expression of the collective subconscious of the Nameless, the entity certainly appears to be a somewhat randomised and unintegrated element. Perhaps most apparently credibility-straining, for the critic, is what amounts, by Campbell's own admission, to a final deus ex machina on the boat.[56] In this dramatic climax, Barbara's dead husband appears - again symbolically named, as 'Arthur', as if out of myth. In quick succession, both Ted, Barbara's current consort, and Angela, her daughter, also undergo an entirely sudden, and in Joshi's view therefore 'highly implausible',

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[55] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 130. One thinks, for example, of the monstrous spiders in M. R. James's tale, 'The Ash-tree' (1904).
[56] David Mathew, 'An Interview with Ramsey Campbell' <http://www.infinityplus.co.uk/nonfiction/intcam.htm> [first accessed 1 June 2020].

psychological conversion.[57] Campbell himself has also been candid about what he sees as the novel's conflicted aesthetics throughout its diegesis but most apparent in this ending. 'The book comes dangerously close', he has reflected, ' to expressing attitudes I have little time for', specifically 'the notion of evil as an external force – "nothing to do with us" – and the idea that independent women are suspect'.[58] In the novel's Afterword, Campbell admits to finding the final appearance of the spectral Arthur to save the day as 'one ghost too many', and to some unease 'with the [Dennis] Wheatley-ish notion of evil at large' (pp. 278—9).

However, there is an alternative perspective to such vexed and baldly qualitative artistic judgements. The novel's somewhat irresolute climax enacts Lyotard's maxim that '[c]onsensus is only a particular state of discussion, not its end'.[59] Angela's pivotal reversal may be unprecedented, but it serves to convey a grimly determined optimism. It is a volte-face that combines elements of Christian and humanist belief. Her infliction of torture upon the cultists becomes, it is narrated, 'a child's exaggerated show of repentance, an acting out of herself-disgust, proof that she repudiated to regain everything the cult stood for, perhaps in order to regain her father's love' (p. 269). Rendered ambivalent though this reversal is by the qualifier 'perhaps', Angela's 'giv[ing] herself another chance' (Ted, p. 272) suggests a counterbalance to the preceding narrative, which has given no indication that the psychically powerful Angela grieves or feels empathy for her dead father, or indeed for anyone else.[60] Her reversal reasserts a concern

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[57] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 130.

[58] Campbell, 'A Small Dose of Reality', *Fantasy Review*, 8.11 (November 1985), repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 294—300 (p. 296).

[59] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 65.

[60] The film adaptation, *Los sin nombre*, offers a bleaker conclusion, in which the daughter engineers the death of her father, who has been a cult member all along, and then kills herself, to ensure that her mother 'will suffer more'.

with social structures, particularly the integrity of the family unit. Like its almost

token 'monster', therefore, although the novel may seem ill-defined, 'baggy' and

unfinished, the sense of incompletion also extends to the ethical issues raised,

which, here, centre on notions of maternity and generation. Campbell's narrative

articulates abjection of the mother, in the forms of the Nameless; the fates of

Margery and Gerry as their victims, and the character of Angela. The cult presents

one form of familial structure, if a repressive and destructive one. Yet, through

Angela's final 'repentance', and the unstable, shifting position occupied by the

child in the narrative, the text also presents a humane alternative. It enacts a

desire for an embrace of the maternal, in opposition to a fundamentalist alterity

that is both inhuman and inhumane, expressed through struggle. Thus, both

artistically and philosophically, Campbell's text, typically for those inflected by

postmodernity, articulates the search for a consolatory credo beyond the 'grand

narrative' of religious dogmatism, but, simultaneously, demonstrates the difficulty

of attaining one.

3. Folk Wisdom? Theological Conflicts in *The Hungry Moon*

While *The Nameless* anatomises the phenomenon of the secretive 'cult' with its

perverse substitute for the family unit, Campbell's later novel, *The Hungry Moon*,

critiques forms of more orthodox religions, both pagan and Christian. It does so

equally unsparingly, and on a larger, cosmic scale. Lyotard maintains that the

purpose of narrative is to confer and transmit knowledge, 'to recount experiences,

positive or negative, allowing society to define its competence'.[61] To achieve this,

Lyotard privileges language games, mini-narratives (petit récit), that derive from

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[61] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 18—19.

the difference, diversity and incompatibility between sender and referent as 'the quintessential form of imaginative invention'[62] In turning to *The Hungry Moon*, one of Campbell's most panoramic and certainly his most overtly Lovecraftian longer fiction of the 1980s, one sees an anatomical smorgasbord of such 'mini-narratives': baldly, it is a text which is brim-full of ideas. Ideological anatomisation, however, is never completed by 'consensus', much less resolution. Fidelity to a Lovecraftian view of the insignificance of humanity in the cosmos and scepticism towards forms of worship co-exist, uneasily, with a fragile liberal humanism. Instead, Campbell's text seems to exemplify, even if it does not finally endorse, what Baudrillard describes as the 'radical antagonism' of the universe, non-dialectical in nature and moving 'towards the extremes', rather than towards a state of equilibrium, reconciliation or synthesis.[63]

Unlike *The Nameless*, *The Hungry Moon* is an ensemble piece.[64] The narrative is set in the fictional Peak District town of Moonwell. In an adaptation of Lovecraft's ascription of an extra-terrestrial origin for supernatural, 'god'-like beings, the plot concerns the infection of this community by an ancient lunar entity imprisoned upon the Earth. The creature is unwittingly unleashed by the actions of Godwin Mann, the leader of a cult of evangelical Christians. Lane is correct that Campbell's novel 'successfully creates its own mythic and symbolic territory'.[65] However, as in all Campbell's fictions, this 'territory' is richly imprinted with literary antecedents. Campbell admitted that his book began as 'a riff' on James Herbert's

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[62] Ibid, p. 60.

[63] Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p. 188.

[64] Campbell has described the book in one interview as a 'failed attempt' to emulate the 'kind of multiple character small town novel' that Stephen King had been producing. Anonymous, 'Ramsey Campbell Talks to the *Horror Zine*', <http://www.thehorrorzine.com/Special/RamseyCampbell/ RamseyCampbell.html> [first accessed 1 June 2020].

[65] Joel Lane, 'Beyond the Light: The Recent Novels of Ramsey Campbell', in Joshi, *Count of Thirty,* pp. 46—51 (p. 46).

earlier novel, *The Dark* (1980), in seeking to 'portray the human psyche's simultaneous attraction to and repulsion towards and condemnation of a monstrous other'.[66] Joshi also sees William Hope Hodgson's apocalyptic work *The Night Land* (1912) as an influence.[67] To these, I would add Nigel Kneale's television screenplays, *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958) and *Quatermass* (1979), in the central theme of the manipulation of a contemporary human settlement by an older, extraterrestrial intelligence. Yet the novel's interpretation of myth embraces much wider temporal and spatial referents. These extend historically to classical literature, exemplified by the sudden appearance of ferocious dogs, which are clearly meant to evoke memories of the hounds of the ancient Greek goddess Hecate, and the climactic, Oedipal blinding of most of the town's inhabitants.[68] The text also draws upon a more recent and, at least until the 2010s, specifically British sub-mode that has been loosely identified as 'folk horror', exemplified by Michael Reeves's film, *Witchfinder General* (1968), Piers Haggard's *The Blood on Satan's Claw* (1970) and Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* (1973).[69] Although his own analysis focuses on cinema and television, Adam Scovell usefully describes folk horror as 'a type of social media that tracks the unconscious ley lines between a

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[66] Campbell, Afterword to 1994 edition of *The Hungry Moon*, repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 402—7 (p. 402).

[67] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 37.

[68] These affinities with Greek myth are noted by Joshi in *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 37.

[69] The success of *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999) and more recent releases such as *The Witch* (Robert Eggers, 2016) and *Midsommar* (Ari Aster, 2019) indicate a cinematic revival and broadening of geographical reference, New England and Swedish settings in these instances. This has run in parallel with a literary renaissance, exemplified by Andrew Michael Hurley's *The Loney* (2016) and Lucie McKnight Hardy's *Water Shall Refuse Them* (2019). 'Folk horror' is also an emergent field of scholarly enquiry. The website <http://www.folklore.com/> [first accessed 10 October 2017] defines it as 'a subgenre of horror fiction… characterised by reference to European, pagan traditions'. Note that any division between 'horror' and 'Gothic' fiction has here, as frequently elsewhere, been elided. Despite a distinction being an important theme of this thesis, which partly espouses Campbell's fictions as representing the maintenance of a distinctively Gothic tradition within the horror genre, as a recognised term, I have left 'folk horror' unaltered.

huge range of different forms of media in the twentieth century and earlier'.[70]

Further, in terms of its plot, Campbell's novel replicates the pattern of what Scovell

defines as a 'folk horror chain': landscape, isolation, 'skewered' belief systems,

and a supernatural or pseudo-supernatural 'happening/summoning'.[71]

In all such texts, pagan or neo-pagan practices are presented as being

identified with, integral to and a confirmation of a community's historical identity as

much as they are a 'threat'. With Campbell's novel, this is especially noteworthy in

the early establishment of locale. This is a landscape that synthesises elements of

Christianity and paganism. The reader is informed that:

> [t]hroughout the peaks, towns decorated wells with pictures made of flowers
>
> and vegetation, a tradition that combined paganism and Christianity in
>
> thanksgiving for the waters that had stayed fresh during the Plague and the
>
> Black Death. (p. 22) [72]

Campbell's narrative, which encompasses aeons, from the birth of the universe to

the present day, strives to create a Lovecraftian mythic texture in the manner of

Lovecraft's story, 'The Dunwich Horror' (1928). To that end, indicators of the

American writer's influence abound. As in Lovecraft's tale, the appearance of the

monstrous 'other' is deferred and prepared for through the testament of hearsay:

'[wh]at's down there is older than Satan' (p. 166), one fearful commentator

remarks. As Joshi argues, the figure of Nathaniel Needham, village sage and local

historian, clearly recalls and serves the same expository function as the

nonagenarian narrator Zadok Allen in 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth', and, like

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[70] Adam Scovell, *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2017), p. 183.
[71] Ibid, pp. 17—18.
[72] Campbell, *The Hungry Moon* (London: Arrow Books, 1987 [1986]). All subsequent references are to this edition.

Nahum Gardner's unfortunate wife in Lovecraft's 'The Colour Out of Space'

(1927), another character mutates into 'a monster', 'shining with a faint whitish

glow like decay' (p. 349). [73]

    Beyond Lovecraft's influence, the blonde-haired children brought to

Moonwell by Mann's cult recall the alien brood in John Wyndham's novel, *The*

Midwich Cuckoos (1957). These indoctrinated youngsters are presented as a

simultaneously disturbed and disturbing group, threatening that the forfeit for

noncompliance with evangelism is that 'you'll go straight to Hell when you die' (p.

63). The children are, however, one of several themes or 'mini-narratives' which

are not developed in the narrative's large ensemble, disappearing halfway through

the text. At the beginning of the novel, the reader is also introduced to Nick Reid, a

journalist covering the relocation of a missile base. The employee of a plutocratic

newspaper proprietor, he is resigned to having only 'the token left-wing

observation of his slip through into print', as the best that could be expected 'when

the newspapers were owned by fewer and fewer proprietors and were becoming

mouthpieces for bigger and bigger mouths' (p. 46). Given the historical context of

the vilification of British antinuclear campaigners by national newspapers during

this period, the reader's expectations of a critique of the said media and of nuclear

power are raised.[74] However, Reid becomes a subordinate if not background

character in the story, and, although there is a brief speculation that one of the

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[73] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 37; Lovecraft, 'The Colour Out of Space', in *The H. P. Lovecraft Omnibus 3: The Haunter of the Dark and Other Tales* (London: Grafton Books, 1985), pp. 237—71. Mrs Gardner undergoes a similar metamorphosis, growing 'slightly luminous in the dark' (p. 250).

[74] For example, *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, British national newspapers owned, respectively, by Rupert Murdoch and the Harmsworth family, were amongst publications responsible for vituperative coverage of anti-nuclear campaigners in the period, particularly the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp (1981—2000). Media treatment of these campaigners is considered by Nick Couldry, 'Disrupting the media frame at Greenham Common: a new chapter in the history of mediations?' *Media, Culture & Society*, 21.3 (2013): 337—58.

subsequent ectoplasmic apparitions is 'a nuclear mutation' (p. 223), the missile

base becomes of peripheral importance in the narrative. Rather than being

deliberate 'red herring' stratagems on the part of the author, such inconsistencies

may be ascribed to imaginative exploration, driven by desire to both maximise the

number of referents and to maintain topicality. The text's epicentre is, in any case,

elsewhere: for the central preoccupation of *The Hungry Moon* is an intense

theological conflict, in which widely divergent belief structures and ethical systems

are deconstructed and, moreover, shown to be equally destructive.

Campbell's portrayal of paganism and fear, incarnated in the lunar entity,

for example, draws upon well-established theoretical and literary antecedents. As

critics have argued in relation to both Lovecraft's and M. R. James's narratives,

the proscribed 'other' here is represented as a manifestation of aspects of the

subconscious.[75] An early, jocular allusion to the 'whole idea of a deep, dark, evil

well' sounding 'pretty Freudian' (p. 111) demonstrates textual self-awareness. One

town inhabitant reflects that he 'had been shown a part of himself he didn't

recognise, and so had virtually the whole of Moonwell' (p. 231). These

manifestations of 'parts' take familiar, often animalistic forms, drawing upon

popular herpetophobia and entomophobia as well as, again (and centrally),

arachnophobia, the lunar creature being repeatedly compared to a spider.

Needham's description of the entity which appeared to the Romans displays a

storyteller's licence. On Campbell's part, it also represents an attempt to convey,

through a plethora of images, the fear of hybridity:

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[75] The literature on both is substantial. See, for example Gina Wisker, '"Spawn of the Pit": Lavinia, Marceline, Medusa, and All Things Foul: H. P. Lovecraft's Liminal Women', in *New Critical Essays on H. P. Lovecraft*, ed. by David Simmons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 31—54, and, with respect to James, Keith M. C. O'Sullivan, 'You Know Where I Am If You Want Me': Authorial Control and Ontological Ambiguity in the Ghost Stories of M. R. James', *Irish Journal of Gothic Horror Studies*, 15 (Autumn 2015): 44—56.

> They could never agree on what they saw, not that they talked about it much. The light got brighter as it came nearer for a start, until the moonlight hurt their eyes. It looked like a spider as big as a man, a beautiful spider made out of moonlight, or it might have looked like a maggot that was growing more legs than a spider, or a man with arms and legs that stretched out over the forest and a face just like the moon's face only it was moving. (p. 135)

The alternating allusions to a spider, fly larvae and a distorted human figure, endorse Needham's view that the moon entity the druids worshipped 'wasn't a god but a monster' (p. 133). To this end, the narrative pursues an affective stratagem, one which relies on fear of and repulsion towards the unnatural and therefore 'monstrous' hybrid. As in *The Nameless*, alterity is portrayed as abject and loathsome, and physical contact with it as unendurable. However, what was 'formless' in the earlier text is now a composite and desiccated human body. Here, the corpse, described by Kristeva as 'without God and outside of science', and as the 'utmost of abjection' is depicted as ambient, and as, literally, in its very animation, as 'death infecting life'.[76] There is an equation of corporeal invasion by the morbid 'other' with aberrant, implicitly sexual coupling. Lending peculiar emphasis, there are two descriptions of the moon entity 'merging' with the body of the evangelist Godwin Mann in the cave, closing the limbs of its rotting host body around him and pressing 'its lipless mouth over his, cutting off his shriek' (pp. 249, 319). Clearly, this fusion of morbid and living tissue is analogous to horror: it is meant to evoke disgust. The grotesquely parodic appropriation of the simulation of the procreative act by the monstrous, as being something negative and repellent,

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[76] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4.

accords with MacCulloch's description of the moon entity as representing 'the predatory morbid imagination', sterile and hostile to life.[77] Such a misanthropic portrayal is lent further weight: elsewhere, a mother throws herself and her deformed, eyeless baby down a lift shaft, and an ectoplasmic being briefly imitates a couple's miscarried son before mockingly degenerating into a 'beast on all fours' and 'scuttling' away (p. 373). Like *The Nameless*, this text thus portrays its monstrous 'other' in terms of parody, delineating negative and destructive implications for birthing and the next generation. However, alterity as presented in *The Hungry Moon* is more overtly anti-natal. The act of procreation itself, or the simulation of it, is represented as abject. In the universe of this novel, parenting, childbirth and children themselves, as either representation or as experience, comprise material for trauma.

Godwin Mann's human evangelical group, through fostering bigotry, intolerance and suppression, are presented as being as 'monstrous' as the hybrid compendium of traditional images that denote the text's supernatural antagonist. The cult's portrayal is in keeping with what Campbell views as the intellectual suffocation incurred in surrendering 'unquestioningly' to ideology. Mann's sect is enabled to do what it does because Moonwell is, as one inhabitant describes, approvingly, and thus, to the reader, ironically, 'so cut off, safe from outside influences' (p. 85). The implication is that, far from making it 'safe', isolation renders a community vulnerable to insularity, isolationism and predatory extremism. Lane rightly describes the 'infiltration' of the small English town by Mann's group as carrying 'disturbing echoes of right-wing popular movements:

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[77] MacCulloch, 'Glimpses of Absolute Power', p. 38.

Nazism, McCarthyism, Thatcherism'.[78] In himself, Mann, the group's American leader, embodies a reverse colonialism akin to Bram Stoker's Dracula, but his name also evokes an ironic divinity, both in and of humanity, together with an echo of the anarchist and utilitarian philosopher William Godwin.[79] In a long set piece, Mann articulates the need for a consolatory 'grand narrative', preaching that 'people still need to believe' (p. 50). However, his solution is, obviously, an uncompromising dogmatism. The harmonious accommodation of Christianity and pre-Christian practices in 'thanksgiving' seen at the beginning of the novel is dismissed: '[p]aganism', Mann declares, 'was always Christ's enemy' (p. 54). Mann's anti-intellectual version of Christianity offers the exact opposite of free thought, liberation and tolerance:

> you can't take what you need from Christ and leave the rest […] You can't think your way to God. Unless you let God into your life to show you how to live, unless you accept Him whole like a child does, you're turning your back on him and your name is Judas. (p. 51)

The abnegation of the right to 'think' is also, in its purest form, a surrender of the 'right to question' and prostration before a totalising 'belief system'.

Such fundamentalist doctrine finds a ready audience in a community in which marginalisation of minorities has already been established. Campbell skilfully portrays a society beset by paranoia, one in which crime has been attributed to 'strangers moving in' and 'hippies squatting in the holiday cottages', anonymised and dehumanised as 'filthy creatures' (p. 24). Like health

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[78] Joel Lane, 'Beyond the Light: The Recent Novels of Ramsey Campbell', in *The Count of Thirty*, pp. 46—51 (p. 46).

[79] See, in particular, Stephen D. Arata, 'The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonisation', *Victorian Studies*, 33.4 (1990): 621—45. In that Mann is both American and Californian, in this instance 'reverse colonisation', of course, heralds from the opposite direction, from the New World of the American West, rather than from Eastern Europe.

professionals, teachers in Campbell's fictions, influenced by his own educational
experiences, are usually portrayed negatively.[80] Here, Mrs Scraggs, the
headmaster's wife, is an embodiment of fascist populism, declaring that children
'aren't here to think, they're here to learn' (p. 91). Even prior to Mann's arrival in
the town, she launches a petition against the use of a deconsecrated chapel as a
bookshop. Mann's subsequent book burning at this 'devil's church', in which such
diverse discourses as 'Henry Miller, William Burroughs, Von Daniken, *The Joy of
Sex*, *A Handbook of Witchcraft*, *Life on Earth* and *A Child's Book of English
Folklore*' (pp. 105—6) are immolated, demonstrates the invidious collaboration of
evangelical Christianity and local politics in the destruction of knowledge, and
underlines the anti-intellectual, anti-Enlightenment nature of religious
fundamentalism. It is Mann's (and, by symbolic implication, man's as shorthand for
humankind's) folly which releases the moon entity and its literal and metaphysical
darkness. Once the evangelist leader is possessed by the creature, Mann's
preaching rhetoric is largely abandoned, the cynicism terse, as in his proclamation
on emerging from the cave: '[i]t's done at last. Praise God as much as you like' (p.
177). The equation of fundamentalism with destructiveness is thereafter
intensified, represented by Scraggs' increasingly hysterical, McCarthyite behaviour
and accusatory, almost archaic language. Diana is successively condemned as
'Miss Permissive Ungodliness' (p. 290); accused of being 'in league with the devil'
and threatened with execution as a witch (p. 373). Scragg's vindictiveness echoes
Matthew Hopkins in Reeves' *Witchfinder General*, as described by Scovell, in that
the character also personifies 'theology used as an excuse to hide the greater

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[80] This trait is evident from early short stories such as 'The Interloper' in the *Demons by Daylight*
collection and recurs in other later novels such as *Midnight Sun* (1990), and, as discussed later in
this chapter, *Obsession*. Again, this foregrounds an autobiographical tendency in Campbell's work.

sense of sadism under a black veil of piousness'.[81] Perhaps most disturbingly, there is a final inference of communal degeneration into cannibalism. A child being served meat described as tasting like pork is instructed not to 'start getting finnicky over your food' (p. 364). The text does not elaborate further on this theme, but it is possible to infer reference to the subterranean Morlocks in H. G. Well's *The Time Machine* (1895) and a similar fear of the dark precipitating an inverse evolution, that will 'turn us into cavemen' (p, 166). The clear impression is also of a parody of the Christian sacrament of communion. Such representation of a final atavistic degeneration and perversion may reflect Campbell's own rejection of the Catholicism in which he was raised.

However, as elsewhere in these texts, forms of abjection are prefigured by the central interrogative scepticism towards *all* forms of religious belief, even when orthodox and thus conferred with 'respectability'. Diana, for example, struggles to find theological certitudes sufficient to explain, much less justify, her own parents' deaths in a plane crash:

> She wondered how Mann would have dealt with that – not so much that God had failed to respond to her prayers, but that if he'd wanted to take her parents he'd taken dozens of others just to do so. Or didn't the individual lives matter to God, just the number of lives, the statistic? All that could justify that sort of behaviour by a god would be life after death. (pp. 60—1)

Similarly, later, Andrew, the child whose father has been transformed into a 'monster' through contact with the moon entity, finds his confidence that God would not permit 'evil things' to come into the house wilting, when he contemplates 'some of the things God let happen in the world, things that were nobody's fault

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[81] Scovell, *Folk Horror*, p. 22.

except God's' (p. 242). Such passages attest to an obvious crisis of faith. The issue of belief is investigated throughout the text. The novel, in accordance with Campbell's agnosticism, refuses to accord privilege to any one discourse - even where, as in the case of Christian evangelism with its deceptively 'easy' answers, that credo is overtly bogus and demonstrably dangerous. Mann's argument that 'druidic rites' have helped 'evil' establish itself in the world (p. 58) is, in fact, subsequently validated both by Needham's narration and by Diana's vision of Celtic rituals that were intended to appease the moon entity on Earth.

The absence of God and the advent of evil is a conundrum for which orthodox Christianity appears to have no answers. Father O'Connell, the novel's representative of established churches and belief, is portrayed as a reasoning and sympathetic figure. In his statement that 'the notion that you mustn't think your way to faith is obviously not far from the intolerance that leads to burning books' (p. 108), an event literalised later in the novel, the priest expresses a rationalist view which is diametrically opposed to Mann's. From paratextual evidence, this may be surmised as articulating Campbell's own liberal viewpoint, for the author has professed to 'loathing' totalitarian tendencies in religion and politics, a 'stultification that seems to be designed to take away the creative urge'. [82] O'Connell seems to offer some philosophical bulwark against the evangelical insurgency:

> After all, this church has been here for close to eight hundred years, and
> the foundations for much longer, you can feel that, can't you? Yet that isn't
> a split second in the eye of God. Think how much less important this bit of
> childishness must be. (p. 35)

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[82] Dziemianowicz, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell', p. 20.

This confidence is not, though, sufficient to save O'Connell from later being savagely killed. Nor does it prevent the priest's body then being mockingly reanimated by supernatural forces in a grotesque parody of religious service, Diana and others wondering, as his semi-decapitated corpse throws objects about, as 'if it was trying to say mass' (p. 379).

It is Diana Kramer, like Mann another American immigrant, who functions as the novel's heroine. Named after the Roman goddess of the moon and of hunting, Diana finally becomes the text's representative of 'mother nature'. Joshi correctly describes her 'vision', a chapter-long episode of exposition concerning the emergence and history of the moon entity, as 'an awkward contrivance' on Campbell's part.[83] Yet, while it may be clumsily out of synch with the rest of the novel as a narrative device, imaginatively it is still an extraordinary interpolation of the universal into the quotidian, and Campbell's earliest and, until the *Three Births of Daoloth* trilogy (2016—8), his most sustained attempt to replicate Lovecraft's 'literature of cosmic fear' at novel length. For clearly the aim is to convey the sublime: Diana's is an epic journey of 'awesomeness', from the birth of the cosmos through time and space, in which only her 'awe and terror' differentiate her from 'the churning gaseous matter she was part of, spreading across infinity' (p. 313). Campbell even imitates Lovecraft's language in referencing the imprisoned moon entity's ability to influence 'minds in which racial memories of the old worship lingered' (p. 318). This echoes a similar power attributed by the American writer to his 'Old Ones'.[84]

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[83] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 37.
[84] See, for example, Lovecraft's description in 'Call of Cthulhu', regarding the Old Ones: 'their dead bodies had told their secrets in dreams to the first men, who formed a cult that had never died', p. 78.

Moreover, Diana's experience of the vision demonstrates a prominent duality of theme in Campbell's fictions, namely the struggle to retain a sense of ontological as much as epistemological certainty. Before embarking upon her psychic journey, Diana 'couldn't help holding back, trying to cling to her sense of herself' (p. 312). Other novels by Campbell in the 1980s, such as *The Parasite* or *The Influence,* address themes of metempsychosis and a disassociation of mind from corporeality. However, it is *The Hungry Moon*, in its juxtaposition of the universal and the intimate, the cosmic and the human in scale, that most suggests the vulnerability and, more pointedly, the *small*-ness of the latter. This is in keeping with the materialist quality of cosmic horror that Campbell inherits from Lovecraft, in which the cosmos is vast and humanity is insignificant, but in which the latter must pursue a self-validating path, be it in the form of creation and adherence to tradition or some other form of consolation. From his atheist perspective informed by studies in anthropology, Lovecraft argues that the '[m]ystic and teleological personification of natural forces' as 'gods' is essential to the 'peasant or workman' in order to comprehend the cosmos: '[t]ake away his Christian god and saints, and he will worship something else'.[85] The applicability to cults and their appeal in Campbell's as well as Lovecraft's own fictions is obvious here. However, Campbell's agnosticism signifies the development of a specifically secular and humanist perspective. A beleaguered humanism underpins Diana's final, successful, defence against the creature through song, 'a cry for healing', which is described as 'lonely and desperate as the first human voice might have been on the first night of humanity' (pp. 416, 418).

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[85] Lovecraft, *Selected Letters*, II: 1925—1929, p. 310, quoted in Joshi, *A Subtler Magick*, p. 35.

As with *The Nameless*, the conclusion of *The Hungry Moon* is sudden and seems rushed. Although Joshi is satisfied that 'the simplicity, poignancy and reaffirmation of humanity' of its ending is 'more effective than any blood and thunder climax could have been', it is still logically problematic.[86] No explanation, after all, is given for Diana's sudden insight or outburst. Further, given the inequity of power between predator and prey detailed in the preceding narrative, the ending can be interpreted as sentimental and unconvincing: it is not clear what exactly needs to be 'healed', nor how the 'lonely and desperate' human voice, precisely because it is so isolated and vulnerable, can overcome the strength, the awesome scale, of the alien 'other'. Campbell himself has judged that the novel, with its large ensemble of characters and ideas, consists of 'too many books'.[87] Its plethora of 'mini-narratives' certainly concludes in irresolution and compromise, with, as MacCulloch describes, the curtailment of human evolution only 'narrowly averted' at the finale.[88] However, the ending also clearly suggests the notion of the circularity of history. Needham's earlier speculation that 'the thing down there wiped out all memory of the place until it was ready to come back' (p. 137), after its imprisonment by the Romans, prefigures the creature's climactic re-confinement and the blindness and amnesia, both literal and metaphorical, suffered by Moonwell's population. This refrains another distinctly Lovecraftian idea, that of the 'awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle', larger than and impervious to the human.[89] The implications are also pessimistic, and attain the tenor of warning: populations forget and learn nothing, and history, unless its

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[86] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 37.
[87] Campbell, Afterword to 1994 edition of *The Hungry Moon*, p. 404.
[88] MacCulloch, 'Glimpses of Absolute Power', p. 38.
[89] Lovecraft, 'Call of Cthulhu', p. 61.

pattern can be recognised and changed, repeats itself with the reappearance of old dogmas in 'seductive' new forms.

4. At the Crossroads: *Obsession* and After

Despite the debate that may be had regarding the artistic effectiveness or otherwise of *The Hungry Moon*'s climax, its heroine's vision and endeavour to retain a sense of identity and reality seem to accord with Beville's description of Gothic-postmodernism. In Beville's prototype, Gothic-postmodernism features both the subject's experience of 'sublime terror' and their 'struggle for self-knowledge, definition and access to the real', 'reality' being defined in terms of epistemological and ontological certainties.[90] Moreover, as in *The Nameless*, the dramatic climax of *The Hungry Moon* contains an element of transcendence, that is, of allusion of elevation of a liberal and humane perspective to the status of some essential and ontological 'truth'. Again, this accords with 'the possibility of supernatural or transcendental existence' that Beville identifies as an intrinsic feature in both the Gothic imagination and postmodernism.[91] I now wish to consider this transcendence and other mediations in a text which, differing from these two others, appears to largely eschew overt supernaturalism in its consideration of magic, faith and belief systems: Campbell's 1985 novel, *Obsession.*

Although another ensemble piece, this work is set on a smaller and more domestic scale than *The Hungry Moon,* which appeared the following year. Indeed, on the surface, *Obsession* displays more fidelity to a realist, even naturalistic aesthetic, as exemplified in one character's sour realisation, late in the

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[90] Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism*, p. 54.
[91] Ibid, p. 55.

narrative, of spousal infidelity: '[s]o this was how marriages end […] messily, absurdly, overbalanced by just a few words' (p. 192). The novel's story line, concerning how a pact made in adolescence by four childhood friends in a small Norfolk coastal town affects them in later life, is, as Joshi notes, a conscious variant on W. W. Jacob's macabre tale of the repercussions of wishes, 'The Monkey's Paw' (1902).[92] Like the other two novels, *Obsession* thus deals with the hidden and with covenants. However, in a prime instance of the novel's metatextual flirtatiousness, the supernatural content of *Obsession* appears to be minimal: it consciously prioritises the 'mess' and 'absurdity' of individual psychology. Unlike *The Nameless* or *The Hungry Moon*, there is no actual 'monster' here, although another character in its ensemble belatedly and self-consciously dons a skull-face disguise to frighten children and become 'a horrible man with a mask' (p. 269). *Obsession* marks Campbell's first major shift into the foregrounding of the psychological realist aesthetic after the non-supernatural novel, *The Face That Must Die*. Yet it is, as mooted, coquettish: a conflicted and ambiguous text, caught between privileging discourses of rationality and an elevation of the very inheritance of myth and folklore that at one level it eschews. To appropriate Baudrillard's theorisation, this is symptomatic of a struggle in postmodernity for aesthetic determinism and self-definition, for both writer and for the fictional characters that they create in narratives, amidst - and against - what has become 'a single hyper-real nebula' of simulacra.[93] Ultimate 'truth' is indecipherable and unattainable. There is, therefore, a preference for discourses of 'crisis' and of 'desire' which have an affirmatory value, to 'counter the mortal

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[92] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 70.
[93] Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, trans. by James Benedict (London: Verso, 1993 [1990]), p. 83.

blows of simulation'.[94] The mini narratives within *Obsession* illustrate both such endeavours and the vexed ethical compromises that these endeavours entail.

Obsession is a curious hybrid of mixed registers, combining subtle psychological realism and sometimes overt social critique. As inferred, this is a distinctly British landscape, without an American lead, as in *The Hungry Moon,* or an overseas interlude like *The Nameless*. Lane has described Campbell's novels of the 1980s as having value as cultural indices. He argues that they 'explore the condition of modern life', and 'their historical perspective has the purpose of uncovering (in Foucault's phrase) a history of the present'.[95] Whilst I broadly agree that this is a redolent quality of these texts, their significance extends beyond the merely reflective to attain a symptomatic status of self-reflexivity. Lane also oversimplifies in claiming that these narratives address what 'appeared to be a right-wing consensus' in British politics, for it is arguable that such homogeneous 'consensus' did not exist. Although Britain was governed by ideologically-driven Conservative administrations throughout the 1980s, the period was marked by escalating polarisation between rich and poor; the political Right benefitted from a divided opposition, and such events as riots across several English cities (1981) and the national miners' strike (1984—5) attest to political fragmentation and acute social conflict during the period.[96] It is more accurate to assert that that the texts reflect and encapsulate such bitter and irreconcilable tensions.

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[94] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, pp. 182, 185.

[95] Lane, 'Beyond the Light', p. 47.

[96] For diverse contemporary perspectives, see, for example, Joel Kriger, *Reagan, Thatcher and the Politics of Decline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), and Peter Riddell, *The Thatcher Decade: How Britain Has Changed During the 1980s* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), while Andy McSmith*, No Such Thing as Society: A History of Britain in the 1980s* (London: Constable, 2011) offers a retrospective. Colin Hutchinson, *Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) assesses the response of contemporary novelists, specifically those on the liberal left, to the ascendant conservative hegemony during the period.

In *Obsession,* on the one hand, mistrust of metanarratives is manifested in a negative portrayal of law enforcement.[97] With the exception of a main character, Jimmy Waters, state agents of 'law and order' are unsympathetic creations. The police officers Dexter and Deedes, the name of the first another instance of Campbell's word play through its derivation from the name of Inspector Morse-creator Colin Dexter, are uncharacterised ciphers. Their pronouncements, like Scraggs' in *The Hungry Moon*, are stereotypical, exemplifying the repressive 'stultification' which Campbell rejects, as in Deedes' disagreement with Waters on the 'kind of world' that that the latter wants to raise his children in:

> 'I hope', Jimmy said mildly, 'not a world where the innocent are treated like hardened criminals.'
>
> 'None of us are innocent, Inspector, although too many of us think we are. If fear is taking the place of religion, so be it. Something worthwhile has to.'
>
> (pp. 86—7)

This absolutist pronouncement reads, as the author intends, as an absurdly negative and invidious mantra. Yet, conversely, and to a greater degree than the other novels discussed in this chapter, *Obsession* also foregrounds a strongly autobiographical mode. Campbell's own experiences of dealing with his mother's schizophrenia and death are portrayed in the split, dual form of both Robin Laurel's tensions with her increasingly neurotic parent and the vexed encounters of Peter Priest with his grandmother.[98] In adulthood, both Robin and Peter have

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[97] Again, as with health professions, there is an unavoidable autobiographical element, Campbell's estranged father having been a policeman. Negative representation of the British police as either sinister agents of oppression or as buffoons is a recurrent feature in his fictions.

[98] Campbell's vivid essay-memoir, 'Near Madness' (see footnote 38, above) describes his mother's decline and death. For example, Robin being 'shaken by the sudden utter hatred she felt for her mother' (*Obsession*, p. 175), echoes Campbell's recollection of a relationship that had deteriorated to one of 'mutual loathing' in which '[s]ometimes I considered killing her' (*Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, p. 284).

taken roles in 'caring' professions, she as a doctor and he as a social worker. The latter has done so as an act of conscious atonement: 'his job was helping people not to grow as desperate as he had been when he'd made the wish' (p. 80). It is these two characters, the guilt ridden, who articulate belief in supernatural agency. The exact nature and motives of this force are unfocused and mysterious, but are perceived as malevolent. Peter can sense that some 'power' is feeding on his anxiety, 'though he had no idea of its form or where it was' (p. 202). Robin admits to her mother her involvement in:

> I suppose you'd call it magic. I only wanted to help you. Four of us wrote a wish, only there was more to it than just wishing. Some power was invoked, I'm sure of that now, something that took advantage of us, God knows why. The point is, everyone's wish came through in some way. (p. 145)

Such perceptions are akin to 'the lingering emotion of terror' produced by an encounter with the sublime, the undefined 'unrepresentable' discussed by Beville.[99]

The text seems to endorse a wry critique of both the prevalent materialism of the 1980s and any such expressed sense of spirituality or of the numinous. Steve Innes, the childhood Communist, grows up to be an estate agent. Both his own family business and eventually Jimmy's wife Tanya are victims of the dilapidation of a theatre that is unsold and 'being left to rot' (p. 60). As Lane argues, Tanya's eventually fatal accident at the Grand conveys 'the idea that negligence can do as much harm as conscious violence'.[100] Yet, through the state of the theatre being the result of a stalemate between the wishes of the owner and

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[99] Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism*, p. 30. See also Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 203.
[100] Lane, 'Beyond the Light', p. 46.

a local council preservation order, it can also be interpreted as an indictment of the government bureaucracy and political machinations symptomatic of late capitalism. The character of Steve also articulates most explicitly the author's own recorded scepticism regarding supernaturalism. Having, in childhood, dismissed their pact as 'fun' (p. 43), in adulthood Steve again tries to pacify Peter through rationalising that 'the supernatural is just something people invent as an excuse for what they want to do themselves' (p. 125), a direct refrain of the author's own view which I alluded to earlier. As with the fate of the priest in *The Hungry Moon*, orthodox Christianity appears to be no guarantee of protection against misfortune. Scepticism towards any kind of consolatory religious faith is, if anything, more overt. It is exemplified above all at Tanya Waters's funeral, when the bereaved Jimmy savagely if silently equates her mother's attempt to comfort their children with belief in children's fantasies:

> Jimmy stared at the worn stone floor as Tanya's mother told them she was sure Tanya was in heaven because at the last she must have remembered what she'd been brought up to know was the truth. He could feel the children relaxing. If they needed to believe that, he wasn't going to argue. Maybe if they believed hard enough, it would come true, maybe if you clapped your hands to show you believed in fairies, the fairy wouldn't die. He took a breath that stung his nostrils, to keep back the tears. (pp. 150—1).[101]

Such dismissal appears to suggest and underline a prevailing realist pattern. In this respect, *Obsession* looks forward to later narratives like *The Long Lost* that

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[101] The sardonic reference is, of course, to the so-called 'Tinker Bell effect', after J. M. Barrie's play *Peter Pan* (1904), in which death is conquered by the audience's applause.

combine a supernatural element with a prevalent realism, even naturalism, in the portrayal of domestic lives and tragedy. According to Lane, for example, *Obsession* 'deliberately avoids becoming a horror novel; its darkest moments arise through the realistic portrayal of human misery'.[102] It is certainly the case that all four main characters in the narrative undergo psychological anguish, the attribution of which extends beyond guilt. In one image of temporal suspension, Jimmy Waters himself serves to suggest the intense quality of the emotion of grief, embracing his children in a tableau that he wishes 'could go on for ever', for '[a]t least then, nothing worse could happen' (p. 131). In his role as detective, Jimmy also finally discovers that the address from which the original letter was sent is non-existent. Further, it emerges that the abhorred teacher whom Steve had wished to be removed had actually suffered a stroke before the quartet of friends had committed their wishes in writing. These 'logical' explanations allow a rationalist perspective to concur with Jimmy's viewpoint, and to conclude that there is nothing supernatural in these events - and that, therefore, there is 'nobody and nothing to confront' (p. 278). Naturally, this materialist perspective implicates the belief that there have been paranormal forces at work as being irrational. Peter Priest, as an advocate of such belief, who has by this time emerged from the ensemble to become the novel's antagonist as both a killer and a child-kidnapper, is accordingly portrayed as delusional. This is enough for the critic Gary Crawford to interpret the novel as being partly a study of internalised delusion, in which the character of Peter has 'created a religion at the heart of which there is a mystery', a 'delusory inner light' which finally destroys him.[103] Crawford's argument, drawing

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[102] Lane, 'Beyond the Light', p. 46.

[103] Gary Crawford, 'A Religion of HIs Own Making: Peter in Obsession', in *Ramsey Crawford: Critical Essays on the Modern Master of Horror*, pp. 171—177 (p. 176).

upon and drawing out a symbolic quality for the name 'Peter Priest' in a

comparison with the Biblical figure of Saint Peter, is a compelling one.[104] However,

like Lane's reading, I contend that this offers an incomplete interpretation of the

text.

For while *Obsession* may not be easily classified as a 'horror novel' in terms

of presentation of explicit violence, it is very much a text infused by consciousness

of the *Gothic* tradition. There is, for example, a sense of a spell being cast, of a

fateful and irrevocable covenant, in the 'sudden gust of wind' that snatches the

pages on which the four friends have written their wishes, and which suddenly

loses momentum, plunging the sheets of paper 'together into the dark sea' (p. 44).

Obviously, the plot mimics Jacobs's classic cautionary narrative on the 'three

wishes' theme, but there are other flirtatious referents at work here. In his analysis

of the text, Crawford mentions that the Latin word for wind or breeze is spiritus, but

he omits an overt echo of another classic, M. R. James's ghost story, '"Oh Whistle,

And I'll Come To You, My Lad"' (1904).[105] In that narrative, of course, a repeated

'gust of wind' against the hapless Parkins' casement serves as an omen for the

professor's misfortunate after he has, twice, blown the fateful whistle.[106] As in

James's story, in which Parkins' colleague suggests that he accompany him on

holiday just to 'keep the ghosts off', there is a playful ironising in Jimmy's scolding

of Peter Priest that '[y]ou'll be seeing ghosts next if you aren't careful' (p. 40).[107]

Nevertheless, for a text that seems to prioritise adherence to a realist aesthetic,

Obsession also preserves a persistent fidelity to the tenets of the ghost story. This

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[104] Ibid, p. 171.
[105] Ibid, p. 173.
[106] M. R. James, '"Oh Whistle, And I'll Come To You, My Lad"', in *The Penguin Complete Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 75—91 (p. 81).
[107] Ibid, p. 76.

is demonstrated most obviously in the presentation of the adult Peter's grandmother, now deceased. The rationalist, psychological explanation for her appearances after death is that she is a manifestation of Peter's guilt. This interpretation renders her as purely imaginary and as perceived only by him. However, at various points the text does not preclude a supernatural explanation, inferring that the spectre is a real, physical presence. For example, the apparition leans into and spatters Peter's face with food: '[t]his close, and in daylight', the narrative insists, 'there was no doubting that she was real' (pp. 80—1). The grandmother is also seen by other people: a hostile client of Peter's, and by Steve, who thinks that he sees 'an old lady looking in through the glass' at her grandson in hospital (pp. 249). Nor, as Joshi points out, is she the only 'ghost' in the text.[108] In another deployment of the 'demonic child' trope, Jimmy's wife Tanya is lured to her fatal accident in The Grand by what she thinks is a child's voice. It is left ambiguous as to whether her last words, '[u]p the ladder' (p. 117), allude to a memory of the traumatic fall or something that she had perceived which induced trauma. Tanya and Jimmy's son, Russell, is almost lured into jumping overboard from a boat by what he perceives is a drowning baby calling his name. Hilda, the sister of Roger whom Peter has killed, comes to believe he has been telephoning her in a disguised voice. It is, again, open to conjecture whether this is in fact Peter masquerading as Roger, but, in the context of other unexplained or ambiguous events, a supernatural interpretation also becomes plausible. Finally, and most crucially, there is a multi-layered representation of Peter Priest himself. Crawford astutely connects the description of the sky as 'black glass that white fire kept cracking' (p. 33) in Campbell's novel to the 'sea of glass' in the Biblical Book

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[108] Joshi, Ramsey *Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 72.

of Revelation.[109] However, the text also invites a more explicitly generic

comparison. For Peter's shout of 'something, he didn't know what – a plea or a

curse – into the storm that was sweeping towards him' (p. 33), echoes Charles

Maturin's Gothic novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). The attendees at the

doomed Melmoth's final hours also cannot distinguish whether they hear 'the

shrieks of supplication, or the yell of blasphemy'.[110] As with Maturin's tragic villain,

the last scene of Peter's earthly life involves a dramatic, and ambivalent,

juxtaposition of land and sea. At the novel's climax, it is stated that Jimmy, the

rationalist, is left 'not knowing what Peter had met on the night of the storm, when

he finally stopped running' (p. 279). Contrary to Crawford's argument, there is thus

a 'mystery' here which is more than a 'delusional religion', and it is one that resists

formal closure.

To a greater degree than Campbell's other long fictions considered in this

chapter, *Obsession* reflects a tension between secular humanist and quasi-

religious belief systems. The text appears to align with Beville's concept of the

Gothic-postmodernist novel, in functioning 'to resurrect both the real and the

fictional in that sublime moment when binary ideologies are destabilised and we

are confronted with the unrepresentable'.[111] The novel ends not just on a note of

moral transcendence, as the various 'victories' of Angela and Barbara in *The

Nameless* and Diana in *The Hungry Moon* over the abject 'other' suggest, but on

one, via a flashback, of literal transfiguration or rapture. Peter 'never felt himself hit

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[109] Crawford's reference is to Revelation 15:2: 'And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.' Passage in King James Version of the Bible, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+15:2-4&version=KJV> [first accessed 10 October 2017].
[110] Charles Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, ed. by Douglas Grant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 541.
[111] Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism*, p. 30.

the rocks', the last sentence runs, 'for it seemed to him that the lightning reached

for him and lifted him up, towards the light beyond the storm' (p. 280). Peter's

psychological journey to this rapturous moment is prefigured in an earlier storm

scene, in which there is ambiguity as to whether he is struck by lightning. The

rational explication for what Peter undergoes in this primal scene, that is, that he

experiences symptoms induced by an earlier head injury which had been inflicted

by his grandmother's attackers, co-exists with portentous tenets of folklore and

mythology: the episode happens at a crossroads, an archetypal liminal space

between the natural and supernatural realms. Peter senses, with dread, 'as if he'd

called something that was rushing towards him, at his back, now in his brain' (p.

33). The language of powerlessness and invasion, in which 'the light seemed to be

in him as well as outside him' (p. 34), recalls the theologian Rudolph Otto's

description of 'the speechless humility' of a human subject, at the moment when it

is 'submerged and overwhelmed' by its encounter with the numinous, or 'that

which is a mystery inexpressible and above all creatures'.[112] As with Otto, the

'mystery' is simultaneously, and paradoxically, frightening and fascinating, an

experience of 'dread' and 'awe' which brings the subject into proximity with the

sublime.[113] Peter feels both helpless and as if he has been granted the gift of

insight and clarity by the experience:

> Bare-knuckled trees stepped forward, flattening. Everything had the sudden
>
> glassy clarity of a slide snapped into the holder of his eyes, and he couldn't
>
> close them, for the light was behind them too. It was lasting too long for

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[112] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 2nd edition, trans. by John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1958 [1923]), pp. 13, 10.
[113] Ibid, p. 16.

lightning, but he didn't care what it was; he welcomed it in a breathless,

terrified way – he could do nothing else. (p. 34)

Otto describes the 'magical' as 'nothing but a suppressed or dimmed form of the

numinous, a crude form of which great art purifies and ennobles'.[114] The

theologian's description can serve to articulate the struggle undergone by

characters in *Obsession* to explain their lives and relationships to forces perceived

as being outside themselves. These forces are but dimly comprehended - and

thus described as 'magic' - but are keenly felt as being more powerful than the

experiencing subject. The personal and humanist thus co-exist with a sense of the

cosmic and numinous. *Obsession* displays to the full Campbell's 'timid' insecurities

about the perception and experience of universals, and about the sense of self,

within a secular culture.

In his application of Otto's account of the 'non-rational' to define the

purpose of and ascribe an ontological structure to a range of supernatural fiction,

the critic S. L. Varnado cites Campbell as amongst the modern writers who have

successfully emulated Lovecraft in displaying a 'sophisticated employment of

techniques and themes developed by earlier masters of the genre'.[115] The swift,

almost abrupt conclusion of *Obsession*, as with *The Nameless* in particular, may

appear from one perspective to be artistically problematic, demonstrative of an

authorial pre-occupation with a formal convention of closure that is actually at

variance with the issues of irresolution and 'mess' addressed in the text. For

example, like Angela's moral volte face in *The Nameless*, Peter's rapid

progression from child kidnapper to a potential child murderer who suddenly

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[114] Ibid, p. 67.
[115] S. L. Varnado: *Haunted Presence: The Numinous in Gothic Fiction* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1987), p. 129.

repents, on the grounds that 'as soon as he'd seen the light come back into their eyes, he'd known that he wouldn't be capable of harming them' (p. 268), arguably stretches psychological plausibility.

From another perspective such a paradox is fully consistent, though, in the context of the strain of besieged but persistent humanism that permeates Campbell's works. His fictions display an acute sensitivity towards and mediate their vexed social and historical contexts. The ill-fated leader of Enoch's Army, a 'New Age' movement in Campbell's novel at the end of the 1980s, the afore-mentioned *Ancient Images*, articulates a markedly jaundiced, Baudrillardian perspective on the efficacy of artistic representation. On the subject of violence, Enoch complains that he and his followers have been scapegoated, 'made into fictions', and dismisses '[a]ll fiction' as 'an act of violence […] an act of revenge on the world by people who don't like it but haven't the strength to change it' (p. 113). Campbell's own fictions reflect a detailed awareness of the history of the Gothic mode. However, they also exhibit engagement with the profound formal and ethical challenges and contradictions that align with postmodernist literature. His works display a mistrust of metanarratives, and especially, as shown here, forms of religious dogma, which resonates fully with Campbell's agnostic and secular vision.

Like Peter Priest, its tragic victim-villain, *Obsession* is a text at the 'crossroads': structurally realist and mainstream, yet thematically Gothic and ideologically unresolved. It incarnates in fictional form what Hazleton describes as 'the creative value of doubt' and of 'mystery'.[116] In featuring, and eventually promoting to centre stage, the deconstructed psyche of an individual against what are perceived to be

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[116] Hazleton, *Agnostic*, p. 19.

supernatural forces, this hybrid text also represents a significant development, an aesthetic 'crossroads', in Campbell's writing. The ambivalent treatment of supernaturalism and portraiture of the lives of ordinary people in *Obsession* typifies a naturalistic, localised and rather British sense of understatement. Moreover, this novel exemplifies what was to be a consistent, and, as I demonstrate, increasingly central, preoccupation with the integrity and status of the haunted subject. Firstly however, I wish to consider in more detail Campbell's complex, distinctive and unique anatomisation of societal conventions and the relationships between these atomised, struggling selves in a community that is both secular and pathologised. The next chapter thus focuses upon representations of the anti-social phenomenon of violence itself, especially that perpetrated by the figure of the 'killer', and examines to what extent such representations signify the writer's alignment with the postmodern.

CHAPTER TWO: 'OF BONDS AND BEINGS': SOCIETY AND THE POSTMODERN SUBJECT IN CAMPBELL'S SERIAL KILLER NARRATIVES

1. Campbell's Sociopaths: A 'Therapeutic Culture' and Its Discontents

As I have argued, in addressing matters of spirituality, the novel *Obsession* displays the social realist and naturalistic tendencies within Campbell's fictions, even if it does not entirely eschew the possibility of supernatural agency at work. This chapter focuses on purely secular metanarratives as represented in three of Campbell's key non-supernatural novels appearing over three decades: *The Face That Must Die*, *The One Safe Place*, and *Secret Story*. *The Face That Must Die* and its successors discussed here are all narratives of violence. They signify another expression of the Gothic mode in featuring killers who operate, by contrast with Peter Priest, under unambiguously non-paranormal influence. Specifically, these texts reflect and transmute a specific historical manifestation of that mode: the serial killer. The Gothic had functioned, as Philip L. Simpson describes, as the 'earliest breeding ground' for the 'moral leprosy' of the repeat murderer narrative that has since attained an enduring popularity and relevance in Anglophone fiction, film and television.[1] Further, however, they represent a deconstruction of certain sociopolitical norms. According to Lyotard, in addition to totemic religious belief, society has also defined and maintained its 'competence' by a shared consensual narrative surrounding certain sociopolitical civic maxims, involving history, tradition, community and family.[2] In Campbell's iconoclastic vision, these

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[1] Philip L. Simpson, *Psycho Paths: Tracking the Serial Killer through Contemporary American Film and Fiction* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), p. 11.
[2] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 18

consensual understandings are subject to critique and subversion, inviting comparison with postmodern paradigms.

Campbell's notably melancholic anatomisation of society and of the psyche of the individuals who constitute it has a corollary in the analysis of a 'devitalised existence' given in Kristeva's *Black Sun* (1989), although, as a psychoanalyst, Kristeva resists a cultural interpretation or contextualisation for mental illness.[3] Kristeva writes of the experience of depression that:

> Absent from other people's meaning, alien, accidental with respect to naïve happiness, I owe a supreme metaphysical lucidity to my depression. On the frontiers of life and death, occasionally, I have the arrogant feeling of being witness to the meaningless of Being, of revealing the absurdity of bonds and beings.[4]

The reference to 'Being' is clearly Sartrean: Kristeva's depressive persona experiences a 'loss of being – and of Being' itself – and becomes 'a radical, sullen atheist'.[5] Such professed 'alienation' does more, though, than suggest psychological displacement of the individual. Lyotard maintains that 'no self is an island', even within the complex 'fabric of relativism' which characterises postmodernity, while the American psychologist Kenneth J. Gergen goes further, deeming postmodernism to be the product of 'an array of technologies' that has 'saturated us with the voices of others' and 'immersed us in an array of relationships' to an unprecedented degree.[6] Over the last half century there has

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[3] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 4.

[4] Ibid, p. 4.

[5] Ibid, p. 5, the reference being to Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of existentialism, as expounded in *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1943)..

[6] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 15; Kenneth J. Gergen, 'Identity Through the Ages', *US News and World Report*, 1 July 1991, p. 59, quoted in Robert M. Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture During the Reagan Years* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 49.

been a spiralling increase in the forms and sophistication of communication, and a commensurate expansion in diagnostic health services, including psychiatry. All these developments are symptomatic of what Robert M. Collins calls 'a therapeutic culture of self-regard'.[7]

Yet, while accepting that western culture is characterised by introversion and self-diagnostics, Kristeva's description implicitly suggests an estrangement from such 'voices of others' and 'relationships', and thus the vital guarantors of social cohesion. It conveys liminality and detachment from society, even a rejection of engagement that borders on, if not narcissism, then a belief in individual exceptionalism. Such conscious self-separation and self-elevation, where the subject is simultaneously beyond and above the 'absurdity' of social bonding with, and thus social obligation to, 'other people', can be interpreted as a form of antisocial behaviour that is, at best, passive-aggressive, and at worst destructive. As Baudrillard observes in *The Consumer Society*, there is a double bind in social relationships. The negative emotional experiences of '[f]atigue, depression, neurosis are', he maintains, 'always convertible into violence and vice versa'.[8] By 'violence', amongst a plethora of definitions, I broadly accept that given by Oxford Living Dictionaries as denoting individual or collective behaviours involving physical force that are intended to harm or kill living beings, although the facticity of mental as well as physical agency and suffering is vital.[9] However, whatever definition is employed, it is inescapable that predatory violence, both individual and social, is a central theme in Campbell's work.

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[7] Collins, *Transforming America*, p. 150.

[8] Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, trans. by George Ritzer (London: Sage, 1998 [1970]), p. 293.

[9] See <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/violence> [first accessed 1 August 2018].

In particular, the figure of 'the killer' recurs in Campbell's longer fictions, from his first novel, *The Doll Who Ate His Mother,* to, at least, 2014's *Think Yourself Lucky*. As expected, a sense of threat to the subject's physical and psychological wellbeing, to the point of inflicting death, permeates his supernatural writings. The perceived or actual capacity of paranormal forces or creatures, or of beings under their influence, human or otherwise, to inflict harm are integral to the conception, design and effectiveness of these narratives in the representation or evocation of fear - just as they had been to M. R. James, Lovecraft and other forebears in the Gothic whose influence Campbell has openly acknowledged. However, as has already been seen, *The Nameless*, *Obsession,* and most of the texts discussed in the remainder of this thesis, whether or not the tenets of supernaturalism are deployed, focus upon the deliberate terrorisation and even the wilful murder, or contemplation of murder, visited by humans upon other humans. Aside from the lauding of his short stories and the evocation of an urban milieu alluded to above, it is the understanding and portrayal of such abnormal psychology that has earned Campbell most critical recognition. Joshi, for example, notes how the author's numerous crime fictions 'probe diseased minds and mental illness with uncomfortable intensity'.[10] Commenting on contemporary trends in the mid-1980s, Campbell himself has declared an abiding interest in the link between crime and horror, 'terror and insanity', in 'psychological horror novels'.[11] According to Campbell, the sub-mode of 'psychological horror' intends to disturb. It shows an audience 'what it would otherwise find hard to bear', and to this purpose the writer admits to finding early inspiration in the 'recurring urban nightmare' presented in

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[10] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 12.
[11] Campbell, 'Contemporary Horror: A Mixed Bag', *Fantasy Review*, 8.6 (June 1985), repr. as 'The Crime of Horror' in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 24—8 (p. 24).

texts like Jim Thompson's *The Killer Inside Me* (1952).[12] It is highly indicative that the central character and antagonist in Thompson's novel is a multiple murderer, or *serial* killer.

Campbell's own fictions are distinguished by a consciousness of violence, and, repeatedly, the potency of the criminal 'other' that is the serial killer. There are conflicting opinions as to both the historical origin of this term and its precise definition. For convenience, I accept the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation's revised definition (1996) of serial killing as 'a series of two or more murders committed as separate events, usually but not always by one offender acting alone'.[13] What is beyond dispute is the impact of the serial killer upon the zeitgeist of western culture over the last four decades, as manifested in both news media coverage of real-life events and in popular forms of entertainment. Factually, despite the murderous activities of many pre-twentieth century historical figures such as Liu Pengli and Gilles De Rais, the serial killer has become, as Anthony King describes, a 'dominant cultural representation' since the late 1960s, in the wake of such criminological landmarks as the 'Moors Murderers' and Manson 'family' trials.[14] Amongst the substantial corpus of works that appeared contemporaneously with Campbell's development as a novelist, Colin Wilson and David Seaman's *The Serial Killers: A Study in the Psychology of Violence* (1991) typifies nonfictional discourses. Although tracing serial murder back to the nineteenth century H. H. Holmes and 'Jack the Ripper' cases, Wilson and

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[12] Ibid, pp. 25, 28.
[13] Robert K. Ressler, Ann W. Burgess and John E. Douglas, *Sexual Homicides: Patterns and Motives* (New York: Free Press, 1996), quoted in Sarah Hodgkinson, Hershel Prins and Joshua Stuart-Bennett, 'Monsters, Madmen… and Myths: A Critical Review of the Serial Killing Literature', *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 34 (2017): 282—89, (p. 283).
[14] Anthony King, 'Serial Killing and the Postmodern Self', *History of the Human Sciences*, 19.3 (2006): 109—125 (p. 113).

Seaman's study portrays the serial killer as a relatively recent and 'alarming' post-war phenomenon.[15] Noting a 'record number' of 23,000 murders in the United States in 1980, Wilson and Seaman describe that country as a 'fortress society'.[16] The authors label the 1970s as 'positively a vintage decade for serial killers', and warn that the exterior 'civilized world' is 'only just waking up to 'the threat' that they pose.[17] Aside from the morally problematic comparison of murderers like Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy to the pleasures of viticulture, Wilson and Seaman offer serious analysis, to which I shall return, but their text exemplifies and encapsulates an enduring dichotomy of simultaneous condemnation and fascination with what is proscribed. This is revealed more recently in the market for 'murderabilia' such as the *Serial Killer Calendar: Murder, Madness and Merchandise* website; the burgeoning 'true crime' publications industry, and television programmes such as the British documentary television series, *Born to Kill?* (TwoFour Productions, 2005—12).[18] The episodes of the latter devoted much of their running time to detailing the offender's crimes, with analysis by 'expert' professionals from law enforcement, criminology and psychiatry as the role of nurture or nature in their offences added as somewhat of an addendum. The commodification, fascination and familiarity associated with the serial killer has caused this entity to become what David Schmid describes as 'the exemplary modern celebrity'.[19]

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[15] Colin Wilson and David Seaman, *The Serial Killers: A Study in the Psychology of Violence* (London: BCA, 1991)*, p. 2.

[16] Ibid, p. 76.

[17] Ibid, pp. 109, 32.

[18] See, for example, the array of artistic products advertised at http://www.serialkillercalendar. com/> [first accessed 1 August 2018], including *Serial Killer Magazine*, the blurb for which claims, somewhat contradictorily, that the publication takes its subject 'very seriously' while also providing 'a unique collection of rare treats'.

[19] David Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 4.

With respect to fictional representations, the serial killer has also been ambiguously respected by Campbell's peers. These include Joyce Carol Oates, whose own serial killer novel *Zombie* appeared in 1995 and who has described the repeat murderer as an 'icon of popular culture'.[20] Wilful aesthetic transgression within a culture that is already prone to paranoia finds a natural channel of artistic expression in the Gothic, the mode that Botting defines pithily as 'a literature of excess'.[21] Conflation of the act of repeat killing with the figure of the lone 'psychopath', broadly defined as 'a mentally-ill or unstable person, especially [one] affected with anti-social personality disorder', affords a transmutation of the traditional, and usually male, Gothic villain into a demonised 'other' or 'monster'.[22] Despite conscientious medical distinction, there has been little attempt to differentiate between manifestations of mental illness, whether they take the forms of psychosis, schizophrenia or paranoia, in the transmedia narratives of fear that have permeated western culture. For example, Dr Chilton casually describes Hannibal Lecter as 'a monster, a pure psychopath' in Ted Tally's screenplay for *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Jonathan Demme's cinematic adaptation of Harris's 1988 novel.[23] *The Silence of the Lambs*, in both its literary and cinematic forms, is one of many now familiar texts alongside its prequel and sequels, Ellis's cause célèbre novel *American Psycho* (1991; filmed in 2000 by Mary Harron) and Jeff Lindsay's *Dexter* series (2004–15; adapted for television, 2006–13). Schmid

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[20] Joyce Carol Oates, 'Three American Gothics', in *Where I've Been and Where I'm Going: Essays, Reviews and Prose* (New York: Plume, 1999), pp. 232—43 (p. 233).

[21] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 3.

[22] Amongst many variants, I quote the definition given by Merriam-Webster Dictionaries: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/ dictionary/psychopath> [first accessed 1 August 2018]. Although superseded by antisocial personality disorder in medical literature and described by Hodgkinson et al as 'now a somewhat outdated and discredited psychiatric label' (p. 286), undifferentiated 'psychopathy' has featured prominently in critical discourses concerning literary and cinematic works.

[23] In Harris' novel, Chilton describes Lecter slightly less dramatically, as 'a pure sociopath' (London: Mandarin, 1991 [1988]), p. 10.

notes 'a cult around Hannibal Lecter' in particular, betokening an abiding

'fascination and admiration'.[24] In fact it is more accurate to describe Harris's

cultured and savage creation as a veritable cultural *industry*, with, to date, four

novels, five cinematic adaptations and an NBC television series (*Hannibal*, 2013–

15).

Amidst the plethora of cultural manifestations, two tendencies are

prominent and of relevance to an evaluation of Campbell's contribution to this

burgeoning field. One, as demonstrated by the 'Lecter' narratives, is an obvious

generic hybridity, a trend towards what Spooner describes as crime fictions

'becoming increasingly Gothicised in the 1980s and 1990s'.[25] This can be

discerned not only in Harris's marriage of Gothic tropes and the epistemological

police procedural, but in writings such as Patricia Cornwell's 'Kay Scarpetta'

(1990–present) and John Connolly's 'Charlie Parker' (1999–present) series, the

latter of which fuses neo-noir construction of the detective protagonist, complete

with 'hard-boiled' dialogue, and supernatural elements, exemplified by *The Black

Angel* (2005). The other, in both the primary and secondary literature, is an

overwhelming geographic bias: the serial killer, in terms of creative outputs and

critical analysis, has hitherto been predominantly a phenomenon of the *United

States*. For example, the Irish writer Connolly makes Parker a former New York

policeman, whose adventures take him across North America, the author variously

adapting New England idioms and Southern Gothic motifs as appropriate. The

voluminous scholarship on the serial killer, similarly, has shown a largely US-

centric bias. Academic analyses by Simpson, Schmid, Mark Seltzer and Richard

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[24] Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*, p. 6.
[25] Catherine Spooner, 'Gothic 1950 to the Present', in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, I, pp. 294—304 (p. 299).

Tithecott variously assume that serial murder has become defined as 'a particularly American crime'; descant upon the serial killer's relationship to 'America's wound culture', or, more bluntly, and simplistically, deem this figure as 'an American problem'.[26]

Whatever kind of 'problem' the serial killer is, popular culture has certainly transmuted this antisocial character into an aestheticized being. Lecter as aberrant psychiatrist, for example, is an inspired choice of villain for a so-called 'therapeutic culture'. 'I know he's a monster', the FBI director tells Clarice Starling in Harris's novel, *The Silence of the Lambs*: '[b]eyond that, nobody can say for sure'.[27] Literary scholar Peter Connelly and criminologists Sarah Hodgkinson, Hershel Prims and Joshua Stuart Bennett have noted the obscurantist and 'reductionist' consequences of such mythologizing.[28] For Connelly, whose own study ranges across fictional and nonfictional examples of the phenomenon, from Thomas De Quincy's account of the Ratcliffe highway murders (1811) through Shelley's *Frankenstein* to writings by real-life murderers Carl Panzram, Donald Gaskin and Ian Brady, portraying the serial killer aesthetically euphemises consequentiality – that is, the brutal reality of the act of and the victim's suffering involved in murder.[29] In his discussion of Lecter, Connelly differentiates between 'psychopathy', indicative of innate biological or genetic causality, and 'sociopathy', suggestive of environmental influences.[30] The two descriptors are often employed interchangeably, but the division is extremely pertinent in discussion of Campbell,

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[26] Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*, p. 25; Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Richard Tithecott, *Of Men and Monsters: Jeffrey Dahmer and the Construction of the Serial Killer* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), p. 178.
[27] Harris, *Silence of the Lambs,* p. 6.
[28] Hodgkinson, et al, 'Monsters', p. 283.
[29] Peter J. M. Connelly, 'The Representation of Serial Killers' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Stirling, 2010), p. 2.
[30] Ibid, p. 121.

whose fictional antagonists are explicitly sociopaths: human 'monsters' produced

by and reflecting their environments, which have manifested dysfunctionality in the

form of societal and familial abuse. For Hodgkinson, Prins and Stuart-Bennett,

mystification by the media, placing the serial killer outside 'our moral universe',

also serves, regrettably, to 'dehumanise' the perpetrator as 'evil', and distracts

from the increased understanding of such behaviours that could be yielded by a

socio-cultural approach.[31] Such sociological ideas as Hodgkinson and her

colleagues list – on inequality, the anonymity rendered by increased urbanisation,

the growth of mass media, rise of celebrity culture and a self-justifying means/end

rationality – are, again, highly relevant in the placement and evaluation of

Campbell's long fictions with respect to sociopolitical metanarratives.[32]

      The writings of Campbell that are discussed in this chapter arise from and

are informed by the cultural context outlined above. However, both singly and

cumulatively they constitute a radical departure from the dominant ideologies and

artistic practices that I have delineated. To begin with, they retain mostly British

settings, and they thus inherently reflect and mediate national as well as local

political and social mores. Further, the milieu of these texts is deliberately

deglamourized and prosaic, with socially unelevated characters. While maintaining

a connection to Gothic tradition, especially to that of the urban Gothic, these

fictions develop a progressively more overt alignment with literary postmodernism.

      As indicated, when it comes to primary sources, there is no shortage of

choice, given that this writer has returned to the subject of killing repeatedly in

fittingly 'serial' fashion. However, unlike, say, the suspense thrillers *The Last Voice*

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[31] Hodgkinson, et al, 'Monsters', pp. 286, 283.
[32] Ibid, p. 288.

They Hear (1998) and *Silent Children* (2000), *The Face That Must Die*, *The One Safe Place* and *Secret Story* are stylistically varied and innovative to a marked degree, as well as being, as I will show, seminal texts within Campbell's oeuvre. Each illuminate a different aspect of his singular vision. The first, Campbell's short, sophomore novel *The Face That Must Die*, establishes its author's prosaic, starkly anti-romantic tonality in its depiction of warped psychology. The killer here is the diametric opposite of the aristocratic and charismatic antihero, while the narrative parodies conventions of detective fictions. With *The One Safe Place*, perhaps Campbell's most atypical and ambitious novel, the scope is broadened to critique the origins of violence across Anglo-American culture; the culpability of mass media within it; and the genesis and construction of a young killer. Finally, having deglamourized what had become, as discussed, an aestheticized figure, Campbell simultaneously *re*constructs the serial killer, this time as author, and *de*constructs the repeat murderer narrative in the satirical novel *Secret Story*. A metatextual tendency that is present in *The One Safe Place*, despite it being a very different kind of narrative, comes to the fore in the last of these works. This harbingers an increasing preoccupation with creative aesthetics and philosophical issues concerning the subject and boundaries between fiction and reality. I analyse these texts with reference to two well-known novels, *The Silence of the Lambs* and *American Psycho*, as well as to the work of Baudrillard, Laing and van Vogt. It is an incidental benefit that such study implies that Campbell's less familiar fictions stand comparison to these two now iconic works. My primary intention is to demonstrate Campbell's critique of secular grand narratives and reframing of the parameters of the Gothic, and to explore and explicate his alignment to a postmodern position and vision.

2. An Encounter with 'Medusa': *The Face That Must Die*

It is no coincidence that the dark flowering of Campbell's imagination as a writer of substantive fictions about violence and its perpetrators coincides with the abandonment of post-war Keynesian consensual politics embodied in the long period of right-wing Conservative governments (1979—97) in Britain, led primarily by Margaret Thatcher. Although as a conservative politician, it must be caveated that Thatcher would probably not recognise the comparison, her argument that '[t]here is no such thing as society' has affinity with postmodernism in its explicit social atomisation, and thus dissolution of what had served as a prevailing metanarrative.[33] In the political sphere, the principles undermined by monetarism and other ideologies embraced and embodied by the Thatcher governments included certain hitherto widely accepted assumptions and expectations, including the aspirations for full employment; amelioration to extreme disparity of wealth; sufficient care for the socially and economically vulnerable, or even any concern for civic cohesion expressed in exercise of mutual respect between individuals and groups. According to Colin Hutchinson, much British fiction of the 1980s articulated a causal connection between the advent of Thatcherism and 'growing levels of [civic] hostility', but suggested that the values fostered were 'essentially alien imports', the 'alien' source of this usurpation being the United States.[34] Campbell's post-1979 novels reflect and engage with the fracturing, decay and radical reorientation of belief structures, but suggest that such tensions were transcultural, and, in a British context, indigenous and *already* present.

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[33] Douglas Keay, Interview with Margaret Thatcher for *Woman's Own*, 23 September, 1987, Thatcher Archive (THCR 5/2/262): COI transcript, p. 30, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689> [first accessed 1 August 2018].
[34] Hutchinson, *Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel*, p. 99.

The Face That Must Die is Campbell's first non-supernatural novel. Set in Liverpool, the narrative recounts how John Horridge, a paranoid schizophrenic living on invalidity benefit, conceives a delusional belief that an innocent man, Roy Craig, a homosexual, is responsible for several local murders of young men. The deluded Horridge, assuming a mission he imagines himself 'meant' (p. 30) to undertake, becomes an urban vigilante and a serial killer himself.[35] During the course of events, Horridge murders Craig and one of Roy's neighbours to cover his tracks, and crosses paths with and finally terrorises a young couple, Cathy and Peter Gardner, two other neighbours of Craig's, whom he thinks can implicate him. After a climactic struggle in a quarry, an ambiguous coda implies that Horridge has survived and pursued the Gardner's to their new home.

As in *Obsession*, there is refracted autobiographical influence at work. The heroine Cathy Gardner works in a public library, again reflecting Campbell's own biography, while her husband Peter, a mature hippy-ish student who experiments with drugs and researches in 'Conspiracy Theory and Paranoia' (p. 117), is also clearly intended to represent the author. As discussed in my introduction, metatextuality was already present in early short fictions like 'The Franklyn Paragraphs,' and was to attain greater prominence in later works. It is, however, Campbell's commentary on generic and social conventions that I wish to highlight here.

Although the novel is a third person narrative, the opening of *Face That Must Die* immediately assumes the embittered and obsessive perspective of Horridge. Like *The Killer Inside Me*, the narrative's protagonist is simultaneously its

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[35] Campbell, *The Face That Must Die* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1991 [1983]). All subsequent references are to this edition.

antagonist. 'Why should he deny himself?' Horridge asserts, seeking to prolong

the pleasure of savouring boiled sweets on a bus: [h]e hadn't had much in his life'

(p. 5). These terse sentences also establish much that distinguishes Campbell's

vision, not just in this narrative but its successors: the allusion to past abuse and to

implication of low social status (indicated here by reliance upon public transport);

the quotidian urban setting and solace in modest pleasures taken by the

economically compromised and socially isolated; and, above all, the notably bitter

tone. Campbell presents a literature of *resentment*. Notions of civic responsibility

and social bonding have broken down or are entirely absent. The urban landscape

across which Horridge limps is similarly bleak, conveying historical indifference to

liberal, nostalgic sensitivities. Description of the loss of his childhood playground

develops the distinctively sour and bleak imagery of the short story 'Concussion'

(discussed above) a decade earlier. Horridge wonders despairingly:

> What had they done to the end of the street? Beyond the crossroads there
>
> had been a similar terrace; he'd used to imagine he was gazing into a
>
> mirror. Now there was nothing but mud [...] Where four streets had stood,
>
> there was an enormous square of desolation, surrounded by derelict
>
> houses that looked shrunken by the waste. A sky the colour of watered milk
>
> glared through the latticework of their stripped roofs. Smoke wandered over
>
> the mud, where puddles shone in ruts left by bulldozers. (p. 65)

It is, at once, an anaemic vista of urban post-Blitz malaise, drudgery, conformity

and the new destruction of nostalgic sensibility wrought by forces – the

impersonal, philistine and insensitive 'they' – of modern mechanisation. The

blighted landscape seems to reflect in literal form what Jameson describes as the

'waning' of a 'sense of history' and 'resistance to globalist or totalising concepts,

like that of the mode of production itself', that are inherent in postmodernism and the advent of late capitalism.[36]

The autobiographical aspect of *Face That Must Die* has been well-delineated, not least by Campbell himself, who has admitted that Horridge is based partly upon his mother and his memories of her mental illness. This is signalled by the inclusion as preface of Campbell's memoir of life with his parents, as 'At the Back of My Mind: A Guided Tour', in the first full, 1983, edition of the novel.[37] Of more significance here is the date of the narrative's conception and its publishing history. Appearing in abridged form in 1979, Campbell's text predates the 'boom' in the literature of serial killing by almost a decade. Harris may be, as Simpson claims, the acclaimed 'creator of the serial killer formula' with the first Lecter narrative, *Red Dragon* (1981), but it is arguable that Campbell quietly owns the patent – that is, he might have done, if his long fictions were at all 'formulaic'.[38]

Moreover, it is revealing that Campbell's novel was rejected by several publishers because of its 'grim' subject matter.[39] It is suspected that this is not primarily because of the descriptions of violence, which, unlike, for example, *American Psycho,* a text which also had a complex publication history*,* are brief and elliptical. The convoluted journey of *Face That Must Die* rather stems from Campbell's lack of compromise: the novel's firmly parochial location, eschewing charm or glamour; the lack of a convincing romantic interest (the character of Peter Gardner, for example, is hardly a heroic presence), and, above all, its sheer intensity of description. Writing decades later, Joshi described *Face That Must Die*

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[36] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp. 387, 405.
[37] See, for example, Klaehn, 'Reaching for the Awesome and Numinous', p. 312; Campbell's essay-memoir subsequently appeared under title 'Near Madness' (as discussed above, Chapter One, footnote 38).
[38] Simpson, *Psycho Paths*, p. 70.
[39] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 110.

as still Campbell's 'most chilling treatment of paranoia' and 'the supreme epitome of urban horror'.[40] The novel's central character has been forced into liminal status, both physically and mentally. At one point, Horridge's mind is described as 'clenched', vice-like: 'it squeezed his thoughts into a small hard impregnable mass that felt as though it might explode and sear his head with pain' (p. 168). In the tradition of peculiarly claustrophobic urban Gothic familiar from cinematic texts like Roman Polanski's 'Apartment Trilogy' (1965—76) or David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1978), the protagonist experiences a sense of persecution in which '[e]verything seemed to be addressing him' (p. 29), and is haunted by hallucinations in which the explicable, the natural, and the imaginary are combined, like 'the voice of the plumbing, the incoherent voice of a madman locked in darkness'. [41] 'It wouldn't send him mad', Horridge as narrator insists, 'they needn't bother trying' (p. 168). Horridge's paranoia and sense of enclosure exemplify a feature of the subject's lack of 'ontological autonomy' described by Laing in observing schizophrenic patients.[42] According to Laing's existentialist paradigm, 'to the schizoid individual every pair of eyes is a Medusa's head which he feels has power to actually kill or deaden something precariously vital in him'.[43] Indeed, repeatedly, this early text seems to dramatise what Hutcheon describes as a paranoid 'terror' within postmodernity, 'that it is really someone else – rather than ourselves – who is plotting, ordering, [and] controlling our life for us'.[44] Horridge's personality and behaviour are aberrant, hellish, but he is also, in his psychotic delusions,

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[40] Ibid, p. 110; Joshi, *Unutterable Horror*, II, p. 665.
[41] Polanski's 'Trilogy' consists of *Repulsion* (1965), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968, based on the novel by Ira Levin, published the previous year), and *The Tenant* (1976, based on the 1964 novel *Le Locataire chimérique*, by Roland Topor).
[42] Laing, *Divided Self*, p. 56.
[43] Ibid, p. 76.
[44] Hutcheon, *Politics of Postmodernism,* p. 105.

experiencing a form of hell. Such a depiction of psychological disturbance, with its

potential to disturb the reader, partly accounts for the novel's (and, as discussed,

its author's) comparative lack of popular acclaim. The content, denoted by a

villainous lead, is far from what Punter describes as the final 'deliberate refutation

of the psychotic' typified, for example, in Harris's fusion of the Gothic and crime

narratives.[45] Simpson, in discussing serial killer fictions, admits that 'while an

ideology of conservatism underpins the challenge to epistemological limits, it is

impossible to suppress a text's own internal resistance to a unified authorial

voice'.[46] Simpson's observation is only partly applicable to Campbell's longer

fictions on violence, if at all, for they engage actively in ideological critique.

In one scene midway through *Face That Must Die*, Horridge, a frequent

patron at the library where Cathy works, scans the shelves and observes balefully:

> Fiction, fiction, fiction. Adventure and horror were mixed on the shelves, as
>
> though one might be a consequence of the other. Detective stories
>
> displayed fingerprints on their spines. He grunted low with mirth. That was
>
> the one way the police might have caught him… (p. 115)

In this passage, Campbell slyly encapsulates the novel's entire plot. In typically

protean, nonconformist fashion, *Face That Must Die* parodies and inverts the

conventions of detective fiction. As in *Obsession*, the metanarrative of law is

compromised, not this time through the stereotypical representation of its agents

but through metatextual misrecognition and re-appropriation. The ominously

named Fanny Adams, who is to become Horridge's second victim, mistakes him

for a private investigator, with a sweet tooth 'like one of the idiosyncrasies

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[45] Punter*, Literature of Terror*, II, p. 167.
[46] Simpson, *Psycho Paths*, p. 19.

novelists gave their detectives (p. 82).[47] Cathy, her professional life spent working in an environment of 'fictions', not only misrecognises Horridge as a policeman and incorporates him into a Holmesian-sounding fictional mystery of her own, 'the incident of the limping man' (p. 34), but assumes the rule of trailing detective herself, enjoying the 'slow pursuit' and likening it to a 'parody of a car chase' (p. 173). Her self-conscious investigation, ironically, brings Cathy to the killer's attention and increases her and her husband's endangerment. This is an atomised, compartmentalised environment in which individual lives are shown as isolated and vulnerable to predation. After Craig's murder, Cathy muses of homosexuals that '[s]ometimes their emotions must be too much for them. It's a different world' (p. 108). At the novel's conclusion, Fanny, the couple's other ill-fated neighbour, is remembered purely for the legacy of paintings she bequeaths, which 'might be an investment' (p. 230). The 'world' depicted by Campbell is one where the value of lives is interpreted reductively, in this case in terms of financial commodification.

Functionally, the greatest paradox is, of course, that Horridge *also* perceives himself as, and enacts the role of, detective in pursuit of 'a killer, perhaps a madman' (p. 46). As an adult, his psychology and murderous behaviour continue in violent forms the superstition held against 'everyone' (p. 43) for cat burglaries that he had been questioned about as a child. The thought patterns of Horridge's investigative 'research', characterised by wild displays of cognitive dissonance – for example, he concludes that Craig must be guilty because his name 'sounded too masculine, too strong, that betrayed it – that and the fact that

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[47] 'Fanny Adams' refers both to the notorious murder of an eight-year-old English girl (1867), and a bowdlerised colloquialism for knowing nothing – a perfect example of Campbell's double entendre and word play.

'Roy' was a little like "gay"' (pp. 37–8) – reveal the depth of his mental aberration. All exterior events, no matter how disparate and disconnected, are internalised and transformed to have a relevance to his own life. In one of the few references to then recent external political events (the 'Watergate' scandal, 1972—4), Horridge asserts:

> What was that about conspiracy?
>
> But the blurred voice [of the radio newsreader] had gone. Oh yes, he knew about conspiracies; the world was full of them. Even presidents could be involved in them, which showed that anyone might be. Sometimes the plotters were careless enough to be found out, but what of those who weren't? What about those homosexuals and their dupes, conspiring against him? (pp. 177—8)

Public and private realms of experience are conflated, with the reader left to recognise Horridge's status as unreliable narrator.

In itself, Horridge's paranoia aligns with the conventions of urban Gothic as seen and discussed in *The Nameless*. All Campbell's narratives about killing considered in this chapter refrain familiar tropes of the sub-mode, such as the vulnerability and abuse of children and of women; abduction and threat; confinement; terrorisation and the haunted site or 'Bad Place' archetype, transmuted to a contemporary setting. In contrast though to, for example, Lecter's physical alterity, denoted by characteristics like the character's polydactyly and vampire-like 'maroon eyes' behind which lie 'endless night', John Horridge is a study in bland anonymity.[48] Although he is described as looking like a 'weird character' (p. 34), Horridge is plain, 'fortyish, bland and scrubbed' (p. 78), and a

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[48] Harris, *Silence of the Lambs*, p. 155.

man about whose appearance the couple cannot agree a single feature at the novel's end (p. 232). The killer's home, a council estate named Cantril Farm, is similarly closed and homogenised, looking 'like its purpose, to make everyone the same' (p.41). Horridge's lack of physical distinction is consistent with the attribution of a non-metaphysical origin for negative and destructive forces defined as 'evil'. Prior to *Hannibal* (2000), which by delineating a history for Lecter pathologises the character, Harris's criminal psychiatrist rejects behaviourism and insists on his own 'evil' as causality. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, Lecter declares that '[n]othing happened to me, Officer Starling. I happened. You can't reduce me to a set of influences'.[49] However, Campbell's interpretation of the occurrence of wickedness aligns with the philosopher Alan Morton's view that 'a large proportion of evil in the world is the result of actions of people well within the range of normal activities of social life'.[50] Similarly, Wilson and Seaman's analysis of serial killing attributes a specifically sexual motivation for their antisocial behaviour, a point developed by Connelly in discussion of a 'sex/crime meme'.[51] However, the individual gratification represented by carnal desire is patently *not* a motivation for Horridge or Campbell's other killers. Their antisocial actions are determined by a perceived need to recover and exert power, and originate in the primal trauma of physical and emotional abuse at the hands of other, socialised beings. These are crimes generated by environment, by nurture rather than nature. Horridge's abused childhood, with memories of being dragged off a ladder for nocturnal enuresis and masturbation and of being blamed for his mother's early death by his drunken father, is alluded to repeatedly. His own acts of violence can be

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[49] Ibid, p. 20.
[50] Alan Morton, *On Evil* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 4.
[51] Wilson and Seaman, *Serial Killers*, p. 34; Connelly, 'Representation of Serial Killers', p. 6, in discussion of Wilson's own novel, *The Killer* (1970) .

interpreted as partly a retaliation for the memory of stripping of identity signified by his father's taunt that '[s]ometimes I wonder if he's my son. Maybe they gave us someone else's by mistake' (p. 66). Above all, as in Horridge's self-rebuke '[w]asn't he a man?' (p. 39) for not telephoning the police about the crimes that he imagines that Craig has committed, the character fears being emasculated and feminised – a fear that propels his pathological homophobia. Rather than endorsing the dominant culture's assumptions of some metaphysical or innate genetic cause for crime, then, the facticity of the killer's sociopathy and transgression to murder in Campbell's fictions serve to indict aspects of the host society's implicitly violent and regressive prevailing ideological system.

The portrayal of the killer and the society in which he operates in *Face That Must Die* and subsequent narratives represent what Jameson and any other left-wing or liberal commentator might lament as 'the utter eradication of what used to be called idealism'.[52] Horridge is portrayed as obsessively homophobic and, variously, anti-feminist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic and racist. From the jaundiced observation regarding 'students tripping on their drugs – sooner or later they'd trip themselves up' (p. 8) onwards, the expression of reactionary prejudices throughout is both explicit and relentless. Almost every thought presented, as when homosexuals are deemed as 'a cancer on the human race, perhaps even its source […] as closed as Jews, protecting one another from normal people' (p. 47), conveys an acid malevolence. Depiction of such civic hostility is a recurrent feature in Campbell's fictions - as shown with the 'Mrs Scraggs' character in *The Hungry Moon* discussed in my first chapter. Such a harsh social landscape demonstrates fidelity to the portrayal of 'a decay of the public realm' described by

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[52] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 387.

Hutchinson as typifying Anglo-American fictions under the prevailing neoliberalism of the late twentieth century – an ideological trend, indeed, that is still ascendant in the twenty-first, albeit under the guise of right-wing 'populism'.[53] Horridge, rigidly puritanical and thus the antithesis of the random sex killer, is described as 'hat[ing] people who corrupted the young' (p. 16). He incarnates an endlessly misanthropic reaction against the liberal social reforms regarding homosexuality, race relations, drug culture and feminism represented by the 1960s. For example, on hearing about the mugging of a pensioner by a gang of girls, he concludes that this is the inevitable consequence of 'women's liberation' (p. 23–4). The allusion to 'corruption' typifies continuing scatological obsession with pollutants like disease (cancer) and 'filth' (p. 25), and with making the world 'cleaner' (p. 180). As, thus, a *counter* 'counter-culture' figure, Horridge aligns with what Hutchinson describes as the political Right's re-evaluation and condemnation of that earlier decade, the 1960s, as being 'to blame for the damage done to social cohesion and to family values' – even though, politically, it is 'they', the political Right, as proponents and agents of free market capitalism and consumerism, who have actually been operating the 'bulldozers'.[54] The deliberate irony with respect to the extreme moral relativism dramatised in this text is that the 'traditional' moral and social values system which Horridge, the supreme 'Thatcherite', proceeds to promote with such messianic zeal, is undermined by its advocate's equally extreme antisocial personality and destructive behaviour.

Campbell, though, acknowledges the resilience of such belief systems through careful portrayal of a psyche as self-validating as it is warped and fragile.

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[53] Hutchinson, *Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel*, p. 40. On the twenty-first-century resurgence of right-wing populism, see also Arthur Goldwag, *The New Hate: A History of Fear and Loathing on the Populist Right* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012) and numerous other works.
[54] Hutchinson, *Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel*, p. 39.

Aside from his ambiguous fate, to the end, Horridge maintains a belief that his

actions are 'right and necessary' (p. 88), and that through committing his murders

he has 'conquered evil' (p. 165) and cleansed or 'exorcised' (p. 139) his world. In a

trait shared with both real and other fictional serial killers, and which is developed

in the later *Secret Story*, Horridge simultaneously both avidly consumes the press

coverage of acts that he has perpetrated and deplores seeing 'his exploit served

up as entertainment to the mob' (p. 112).[55] Significantly, in a public house, he

defends the activities of an apprehended murderer reported on television with a

tub-thumping claim that 'I'd call him a guardian of the law. […] Someone who

stands up for what he knows is right' (p. 180). I address the role of media in more

detail below, but Campbell's setting here is, I think, wryly deliberate: the British

urban pub is the kind of environment traditionally identified as both working class

and self-consciously masculine, in which such uncompromisingly retributive

positions on vigilantism and 'law and order' issues might be imagined as finding

favour.[56] As Connelly says of the real-life killer Gaskins, Horridge is an example of

a lone actor, 'behaving as if he is the member of a group and appealing to the

values which [he imagines] are held by the majority of members of society'.[57] In his

analysis of the serial killer's construction of a self-justifying narrative, Connelly

refers to van Vogt's American study from the 1950s, *A Report on the Violent Male*.

Van Vogt's research on the violent or so-called 'Right Man' is not based upon

marginalised, psychotic and fantasising subjects, although the descriptions of the

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[55] See for example the media-motivated behaviour of the real-life serial killer Dennis Rader or 'BTK' (b. 1945), and the character of Francis Dolarhyde in Harris's novel, *Red Dragon* (1981).
[56] Amongst the many fictional and critical treatments of aspects of British pub culture, see, for instance, Alan Sillitoe's novel, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), or Stephen Tomsen, 'A Top Night: Social Protest, Masculinity and the Culture of Drinking Violence', *British Journal of Criminology*, 37.1 (Winter 1997): 90—102.
[57] Connelly, 'Representation of Serial Killers', p. 158.

absent, emotionally detached or disciplinarian father 'who tried to enforce

manliness on the boy beyond his ability'; the pathological 'need to be right'; and

the symptom of 'feeling as if he is the person who has been put upon past all

endurance', are all certainly applicable to Horridge.[58] A critique of male

adversarialism, in which almost any of the case studies included in van Vogt's

report would not look incongruous, is one aspect of the anatomisation of society

given in Campbell's later, 'mainstream' novel, *The One Safe Place*. The social

structure portrayed within this text also aggressively asserts its functionality, but in

fact is shown to be deeply conflicted and dysfunctional.

3. The Breaking of 'Bonds': *The One Safe Place*

'Positioning the serial killer as gothic monster', Schmid asserts, 'represents our

attempt to salvage and locate a (national) community by defining what stands

outside that community'.[59] *Face That Must Die* is an intense and claustrophobic

chamber piece. The idea of a broader canvass of a vulnerable 'national'

community against which the proscribed, alien outsider is contrasted attains

significance with *The One Safe Place*. At one point in the narrative, the reader is

duly introduced to a police composite picture of a 'cartoon face for everyone to

hate on sight', looking 'like an outlaw trapped by a wanted poster in an Italian

western' (p. 63).[60] Yet, superficially, this thriller, one of the longest of his fictions,

presents a stark thematic anomaly within Campbell's corpus. As a text, it is not

immediately reconcilable to discussion of the novelist as a Gothic writer. Unlike

with *Face That Must Die,* there is also no single warped, machinating Gothic villain

[58] A. E. van Vogt, *A Report on the Violent Male* (London: Pauper's Press, 1992 [1956]), section 11.
[59] Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*, p. 7.
[60] Campbell, *The One Safe Place* (London: Headline Feature Publishing, 1995). All subsequent references are to this edition.

or 'monster' at work here. It does not even feature a serial killer, as that term has been defined. Nor, as what has been described as a 'mainstream novel', does it appear to be a text obviously aligned with the postmodern.[61]

Certainly, there are no supernatural elements. Set in Manchester, *One Safe Place* is a linear, third person narrative, although the focus and perspective alternates between characters. Its plot takes the form of a secular neo-Hegelian tragedy. An American family, the Travis's, relocate from Florida for a new beginning in Britain. Although foreign, familiarly for Campbell, they are both literate and literary: Susanne Travis has secured a lecturing post in film at a Manchester college; her husband, Don, works as a second hand and antiquarian bookseller, while their son, Marshall, is a sensitive and imaginative adolescent. Through a chance 'road rage' traffic encounter that Don experiences with Phil Fancy, a member of an ironically-named extended clan of local petty criminals, both families are drawn into a descending spiral of verbal and judicial conflict and violence, resulting in four deaths. The second half of the narrative focuses on the relationship between Marshall and Darren Fancy, Phil's vengeful teenage son, who has, unbeknown to Marshall, drugged him in a shopping mall café and abducted him.

One Safe Place is, in the broad sense defined by Dominic Head, a 'social novel' in that it is a work 'addressing contemporary social and political concerns, more or less explicitly'.[62] Campbell's text is deliberately topical. It is set in a city with a prominent gangland and drug culture; a metropolis whose chief police officer the decade before, the evangelical Christian James Anderton, had ordered

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[61] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 108.
[62] Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950—2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 2.

raids against vendors holding so-called 'video nasties' in the presage to the Video Recordings Act (1984). Although the tragedy occurred in Merseyside, the novel also evokes memories of the then recent abduction and murder of toddler James Bulger by two other young boys in 1993. In addition, *One Safe Place* fully realises the tendency, noted in *Obsession,* towards not just social realism but a stark anti-romantic naturalism in its observation of the phenomenological world and its depiction of interpersonal relations. The misanthropic tone of civic dissonance and hostility, familiar from *Face That Must Die*, is present throughout: even before the initial, fateful confrontation with Phil Fancy, Don is asked whether he is 'a Jew as well as a Yank' (p. 45) by an aggressive prospective client. Head, regrettably, but as I have implied above in discussion of critical recognition and canonicity not altogether surprisingly, omits both this text and its author from his own survey. Writing from a Gothic studies perspective, Joshi argues that Campbell's novel offers 'a magnificent etching of the troubled relationship between the middle and lower classes in England and its potential for hideous violence'.[63] I agree, to the extent that the social 'bonds' represented by class, family, heteronormative relationships and community, and their dissolution, treated with varying degrees of obliqueness in *Face That Must Die*, assume centrality here. Equally aptly, Joshi describes *One Safe Place* as examining the culture of a perpetual 'cycle of violence engendered by domestic abuse'.[64] However, Joshi rather understates, or occludes, the international, émigré element. For the novel's range is also more panoramic, critiquing perceptions of nationhood as well as social class – and, particularly, aspects of Anglo-American culture. Simultaneously, the narrative of

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[63] Joshi, *Unutterable Horror*, II, p. 705.
[64] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 106.

One Safe Place also tightens its focus to become a case study of 'corruption of the young' and the construction of a potential serial killer. It is thus a far more significant conduit of Campbell's vision than Joshi's evaluation of the novel as a straightforward if idiosyncratic suspense thriller would suggest.

Campbell himself has stated that *One Safe Place* 'becomes' a horror narrative.[65] It retains a fidelity to the 'mainstream' of realism while signifying the dialectic between literary modes that typifies a genuinely hybrid text. With their literate and media-aware characters, an element of metatextuality pervades all Campbell's narratives. Here, as with Cathy in *Face That Must Die*, the educated Travis family represent this analytical consciousness, but this knowledge does not help them. The betrayal of the expectation of a Holmesian denouement is even more overt than in the earlier novel. Don catches sight of himself holding a magnifying glass in a rear-view window and muses that it makes him 'resemble some eccentric sleuth in an English detective story (p. 40). However, he immediately encounters Phil, and is quickly made to realise that '[t]hey were in a different kind of movie now' (p. 50). Don's later death at the hands of Phil's relatives reiterates the scepticism towards the metanarrative of 'law and order' expressed in the epistemological form of detective fiction. It is also a shocking narrative development, in the manner of Robert Bloch's *Psycho* (1959, filmed by Hitchcock, 1960): the apparent lead character is eliminated, and the text thereafter is transformed into something else.

Given Campbell's self-description as a writer associated with horror, it is unsurprising that what little critical attention *One Safe Place* has received has

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[65] Campbell, 'Horror Fiction in the Mainstream', *Necrofile*, 12 (Spring 1994), repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 39—43 (p. 43).

sought to interpret it according to and accommodate it within parameters of that genre. As a scholar of weird fiction, Joshi claims that the novel is a 'mainstream' fiction, 'pure and simple' and that only the passages involving Marshall's drug induced hallucinations and abduction by Darren include 'an element of fantasy' or are 'remotely *outre*'.[66] These scenes, exemplified by Marshall's visions of the vagrant disintegrating into grey dust (p. 278), or of his own reflection in a telephone booth, his head substituted by that of a doll (p. 282) are certainly macabre and vivid. Yet aside from abduction and imprisonment being in themselves key tenets of the Gothic, Joshi surprisingly omits or does not elaborate on other Gothicised elements in the text. For example, in a prophetic dream before Don's death, Marshall brushes his father's scalp, 'only to notice that each movement of his brush enlarged a red stain that was pulsing through his father's hair' (p. 133). Moreover, the presentation of the Fancy's and their environment repeatedly employs modal imagery or suggests an affinity with it. Like Cantril Farm in *Face That Must Die*, the housing estate on which this family lives is portrayed as a dispiritingly homogeneous but threatening mass of uniformity, 'the colour of sodden sand' (p. 287). Marshall's acid trip renders what is, to him, an unfamiliar neighbourhood, as uncanny, the lair of non-human predators. The houses themselves assume an arachnid quality:

> When it leapt out of its crouch, glaring at him, he knew that any house he approached would do so. They were lying in wait for him – they were controlled by whatever lived at the centre of the overhead web, the thing which grew more aware of him each time he triggered a house. He saw the lines trembling, and knew it was coming for him. (pp. 350–1)

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[66] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 107, emphasis in original.

This language prefigures, in Gothicised form, his mother's negative impression of the 'ghetto architecture' and houses 'designed for secrecy or for caging their occupants', with 'upper windows reminding her too much of gun holes in a bunker' (p. 434). The Fancy's dwelling itself, with its dirty carpet 'grey with spilled ash and decorated with trampled cigarette-ends', and 'wallpaper blotched with blurred handprints, the smell of trapped, stale sweat and worse' (p. 437), incarnates the claustrophobic 'haunted house'. With respect to the house's inhabitants, Joshi does not include Campbell's explicit presentation of the grandfather as a grotesque, monstrous presence. The lengthy descriptions of this bedridden, desiccated but lecherous old man, a figure likened more than once to rotten 'perished whitish rubber' (p. 22), is intended to function purely as a source of horror, in the sense of evoking physiological revulsion. There is an implication of his being responsible for past familial sexual abuse - Phil taunts his father that '[w]e know all about your loving, you dirty old sod' (p. 25) - but in his withered dissolution he is finally 'just one more object' in this decayed, haunted environment (p. 401). Of greater centrality to the narrative, Darren, a boy of similar age to Marshall, with his prematurely aged 'thin pale face' (p. 435), serves as the other youth's Gothic double. He even consciously assumes the mantle of Gothic villain, feeling, in his pursuit of the other boy, 'like a camera that was being the eyes of a maniac stalking his prey' (p. 308).[67] Darren's eventual death releases him from a state analogous to a vampire's curse, and he assumes 'a little boy's face, slack as though asleep, the lips slightly parted', (p. 496). However, prior to this, like a vampiric 'other', he also partly prefigures the 'monster' that Marshall will become.

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[67] This is a clear reference to the 'killer's point of view' technique, familiar from horror films like *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978) from the 1970s onwards.

Even when working outside the Gothic mode, Campbell thus still employs its

tropes.

Middle class anxiety about the working class and comparison of the latter

and its environment to a threatening alterity can be interpreted as potentially

problematic for liberal humanism, a perspective that, itself, typically hails from the

educated, urban middle class. This uneasy dialectic continued over the next two

decades in so-called 'Broken Britain' narratives like James Watkins's film, *Eden

Lake* (2008).[68] Such narratives have attracted criticism for perceived negative

representation of the working class as a primitive, feral force.[69] Certainly, the

Fancy's and their associates live by and dispense verbal and physical violence

without hesitation. The adult males of the family are undifferentiated vehicles of

menace, as when Marshall, in court for Phil's trial, sees the doors burst open and

'the identikit face' apparently split into three as three of his relatives advance on

him 'blaz[ing] with sunlight' (p. 99), like a vision of some unholy trinity. Whether

turning to robbery or other crimes or, in the case of Darren's mother, prostitution,

this patriarchal and homophobic group share a brutal social Darwinist philosophy

combining aggression – they intimidate neighbours on their estate by the ready

threat and delivery of violence – and a besieged, self-pitying sense of grievance,

summarised in their associate Barry's assertion that '[t]he world's not fucking fair.

That's why anyone like us has to even it up for ourselves' (p. 455). This

aggression naturally correlates with van Vogt's concept of the 'Right Man'

discussed above. Darren's physiological display and mental internalisation of this

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[68] See, for example, BBC news: 'England riots: Broken society is top priority - Cameron', 15 August 2011, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/ news/uk-politics-14524834> [first accessed 10 July 2018]. The last line of dialogue in Watkins's film is 'We look after our own down here' – a sentiment which could have been lifted from Campbell's text.
[69] See, in particular, Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*, updated edn. (London: Verso, 2012), pp. 130—1.

belief system, 'growing hot with the promise of violence' (p. 160), and later

repressing how much his mother is psychologically hurting him 'until he could pass

it to someone else' (p. 425), echoes van Vogt's finding that 'if the person could

project destruction or inflict pain on another, it relieved him, as if some feverish

feeling was abated, temporarily'.[70] An inherited perception of victimisation, of being

at a disadvantage due to acutely perceived social class difference, propels

Darren's hostility, as in his taunting of Marshall: '[w]hat do you think I am, your

fucking servant? Got a butler at home to wipe your arse, have you?' (p. 367). Yet

despite the family being apparently 'too poor' (p. 315) to own a working telephone,

Darren's room is furnished with new commodities: a computer, hi-fi system,

television, video recorder and game console. This plenitude of goods amidst

poverty echoes Baudrillard's vision of consumerism, in which 'there is no such

thing as an affluent society'. According to the philosopher, there is instead

'structural excess and structural penury', a state of spiritual impoverishment 'in

which growth itself is a form of inequality': the more society's members possess,

the more they are aggrieved and seek more.[71] Even if it is stylistically not

consciously postmodernist, Campbell's humanist vision of sociopolitical life, as

articulated in *One Safe Place*, amounts to something more complex than

endorsement of one social class over another.

Campbell's text presents an interrogation of the metanarratives, specifically

the defence mechanisms, that Anglo-American culture has deployed in its struggle

to explain the phenomenon of societal violence, a phenomenon for which it is itself

at least partly responsible. The consumption of goods is equalled by saturation

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[70] Van Vogt, *Report on the Violent Male*, section 10.
[71] Baudrillard, *Consumer Society*, p. 53.

with the forms of mass media. In *One Safe Place*, this serves to bombard the subject, and reader, with reportage of a cacophony of atrocities for undifferentiated consumption. In subtle contrast to *Face That Must Die*, the media, as portrayed in this novel, serves not as an intensifier of the antagonist's self-justifying psychosis, blurring the public and private realms, but as social chorus, a background device, to delineate, in the manner of a paintbrush, a pathologized culture. The accretion of detail of crimes from newspaper, television and radio headlines is deliberately lurid and overwhelming, as in the newsreader listing reports of:

> a nine-year old Asian boy set on fire by three of his white schoolmates, and a policeman beaten up by the drivers of both cars involved in a traffic accident, and a gang who's gouged out a jeweller's eye to make him tell the combination of his safe, and a teenager who'd tried to drown his girlfriend's baby in a toilet. (p. 297).

The cumulative effect of this catalogue of atrocities is anaesthetising, the gravity and reality of each appalling crime losing its power to shock and engage. The undifferentiated description accords with Baudrillard's paradigm of a media-dominated world that neutralises the possibility of uniqueness through 'a multiple universe of mutually reinforcing and self-referential media which becomes so that events become each other's reciprocal contents', this constituting 'the totalitarian message of the consumer society'.[72] Such a jaundiced view may be 'playful nihilism' on the part of Baudrillard, in Hutchinson's words.[73] However, as presented in Campbell's fictions, authorial intent is not so much what Hutchinson describes as 'conciliation' motivated by nostalgia, or 'a desire for recuperation and

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[72] Jean Baudrillard, 'Mass Media Culture' [1970], in *Revenge of the Crystal: Selected Writings on the Modern Object and its Destiny, 1968—83*, ed. and trans. by Paul Foss and Julian Pefanis (London: Pluto Press, 1990), pp. 63—97 (p. 89).
[73] Hutchinson*, Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel*, p. 5.

for the association of value in the context of mutuality and social being', but rather a critical dissection.[74] The power of mass media in *One Safe Place* is shown to deprive the subject of differentiation between representation and reality. This is exemplified when Darren, on seeing a rabbit hit by a car, is 'less disturbed by the mess that had spilled out of it than by the colour of the innards, a duller red than they ever were in videos' (p. 18).

Still more invidiously, the lack of ethical hierarchies induced by consumerism and media domination facilitates cognitive and thus moral dissonance. This is displayed in the consistently contradictory behaviour of the Fancy family and their associates, people who hoard mostly stolen material goods but blame television for 'making kids want the earth' (p. 215), and who condemn homosexuality as an animalistic perversion whilst keeping bestiality videos in the house. It is also on display in the television debate on 'causes of violence' that Susanne participates in, and the commentary offered by authority figures. The former, overtly satirical, scene parodies the likes of the American *Jerry Springer Show* (1991—2018), an instance of what Schmid describes as the 'tabloidization' of newspapers and television.[75] *One Safe Place* portrays the media as reducing complex issues to glib soundbites for a mass audience, its confrontational style also, as one of Susanne's students observes, serving only to set people against each other and making them angry, 'which is on the way to violence' (p. 35). Campbell delivers a vivid character sketch of simultaneous righteous indignation, self-contradiction and lack of self-knowledge in the form of the student's mother, who threatens to split Susanne from 'gob to navel' unless she takes the 'violence'

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[74] Ibid, pp. 4, 33.
[75] Schmid, *Natural Born Celebrities*, p. 14. Campbell's novel is also prescient in anticipating the excesses of the British *Jeremy Kyle Show* (2005—19).

that has 'infected' her daughter back with her to America (p. 36). Nor does the author, predictably, accord greater insight to representatives of the 'educated' establishment. The manslaughter trial judge's assumption of the influence wrought by 'films and television' consciously evokes the conclusions expressed in the Bulger case about violent videos and tabloid newspapers.[76] 'His Honour' is, however, presented as an emotionless cipher, a droning recorder of a list of right-wing clichés such as 'the duty to rebuild the wall of law against the tide of violence…' (p. 240). Still more patently worthy of ridicule is the incongruous equivalence between Marshall's vandalism as being 'as unlawful' (p. 268) as the killing of his father drawn by the pompous headmaster, Harbottle. Far from being inspirational, schoolteachers in Campbell's fictions accord with Laing's tart observation that society 'educates children to lose themselves and to become absurd, and thus to be normal'.[77]

However, it is obviously another teacher, Susanne Travis, who articulates Campbell's own, pragmatic, views on 'causes of violence'; the culpability of pornography and media as contributors to it, and the flaws with censorship as a means of combatting it. As Susanne argues to her head of department, 'people consume it [violence] even if they think they don't and it's our job as educators to equip people to analyse' (p. 82). In his otherwise positive appraisal of *One Safe Place*, Joshi regrets an apparent narrative 'cop-out' on Campbell's part with respect to the disappearance from the plot of the police and university censure of Susanne for use of certain then-banned films.[78] Campbell himself, though, has

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[76] See, for example, 'Video Link to Bulger Murder Disputed', *Independent*, 29 November 1993, <www.independent.co.uk/news/video-link-to-bulger-murder-disputed-1506766.html> [first accessed 1 August 2018].

[77] Laing, *The Politics of the Family and Other Essays* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971), p. 24.

[78] Joshi*, Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 110.

maintained a liberal position on these issues, arguing not only that fiction

'expresses the emotions of its chosen audience rather than corrupting them', but

that censorship functions as 'a method used by a culture to deny what it has itself

produced'.[79] In this context, the novel's apparent irresolution becomes explicable

as deliberate strategy. Here it is the avoidance of 'easy' answers, whilst

concurrently critiquing the adversarialism represented by judiciary and media, with

their Manichean oppositions between guilt and innocence and good and evil, as

being harmful. The text's inconclusive treatment of censorship also suggests

affinity with literary postmodernism as I have described it, signalling resistance to

the notion of closure.

Campbell's conscious concern in *One Safe Place* is with the tragedy

presented by 'the contagion of violence' and with tracing the corruption of the

individual that it entails.[80] The aforementioned Gothic 'doubling' of the novel's two

juvenile leads is prefigured in the juxtaposition of violence in Florida and

Manchester which opens it. From the menacing opened beer can that 'hisse[s] like

a snake' (p. 3) and George S.'s railing against liberal 'campus bitches' who 'think

the army shouldn't have a say in things no more' (p. 4), it is apparent that violence

is not the prerogative of Mancunian housing estates, or some alien import, but is

indigenous to both cultures: there is no 'safe ground' (p. 11). The reference to

armed forces and Marshall's own name harbinger the text's analysis and

indictment of gun culture. In this novel, the gun is the symbol of violence and,

indirectly, and finally directly, the cause of three deaths. It is Don Travis' friend's

fateful advice to procure a weapon, on the basis that '[o]ver there, I expect you'd

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[79] Campbell, 'Beyond the Pale', *Fantasy Review*, August 1985, repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 57—62 (p. 57) ; 'In My Opinion: Psycho by Design', *Fear*, (31 July, 1991), repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 160—164 (p. 163).
[80] Campbell, 'Horror Fiction in the Mainstream', p. 43.

get yourself a gun to be on the safe side' (p. 121), which triggers his family's

catastrophe and the novel's chilling denouement concerning Marshall. The boy is

initially content with the power of verbal retort. Nonetheless, he is 'dismayed',

when he imagines punching another child, at '[t]he ease with which he could be

driven to pointless violence' (p. 126). Through their intensity and repetition, the

images of Marshall stamping his own father's head to pieces (pp. 338, 395),

although induced through hallucinogens, imply a developing 'infection' by his

environment. The prognosis is a fatal one, because in the epilogue Marshall is

finally shown to have been transformed into both a consumer of 'true crime'

literature and a gun advocate. His defiant challenge to anyone 'to try to fuck with

him' (p. 501) replicates exactly the language of the Fancy's. As such, it exemplifies

Baudillard's despairing conclusion regarding the amorality and destructiveness of

contemporary culture, that '[t]here is no longer such a thing as a strategy of Good

against Evil … only the pitting of Evil against Evil – a strategy of last resort'.[81] At

this point, Marshall is already the unrepentant killer of two people. The implications

are that he will account for many more, and that Susanne, having already lost her

husband, has now 'lost' her son: the familial 'bond' has finally been broken.

Ethically, this is undoubtedly a bleak conclusion. In one respect, the

corruption of Marshall Travis also represents an aesthetic diminution. As with the

brutal killing of his literary father, a man enthused by spotting a rare first edition of

a Lovecraft short story collection (p. 187), Marshall's aspirations 'to be both a

university librarian and a best-selling author' (p. 131) have also been kicked or

bludgeoned to death. He ends the novel aspiring to be a policeman – never, in

Campbell's imaginative universe, an unqualified positive. However, the death of

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[81] Baudrillard, *Transparency of Evil*, p. 104.

the artist depicted in *One Safe Place* co-exists with an almost playful consideration of the creative mechanics of murder, notably in the scene in which Darren's mother taunts her son as to what he will do with his captive. Marie Fancy asks:

> 'Kill him, you reckon? Or torture him first? Cut him open like in one of them videos and make him watch his guts fall out?'
>
> Darren felt apprehensive and queasily excited. 'Ooh God, mam…'
>
> His mother stood up to drag her chair away from the door.
>
> 'Here you go, get a spoon from the kitchen.'
>
> 'What for?'
>
> 'So you can poke one of his eyes out and feed it to him and he'll have to watch. Sound good?' (p. 361).

The passage is visceral, but also strikingly metatextual, in that a degree of media awareness and, tonally, humour and lack of profanity are shown, and these are at variance with both the setting and Marie's other utterances. It is clearly a vehicle for authorial critique of an audience's sensationalist appetites. As such, despite a dominant style inclined to social naturalism as well as realism, this text anticipates a concern with the aesthetics of creativity, an interest brought to fruition in the following decade with the more overtly postmodern longer fiction*, Secret Story*.

4. The Mask and the Mirror: *Secret Story*

Returning to a Merseyside setting, Campbell's later novel is, simultaneously, his most comprehensive and subversive portrait of an adult serial killer. *The Count of Eleven*, fourteen years earlier, had represented an innovation in detailing its central character's relationship with the forces of capitalism through introducing a serio-comic turn. However, that novel had retained a fidelity to conventions of both

social realism and dramatic structure, especially in its tragic conclusion. By contrast, *Secret Story* presents what Jeremy Dyson describes in his introduction as 'a vitriolic satire on the creative process itself' (p. vii).[82] Dyson's assessment is entirely accurate as far as it goes, but an incomplete assessment of this complex work and its significance within Campbell's overall treatment of postmodernism and vision of the Gothic.

Secret Story is an acutely metadiscursive text. Its narrative is concerned with both fictions and the people who create them. The novel presents psychological horror not through depiction of inner-city social marginalisation, as with John Horridge in *Face That Must Die*, or conflict in a council house, as in *One Safe Place*, but this time in the lower middle class setting of a 'sunny suburban lounge' (p. 356). The central character, Dudley Smith, like Campbell himself, and like the other male protagonists discussed in this chapter, is an only child. A civil servant working in a job centre, he writes unpublished short stories in his spare time concerning the exploits of a serial killer, and lives with his overprotective mother, Kathy. Kathy, a civil servant and aspiring author herself, who has sublimated her own creativity in over-devotion to her son, is divorced. Smith is also estranged, from his father, Monty, an insensitive, boorish poet and self-proclaimed 'Scouser that's proud of being Scouse' (p. 202), who abandoned the family when Dudley was thirteen. 'Your writing's never more important than your audience', Monty lectures his son, to which Dudley counters, '[p]erhaps we'll have to disagree about that' (p. 286). The novel's dramatic action is triggered by Smith winning a short story competition run by a local magazine to which Kathy has submitted one

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[82] Jeremy Dyson, 'Introduction', in Campbell, *Secret Story* (London: Drugstore Indian Press/PS Publishing, 2012 [2005]), pp. v—vii. The novel originally appeared as *Secret Stories* in 2005, but all subsequent references are to this edition.

of his efforts without Dudley's knowledge. Smith's macabre tale of a young woman being pushed onto a railway line by a serial murderer that he christens as 'Mr Killogram' attracts the attention of a local filmmaker, Vincent Davis. Smith, while relishing the recognition, feels pressured by the magazine and by Davis for more stories and ideas, and begins to feel the need to seek inspiration. He eventually fixates on a young female journalist from the magazine, Patricia Martingale, to aid in his 'research' (p. 238). It emerges that not only do all his stories feature the same killer, but they are based on each occasion upon real-life unsolved crimes, of which he is himself the perpetrator: Smith has written each narrative after the event. Unlike Horridge, he is already a serial killer. As with Panzram, although unwittingly, Smith's stories posthumously become his 'journal' or testament of murder.

Campbell's novel adheres to some degree of convention and antecedence within the Gothic with respect to portrayal of the serial killer; their behaviourism and the familial and societal abuse that have played a role as factors in their formation. Smith is not psychotic in the sense of being delusional, as Horridge in *Face That Must Die* clearly is. Nor does this text present a process of corruption of innocence, a moral descent that lends a degree of sympathy to Marshall Travis and, arguably, also to Darren Fancy, as the other juvenile lead in *One Safe Place*. Instead, Smith is an organised, sadistic and, to the end, unrepentant serial murderer. Laconic and calculating, almost every utterance he makes is a sly double entendre. 'I've got plenty of sense,' he tells an unsuspecting Patricia, menacingly: '[t]here's quite a few people who've found out how much. Maybe you ought to meet them' (p. 145). In contrast to Horridge, whose misanthropy against all forms of post-1960s liberalism crystallises around homophobia, arising from

what I have suggested is a fear of feminisation, Smith is a classic misogynist, railing and defining himself against women. He refrains the violent misogyny of the serial murderer noted by Simpson amongst others, a 'tradition' of deliberate, vicious verbal abuse (Smith repeatedly refers to women as 'bitches', as in 'it'll take more than a few bitches to stop me', p. 304); abduction and terrorisation. These female victims all suffer because, in Smith's view, they deserve to, or 'ask for' it' (p. 139). The trait of victimisation of women is familiar, as it has been shared by countless antagonists such as Harris's Jame Gumb in *The Silence of the Lambs* or Ellis's Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho,* and *Secret Story* deliberately evokes both these earlier texts.[83] Like Gumb, for whom the imprisoned women are merely 'material' for his project, the abducted and bound Patricia becomes a dehumanised 'package' who does not even 'sound like a person' (p. 281).[84] A previous victim whom Smith had flung to her death had become a broken 'insect' crawling on the road (p. 233). Bateman's isolation of his human prey, the dismissal that '[n]o-one cares. No-one will help you', is echoed in Smith's various taunts that Kathy has not asked about Patricia's wellbeing; that he has texted her parents lying that she has moved away to London, and that '[n]obody's going to hear you but me, however much noise you make' (p. 263).[85]

A cruel and meticulous murderer then, the influences governing Smith's violent sociopathy are carefully delineated, to a degree not seen in Campbell's earlier fictions. Firstly, Smith's disorder is accorded historical contextualisation through reference to formative time spent with his cousin, and, in a gesture of acknowledgement to conventions of classic Gothic villainy, his 'Catholic' (p. 201)

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[83] Simpson, *Psycho Paths*, p. 57.
[84] Harris, *Silence of the Lambs*, p. 196.
[85] Brett Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (London: Picador Press, 1991), p. 246.

uncle, a hare beater under whose influence the serial killer's familiar tendency to torture animals – because Dudley does not think that living things 'feel' (p. 41) – was nurtured. Smith's childhood friend Eamonn Moore also recalls the pair of them watching banned videos from his parent's film library, a pursuit in which young Dudley most enjoyed '[a]nything with people being tortured in' (p. 116). In oblique reference to the censorship issue raised in *One Safe Place*, Eamonn remarks that 'twenty years later the law says these films are all right for people to see after all' (p. 117), although it will be seen that Campbell's text does not ascribe causality for antisocial behaviours to the availability of violent material. Secondly, Smith as an adult has clearly been suppressed and infantilised by his mother. When they are not insinuating, Smith's utterances are laconic, bland, immature and petulant, as in his protest that '[i]t isn't fair. I won' (p. 133) on learning that his story has been pulled from the magazine to placate the family of a young woman the anniversary of whose death is imminent. Kathy has preserved her son, as in aspic, in one of her own amateur narratives, as an angelic being with 'a cherub's golden curls that were heavenly in their untidiness' and 'a face that would disown its innocent chubbiness too soon' (p. 217). Smith's reaction is a terse, worsening hostility and a projection of his resentment against his mother into undifferentiated misogyny – '[n]obody tells Mr Killogram what to do', he rails, 'especially not women' (p. 364) – that culminates in the accusation that she hasn't 'protected anything. [She has] destroyed everything [Smith] ever was' (p. 372). Most powerfully, and perhaps most subtly, the text conveys what Joshi describes as 'the slow-burning hell' of white-collar working life, with the hierarchy, boredom, loss of personal autonomy and abuse as being perceived as 'nothing but an office worker' (p. 75) that it

entails.[86] Despite the advent of ostensibly more centrist and liberal 'New Labour'

administrations (1997—2010), social relations at the level of normal day-to-day

experience are shown to be as discordant as in earlier texts. The malign civil

discordance represented in *One Safe Place* has not diminished: 'I wouldn't feel

superior to anyone if I were you', Dudley is rebuked by a client at one point, 'not

with your job' (p. 20). Both Smith and his mother are shown as subordinate to the

formal petty tyranny and timekeeping of their managers, 'Mrs Wimborne' and 'Mr

Stark' respectively. After a physical assault by a client's brother, widely witnessed,

but in which no bystander has come to his aid, Smith, like Darren Fancy in *One*

Safe Place, experiences 'an ache that felt as if it mightn't be assuaged until he

transferred it to someone else' (p. 57).

Environmental factors, not least this rigid social stratification and callous

indifference, are shown to be both psychologically and physically harmful, and, in

Smith's desire for 'transference', generative of violence. Dudley's frustration,

naturally, generates psychological withdrawal into a compensatory fantasy

existence, or what Wilson and Seaman describe with reference to serial killers as

'a dream of transcendence'.[87] 'Away from the office', it is narrated, 'he was himself'

(p. 23). Smith's fantasy life is, in both contemplation and execution, retaliatory. The

behaviour exhibited by Dudley accords with the 'alienation' noted by Wilson and

Seaman as being experienced by the working and lower middle classes in a

competitive and hierarchical culture under capitalism; his self-ascribed status as

an author expresses those classes' desperate 'longing to be important' [88]

Hodgkinson, Prins and Stuart-Bennett, writing nearly three decades later, reaffirm

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[86] Joshi, 'Ramsey Campbell: Alone with a Master', p. 126.
[87] Wilson and Seaman, *Serial Killers*, p. 158.
[88] Ibid, p. 58.

how serial murder is viewed by perpetrators as one method of 'transference', and of 'cheating the system' that has rendered them as underachievers.[89] Smith's proclivity for murder also places him as an actor in a cultural context in which, as Simpson argues, 'high art' and the notion of the elite artist have combined with romantic notions of self-assertion.[90] Smith constructs an alternate, highly egocentric reality, in which his mind 'seemed to own everything around him', his drab suburban environment confirms there is 'much more to him', and the world might have been 'a show' staged for his benefit (pp. 23—4). In the workplace, this narcissistic mental canvass enables Smith to indulge in contemplation of violently attacking and killing his manager, the overbearing Wimborne. Eventually, in a key scene, his superiority complex allows Dudley to stage a grandstanding departure in which he denounces Wimborne, asserting that she is:

> Dull. Unimaginative. Not just you, the whole boring lot of you. If you knew half of what I am, none of you would dare to talk to me the way you do. You ought to be proud if you're associated with me. People might even think that you were interesting. (p. 164)

The irony with Smith's egotistical allusion to 'half of what I am' is that *Secret Story* is Campbell's most detailed character study of a *non*-character. To a greater degree even than Horridge in *Face That Must Die*, the adult Smith is physically anonymous. He is barely ascribed any features, except as 'a figure in a grey suit, a visitor so non-descript as to be invisible' (p. 182). This is not just deliberate self-mystification in which Campbell's protagonist draws vicarious pleasure from the fact that 'nobody ever finds out' who his nameless killer alter ego is, 'or anything

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[89] Hodgkinson et al, 'Monsters', p. 288.
[90] Simpson, *Psycho Paths*, p. 22.

about him' (p. 62). In common with his literary forebears as serial killers, Dudley is also psychologically an incomplete person, striving for transformation and facing an existential crisis. Like Harris's Jame Gumb, who is described as 'not anything really, just a sort of total lack that he wants to fill, and so angry', Smith, and his similar 'baffled rage' (p. 39), are anatomised.[91] In this case, the agent of a particularly ruthless dissection is the separatist and confrontational comedienne, Shell Garridge, herself a victim of parental abuse. Her withering critique of Smith's fictional alter ego also summarises, all too accurately, Smith's real psychological history and present domestic life:

> I told you he'd be like they all are. Tortured animals as a kid. Scared of women. Hasn't got a girlfriend. Likely brought up by a single mum. I'm not dissing them, but she'd have kept telling him he was better than everyone else, treating him like every time he farted somebody should bottle it and sell it. Only deep down he'll know he's nothing and hate her for not stopping him knowing. (p. 66)

Unsurprisingly, this humiliation goads Dudley into furious denial, and Shell shortly thereafter becomes his only victim whose murder, staged as an accident, is depicted in the timeframe of the narrative. Her assessment is validated in Smith's complete identification with his own fictions and final protest that he has 'nothing to live for' (p. 373) after Kathy destroys them.

However, Garridge, fatally for her, does not recognise how dangerous Smith is until it is too late. Theirs is a culture in which insight coexists with ignorance. The kind of cognitive failure manifested by Shell is endemic in *Secret Story*. Most consistently, it is displayed in Kathy believing that she and Dudley are

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[91] Harris, *Silence of the Lambs*, p. 165.

'two of the healthiest people she knew' (p. 195) and her stubborn preservation, as the evidence of her son's criminality becomes inescapable, of a 'sense of domesticity' (p. 368) in attention to minor detail. His insensitive father, who wrongly attributes the deaths of Dudley and his mother to murder-suicide by the latter, also blames Kathy for not leaving Smith alone, 'so he could have got some help', and the magazine for not trying 'to get him to write something healthy' (p. 378—9). Monty is incapable of accepting his own failures as a parent. Deception and misrecognition, especially when deliberate, as manifested in Kathy's determined perseverance, or by victims, are key sources of irony and generators of suspense in serial killer narratives. As Ellis's first-person narrator argues in *American Psycho*: 'I mean, does anyone really see anyone? Does anyone really *see* anyone else? Did you see *me*? See?' [92] For the damaged sociopaths in Campbell's fictions, being observed – 'seen' – is a vital means of assurance, of both conferring and confirming their own identity. Just as Bateman pauses to note 'my reflection in a mirror hung on a wall – and smiling at how good I look', so Horridge 'share[s] a grin with himself in the disfigured mirror' (*Face That Must Die*, p. 41); Darren assumes a cinematic killer's point of view in *One Safe Place*; and Smith, assuming a persona to inveigle his way into Eamonn's house in an abortive attempt to murder his wife, is 'beguiled' by glimpsing his 'decisive progress' (p. 185) in a mirror.[93] He realises that he is 'acting out' a character created for him by the film director. This consciousness of how one may be perceived by others suggests affinity with what Slavoj Žižek describes as the function of the Other's 'gaze' as 'a kind of ontological guarantee' of the subject's own being.[94] Smith's awareness of

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[92] Ellis, *American Psycho*, p. 238, emphasis in original.
[93] Ibid, p. 11.
[94] Slavoj Žižek, 'Neighbors and Other Monsters: A plea for Ethical Violence', in *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), by Eric

film also reflects his, and his creator's, consciousness of visual media, especially -

in this instance, and both *One Safe Place* and *Secret Story* as texts - the

cinematic. In a cultural context, as opposed to a psychoanalytical one, Baudrillard

argues that the present 'simulacrum of violence', the distinguishing terror within

postmodernity, has emerged 'less from passion than from the screen: a violence in

the nature of the image'.[95] Žižek's specific argument refers to web-camera sites,

but my juxtaposition of discourses by both philosophers intends to highlight just

how important cognition and the role and forms of media are in Campbell's own

'vision'.

In an address to younger writers in his self-prescribed field of horror fictions,

Campbell has, in effect, cautioned against a repetitive endorsement of pre-existing

metanarratives under the guise of 'tradition'. On the continued tendency to include

representation of violence against women in fiction, he observes that, 'I think it's

time for some in the field to acknowledge that, when we come face to face with the

monster we may find ourselves looking at not a mask but a mirror'.[96] Campbell is

alluding, highly critically, to authors whom he perceives as either struggling with

aspects of reality that they cannot cope with, thus typically indulging in misogyny,

or with the problem of explaining the phenomenon of evil (and hence taking

recourse to simplistic explanation or excesses of representation). *Secret Story*,

with its protagonist who protests '[t]hey're stories. I write stories' (p. 127), echoing

the introductory line of Campbell's own website, articulates this critique as

narrative.[97] It satirises both Campbell's own industry and the appetites of a society

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Santner, Kenneth Reinhard and Slavoj Žižek, pp. 134—90 (p. 180). Žižek's use of upper case for
'Other' is preserved here as he consistently refers specifically to the Lacanian Other.
[95] Baudrillard, *Transparency of Evil*, p. 75.
[96] Campbell, 'To the Next Generation', p. 53.
[97] That is, as: 'I'm Ramsey Campbell. I write horror…' on the author's website,
<http://www.ramseycampbell.com/>. See also my introduction, footnote 17.

which consumes such narratives in a non-discriminatory manner, analogous to serial killers' use and consumption of their victims as objects, as commodities. In what can be construed as a sly commentary on his unimaginative peers by Campbell, Smith's dubious writing 'talent' (p. 29), misrecognised as signifying how 'ahead he was of the other children' (p. 27) by his doting mother, is undercut by the scathing dismissal of Dudley for being 'wholly devoid of imagination' (p. 125) by Fender, his former teacher, and the ease with which Patricia guesses the password to his computer files, despite Dudley's attempt at concealment: '[the keys] spelled "secret"; which seemed to confirm the lack of imagination that his old schoolmaster had found in him' (p. 359). Campbell occasionally takes recourse to comic symbolism, as exemplified by the brief encounter in a hotel between Kathy and Jim Cunningham, the sexually submissive role player whose job happens to involve the disposal of unsold, remaindered books. However, mostly the stratagem is one of irony or dark satire, as in the *Mersey Mouth* photographer posing Smith with a carving knife to make him 'look dangerous' (p. 47), or Dudley's murder of Garridge, which although partly an act of vengeance also provides creative inspiration, or 'ideas' (p. 82). In Smith's discussion on a ferry with a then unsuspecting Patricia on how to render Shell's seemingly accidental death by drowning 'more spectacular', Campbell, as he does in *One Safe Place*, clearly parodies the perceived excesses of the horror genre. Patricia, as in Marie's interview with Darren in the earlier novel, teasingly asks Dudley:

> 'What kind of spectacle are you thinking of? A girl's body being shredded under there? Her bones being ground up and splintered and broken? All her blood?'
>
> 'That sounds good'.

> Her attempt to shock him had merely succeeded in making Patricia feel
>
> uneasy about her own depths. (p. 243)

The effect here is both darkly comic, and, in its allusion to 'depths' and

connotations of potential for violence to condition and influence, disquieting. Like

Darren's comprehension of the death of the rabbit in *One Safe Place*,

spectatorship anaesthetises the brute reality of death through distancing and the

invocation of comparisons to a more vivid, more 'real', form of media

representation as substitute. The pursuit of a more satisfying 'real' becomes

paramount. As Dudley fantasises about slashing or mangling the throat of

Eamonn's wife, he is sure that 'the real thing would be different and worth

witnessing – worth at least a photograph, maybe more' (p. 183).

Desensitisation, and the sensation of dissatisfaction and quest for

satisfaction through consumption, in this case through staging the 'perfect murder',

are symptomatic of the levelling of forms of representation into a monotonous

landscape that characterises postmodernism. As Mark Currie argues, the cultural

context of the postmodern:

> is not one divided neatly between fictional texts and their critical readings,
>
> but a monistic world of representations in which the boundaries between art
>
> and life, language and metalanguage and fiction and criticism are under a
>
> philosophical attack.[98]

Secret Story tests a number of such 'boundaries'. The novel continues Campbell's

critique of the moral relativism denoted by respective media representation and

cultural reception of violence and serial killers. Smith and his crimes are finally

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[98] Mark Currie, Editor's introduction, in *Metafiction*, ed. by Mark Currie (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 1—18 (pp. 17—18).

both proscribed and lauded. 'I can't believe you want to be mixed up with a film about killing women for pleasure', the actor portraying Smith's Mr Killogram indicts the film crew, who protest that they 'need the work' (p. 306). However, in the chapter set in a restaurant with which the novel concludes, the reader learns that Smith has become the subject of a website, T-shirt and another proposed film, this time a documentary. His death, although unintentional, enacts literally Sartre's key argument, that '[i]f nothing compels me to save my life, nothing prevents me from precipitating myself into the abyss', and is an event which confers, in appearance, a degree of tragic grandeur to the narrative, however unwarranted.[99] Smith is described as a 'cultural icon' (p. 377) and a book tie-in is even proposed to Patricia, 'while he's hot' (p. 380), refraining, and thus validating, Smith's earlier self-description as 'the hottest thing around' (p. 75). In death, Smith achieves the elevated social status he has craved, and, as the 'Scouse Slayer' (p. 377), has ascended to become an urban legend like the 'Yorkshire Ripper'.[100]

Most profoundly, Campbell's text, through enactment, audits the division between reality and its representation. In the final scene, Vincent Davis, now an enthusiastic would-be maker of a documentary on Smith, calls for investigating 'other things as well, like how fiction and reality depend on each other' (p. 378). To a greater degree than the earlier texts discussed in this chapter, *Secret Story* represents an authorial self-consciousness as a notably self-consumptive narrative. The novel opens almost immediately with Smith's prizewinning, but here untitled, short story 'Night Trains Don't Take You Home'. In its inclusion of a self-referential allusion to its female victim 'reading the latest prizewinning best seller

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[99] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1995 [1943]), p. 32.
[100] The sobriquet accorded by the British tabloid press to serial killer Peter Sutcliffe (1946—2020).

by Dudley Smith' (p. 6), 'Night Trains' represents a compound instance of a metatextual text within a text. Smith's exploits are reconstructed in Davis's original film, the abortive making of which is depicted in the ensuing narrative. During the project, Smith subsumes his own identity into the depicted character of 'Mr Killogram' and elides 'Killogram' with Colin Holmes, the actor portraying him. 'As long as Mr Killogram was on his side', Smith thinks, 'Dudley wouldn't care, and whose part could his other self take except his?' (p. 302). The idea for a murder on a ship that had been formulated through his earlier real-life conversation with Patricia aboard the ferry is actualised. However, this scene of reconstruction becomes *de*construction when Smith's 'other self', Holmes, a collaborator with the friends of Smith's victim, Angela Manning, turns on him. Like his fictional namesake, Sherlock Holmes, the deliberately named Holmes, in yet another reference to detective narratives, has proved a master of disguise. Finally, virtually the last image in the novel is of a menacing youth wearing a 'Bring Back Mr Killogram' T-Shirt on a train planting his heels on the seat opposite, a refrain of the doomed Greta's encounter with the gang which opens 'Night Trains'. Patricia glimpses 'someone all too reminiscent of Dudley Smith spying from deep in his eyes' (p. 382). The text thus ends, like *One Safe Place*, with an inference of the circularity and perpetuation of violence.

In his study of the representation of serial killers, which cites Campbell as an authority on the literature but does not analyse his work, Connelly concludes that a 'pessimistic culture' that draws upon negative depictions of society 'will tend to produce misanthropic and life-devaluating narratives'.[101] In common with texts like *American Psycho*, Campbell's fictions depict misanthropy to an intense,

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[101] Connelly, 'Representation of Serial Killers', p. 192.

although unlike Ellis' text, not viscerally explicit, degree. However, they maintain a grimly determined liberal humanist perspective, in which the forces of violence that 'devalue' life are seen to have social rather than biological, genetic or metaphysical causality, and are thus amenable to analysis and, in theory, and however difficult, capable of future redress.

This chapter has focused on Campbell's analysis of a consumer culture's responsibility for violence and the inadequacy of grand narratives of sociopolitical maxims to either account for or ameliorate it. I have also addressed the transmutations which take place within his fictions of the Gothic, particularly the figure of the serial killer. Above all, I have sought to highlight an increasing tendency towards the self-reflective and metatextual, propensities which, although present in Campbell's writing from the beginning, were now assuming an increasing level of sophistication and alignment with the postmodern. The resistance to formal narrative closure signalled in the three texts discussed in this chapter, with Horridge left possibly still alive; Marshall Travis transformed into a killer; and Smith's poisonous, posthumous cultural 'legacy', both exemplify the theme of paranoia within Campbell's fiction and attest to the author's iconoclasticism. Patricia's insistence at the conclusion of *Secret Story* that '[t]his is our story now' (p. 382) expresses a desire to take control of the 'narrative' of her own life after her victimisation by Smith. Yet it also simultaneously both represents an address to the reader regarding choice of ethical codes and summarises an aesthetic challenge to authorship. It is Campbell's representation of authorship, the challenges to its creativity, and the control (or lack of it) wielded over 'reality', that I seek to address in the following chapter.

**CHAPTER THREE: WRITING WITH INTENSITY: AUTHOR, SUBJECT AND
ARTEFACT IN CAMPBELL'S NOVELLAS**

1. Constant Writers: Campbell and King

Campbell's fictions, from his emergence in the 1960s, have been infused with an
intense self-consciousness around notions of authorship; the craft involved in
writing, and the relationship between writers, their readers and environment. The
afore-mentioned concepts of the novel as being 'absolutely *dead,*' or the writer
who 'can't stop thinking' in the early short tale 'The Franklyn Paragraphs' are
echoed in much later and more expansive works, like *Secret Story.* 'You don't stop
being a writer', Kathy Smith tries to assure her doomed son at that novel's
dramatic climax (p. 378). After Dudley's death, his near-victim Patricia Martingale
dismisses the suggestion from her magazine's proprietor that she might author
any reconstruction of the serial killer's crimes: 'I don't want to write', Patricia
insists, 'I want to survive'. However, her interlocutor, the enthusiastic but
insensitive Walter, is undeterred, asking '[c]an't you do both? Mightn't one help the
other?' (p. 380). As I demonstrate, this is an indicative and revealing exchange.
For, in Campbell's imaginative universe, the act of writing and 'survival' are
entwined. The former attains the status of an ethical imperative. Self-expression
becomes an intense activity carried out under compulsion and over which the
subject has no choice. It defines one's existence or 'survival'.

This chapter largely focuses on Campbell's vision of the self-conscious
author, a metatextual figure described as postmodernist literature's 'stock
character' by Aleid Fokkema, the texts or 'artefacts' that the writer creates, and the

'survival' of both.[1] Further, it is suggested that the author functions as a surrogate for the contemporary subject, and that the writer's 'text' is a metaphor for the subject's endeavours to ascribe or create, mediate and control a valedictory reality and 'meaning' in relation to their own existence. I begin with a brief comparison and contrast between Campbell's portrayal of the author-protagonist and that offered by his contemporary King, for whom the theme of authorship has been equally important, and certainly more comprehensively and intensively studied. I then discuss Campbell's deliberate use of the novella, the specialised prose form in which he has explored ideas of authorship and textual self-inflection most thoroughly, before analysing two highly germane examples of this disciplined form of long fiction from his oeuvre. Published over a quarter of a century apart, the semi-autobiographical, if surreal, *Needing Ghosts,* and the late meditation on bibliophilia, *The Booking*, are multi-faceted and complex works. However, they foreground, respectively, distinct interpretations of the author and of literature. Moreover, taken together, these texts can be interpreted as reflecting a nuanced and developing interpretation of, and response to, postmodernism's central tenets: metatextuality, stylistic or narrative experimentation, the questioning of notions of authorial authority, literary canons, moral absolutes and 'truth', and a tendency towards final open-ended irresolution rather than resolution.

As already inferred, despite their significant differences, theorists and critics associated with postmodernism have identified and congregated around a number of traits. The area of convergence is an interrogation of previously accepted maxims or 'grand narratives', such as a teleological interpretation of

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[1] Aleid Fokkema, 'The Author: Postmodernism's Stock Character', in *The Author as Character: Representing Historical Characters in Western Literature*, ed. by Paul Fransen and Tons Hoensselaars (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1999), pp. 39—51 (p. 41).

history, and a concomitant challenge to the interpretation of narrative as being, to

appropriate Lyotard again, 'quintessential' as a form of 'customary knowledge'.[2]

Aesthetically, such a perspective critiques the worldview that had traditionally

conferred authority upon the author as creator, or which preserved hierarchical

differentiation between high and low cultural forms. Philosophically,

postmodernism undercuts the traditional status of literary fictions as affording what

Waugh describes as 'a useful model for learning about the construction of reality

itself' by virtue of a supposed affinity between the subject's mediation of reality

through language, and the presentation in fictional texts of 'worlds constructed

entirely of language'.[3] Instead of clearly delineated hierarchies, boundaries and

assurances relating to the subject's integrity and the reality that it inhabits, the

postmodernist paradigm substitutes fluidity and insecurity. A society characterised

by mass consumerism represents, according to Baudrillard, 'an age of radical

alienation'.[4] Jameson, equally pessimistic about the process of cultural

transformation, goes further, in arguing that 'the alienation of the subject is

displaced by the latter's fragmentation'.[5] The implications of such splintering are

far-reaching. Thus, for example, postmodernist literary works frequently exhibit

metatextuality, as Waugh describes, 'an extreme self-consciousness about

language, literary forms and the art of writing fictions', and an inflective tendency in

which 'the 'conventions of realism' are 'laid bare'.[6] In respect to the traditional

authority of authorship prescribed by realism, the omniscient narrator conflicts with

and is supplanted by the unstable and unreliable narrator. This reflects the

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[2] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 17.
[3] Waugh, *Metafiction,* p. 3.
[4] Baudrillard, *Consumer Society*, p. 191.
[5] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 14.
[6] Waugh, *Metafiction,* pp. 3, 18.

subject's dual, paradoxical existence under postmodernism. The subject becomes

what Hutcheon deems as both 'a coherent, unified whole and a contradictory

dispersed multiplicity'.[7] Moral objectivity or 'truth' in the midst of this fragmentation

becomes opaque and elusive. Instead, as Hutcheon puts it, the subject and, by

extension, the reader, face 'a questioning of what is real, and how one can know

it'.[8] Nor do postmodernist texts end neatly with the panacea of formal resolution of

the ideological and other contradictions featured within. Instead, such narratives

are, as Laura E. Savu describes, 'suspicious of closure, unity and absolutes'.[9] It is

in articulating and displaying such ambiguity and irresolution that Campbell's

nuanced fictions align as directly with postmodern paradigms as the works of King,

but with a less informal or populist and more distinctively paranoid voice.

As noted, the Academy has had a burgeoning, if belated, interest in King in

comparison to Campbell. This scholarship extended to the application of

postmodernist concepts as early as Jesse Norman's 1997 article on *Pet Sematary*

(1983).[10] More recently, Clotilde Landais, for example, analyses a metatextual

'reflection on the artistic identity of the writer and of writing' in two of King's other

fictions, *The Dark Half* (1989) and the novella *Secret Window, Secret Garden*

(1990), in her own interpretation of King as a postmodernist writer.[11] On

Campbell's part, a detailed historical knowledge of the horror genre, especially in

its American incarnations from Poe and Lovecraft to Klein and Ligotti, renders

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[7] Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 175.
[8] Ibid, p. 223.
[9] Laura E. Savu*, Postmortem Postmodernists: The Afterlife of the Narrator in Recent Narrative* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), p. 16.
[10] Jesse Nash, 'Postmodern Gothic: Stephen King's *Pet Sematary'*, *Journal of Popular Culture*, (Spring 1997): 30.4: 151—60.
[11] Landais, *Stephen King*, p. 93. Studies like Maroš Buday's 'Demystification of Stephen King's Fiction in the Context of Postmodernism' (Presov: Vydavatelstvo Presovskej Univerzity, 2016), continue the trend.

inevitable some consciousness of, and engagement with, the most commercially-successful peer in his own field. Even Campbell's *The One Safe Place*, stylistically a naturalistic work, and one, as discussed, seemingly at some distance from the horror genre and Gothic mode (let alone the 'high' postmodernism of authors like Pynchon), contains a playful reference to Marshall Travers 'reading a book which Stephen King had been unable to put down' (p. 87). Some comparison of Campbell with King is, therefore, both overdue and rewarding. For the outputs of both writers present a wealth of material on authorship and audience in both fictional and paratextual form.

The recurrence of the author as protagonist or as significant character in King's literary corpus, from *'Salem's Lot* (1975) to, at least, the crime novel *Finders Keepers* (2015), the plot of which features the murder of a reclusive writer, has been studied extensively.[12] Moreover, an identifiable subsequence of his texts, including *Misery* (1987), *The Dark Half*, *Secret Window* and *Lisey's Story* (2006) are more overtly autobiographical, engaging explicitly with various aspects of the literary profession, including pseudonomy, anxiety over plagiarism and authorial legacy. While Campbell, as noted, is a prolific commentator and essay writer, King has also produced at least two substantial non-fictional disquisitions: *Danse Macabre*, on the history and conventions of the horror genre, and the practical 'tool kit' manifesto, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (2001).[13] Therefore the practice of writing, as John Sears notes, is not just King's vocation but a central theme in that author's own imaginative vision.[14] In totality, King's output has been even more

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[12] Examination of this theme is central to Sears' study, *Stephen King's Gothic*. See also Amy J. Palko, 'Charting Habitus: Stephen King, the Author Protagonist and the Field of Literary Production' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Stirling, 2009).

[13] Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (London: Hodder, 2012), p. 119 passim.

[14] Sears, *Stephen King's Gothic*, p. 8.

prodigious than Campbell's, so spatial constraints must inevitably dictate a similarly selective citation of examples.[15] I have, therefore, largely restricted discussion here to these two substantive non-fictions and to the novel *Misery*. This 1987 novel is still probably King's most notably self-referential literary work. The text constitutes, as Punter describes, 'a Gothic labyrinth of writers and readers', and it is one which has the vexed minotaur figure of the author at its nexus.[16]

Even a cursory comparison of Campbell with King discloses some obvious similarities on the theme of authorship. This affinity can itself be interpreted as a response to, and even a degree of, self-assertion against the disappearance of the viability of the 'Great Writer' under postmodernity once described by Jameson.[17] For example, both King and Campbell endorse implicitly the Romantic concept of artistic inspiration and the autonomy of creativity. King maintains a 'basic belief' regarding the composition of stories that 'they pretty much make themselves'.[18] Paul Sheldon, the protagonist who serves as King's alter ego in *Misery*, maintains that '[w]hen I start a book I always *think* I know how things will turn out, but I never actually end one that way'.[19] Such faith in the mystery of the creative impulse is echoed frequently in Campbell's discussion of his own working practices. Always intuitive and instinctive, he prefers to 'let them [fictions] develop their own energy and direction'.[20] Thus, for instance, the short story 'Concussion' was 'more important to write than to understand', and the novel, *The Nameless,* 'pretty well

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[15] To illustrate, by 2020 King had produced some sixty-three long fictions, ten collections and five books of non-fiction, as well as being involved in various other enterprises, including the libretto for a musical (*Ghost Brothers of Darkland County*, 2013).
[16] Punter, *Literature of Terror*, II, p. 164.
[17] Jameson*, Postmodernism*, p. 307.
[18] King, *On Writing*, p. 188.
[19] Stephen King, *Misery* (London: Hodder, 2011 [1987]), p. 306, emphasis in original.
[20] Dziemianowicz, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell', p. 18.

composed itself'.[21] With respect to *Needing Ghosts*, Campbell disclosed in a contemporary interview that the experience of authoring this text was 'more like dreaming itself onto the page than anything I'd ever written', and his decision was to simply 'carry on letting it be strange and see where it went'.[22] The writer's view of this particular work has remained notably consistent over the decades, as he admitted to me in 2019 that it was dictated to him by his 'subconscious'.[23] In keeping with the notion of professional and authorial integrity, both King and Campbell also espouse fidelity to 'truth'. King, in *On Writing*, alludes to 'the unspoken contract that exists between writer and reader – you promise to express the truth of how people act and talk through the medium of a made-up story'.[24] Campbell has similarly asserted that 'I persist in committing myself to the principle that the purpose of writing is to tell the truth'.[25] At root, both writers are seeking to validate what they do, creating fictions, and ascribing value to those creations – especially generic fictions – against their perceived detractors. As Undercliffe in Campbell's 'The Franklyn Paragraphs' remarks of one such, 'I could tell he looked upon all fiction as the poor relation of non-fiction, like all academic librarians – so much for our writing' (p. 50).

However, there remain important artistic and philosophical differences between King and Campbell. Firstly, there is divergence on the matter of identification with and unqualified support for 'our writing'. For example, although in its self-referential complexity King's novel *Misery* may appear to propose and constitute an elevation of literary status for horror fictions, its diegesis, as

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[21] Campbell, 'Introduction: So Far', *Alone with the Horrors,* p. 14; Dziemianowicz, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell', p. 16. See also my introduction, footnote 58.
[22] Dziemianowicz, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell', p. 21.
[23] Keith M C O'Sullivan, email correspondence with author, 12 April 2019.
[24] King, *On Writing*, p. 219.
[25] Campbell, 'Horror Fiction and the Mainstream', p. 39.

suggested in Sheldon's vexations over the 'degenerate' art of popular fiction, is more ambiguous and revealing.[26] Clearly, both here and in *The Dark Half*, the plot of which (in a poignant instance of art anticipating life by two decades) involves a former National Book Award nominee, the text is also articulating authorial concern with status, and thus with attaining the respect of mainstream critics. The accusation of being 'degenerate' obviously rankles with an authorial consciousness focused upon, if not obsessed with, the divide between genre and literary fiction. This is no more vividly demonstrated than when Sheldon admits that dismissal of his work as 'popular' 'hurt him quite badly': '[i]t didn't jibe with his self-image as a serious writer who was only churning out these shitty romances in order to subsidise his (flourish of trumpets please!) REAL WORK'.[27] There is an obvious critique of a perceived cultural elitism at work here. However, this critique is itself undercut by the self-contradictory inflection of creative self-loathing, not least in the context that this, the novel within the novel that Sheldon is being forced to write, and *Misery* are themselves by implication 'shitty' horror fictions. In her innovative analysis of King as a writer of popular fiction outside the familiar horror or Gothic modalities, Amy J. Palko, employing the concept of habitus drawn from Pierre Bourdieu, seeks to 'release' the writer from 'the confines of the horror genre', portraying him instead as engaged with 'exploring and questioning the cultural forces and processes that give rise to such designations as 'popular' or 'literary' writing in the first place'.[28] The contrast with Campbell's self-positioning as a horror writer could hardly be more marked. Valuable as Palko's thesis is, the implication of imprisonment given by her references to confinement and release

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[26] King, *Misery*, p. 272.
[27] Ibid, p. 314.
[28] Palko, 'Charting Habitus', p. 6.

seems at odds with such comfortable self-description. Nor, I argue, does

Campbell's overt embrace of categorisation as a horror author preclude his work

from being of relevance in the kind of debates raised by Palko. For his part,

Campbell repeatedly and vigorously defends the value of imaginative literature in

his own narratives. As a video shop proprietor in *Needing Ghosts* asserts, albeit

defensively, there is '[n]othing in here to be ashamed of. Stories, that's all they are'

(p. 29).[29] Further, while placing himself squarely within the 'confines' of and

defending horror fiction - 'our writing' - Campbell has expressed the desire to

expand its parameters. He professes to stand 'for broadening the genre, not

narrowing it.'[30] The sheer diversity of Campbell's own output, while never

abandoning the generic label of 'horror', testifies to this ambition.

The second area of difference between Campbell and King arises from this

very desire for, and spirit of, experimentation. In *Danse Macabre*, the American

author elevates the primacy of the 'made-up story' above all else. King argues

that:

> My own belief about fiction, long and deeply held, is that story *must* be
>
> paramount over all other considerations in fiction; that story *defines* fiction,
>
> and that all other considerations – theme, mood, tone, symbol, style, even
>
> characterisation - are expendable.[31]

On Writing refrains this mantra, with the insistence that 'good' writing 'always

begins with story and progresses to theme'.[32] Annie Wilkes, the antagonist and,

among several guises, the reader-surrogate in *Misery*, expresses distaste for

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[29] Campbell, *Needing Ghosts* (London: Century, 1990). All subsequent references are to this edition.
[30] Campbell, 'Dig Us No Grave', p. 32.
[31] King, *Danse Macabre*, p. 346, emphasis in original.
[32] King, *On Writing*, p. 247.

narratives that are 'hard to follow' and which 'keep you yo-yoing back and forth in time', and her creator's strong opposition to the experimental in media res technique is also expressed in paratextual writings.[33] In contrast, Campbell's afore-mentioned formative admiration for the cinematic auteur Resnais has led King's British contemporary to follow a less formally conservative and more innovative pathway. It is a minor irony in comparing the two, given the disparity in the number of adaptations into other media of the writers' works, that Campbell in his fictions displays a filmic sensibility which equals King's. In a 1994 article, 'Horror Fiction and the Mainstream', Campbell discloses that:

> the film-maker whose influence most shaped my prose was Alain Resnais, with *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and especially *Last Year in Marienbad*. […] I found the instant flashbacks and other narrative dislocations of these films profoundly disturbing and exciting. […] I've been trying to achieve similar effects in prose for as long as I've sounded like myself.[34]

This influence is manifested in the prominence within Campbell's fictions of those 'characteristics' or 'effects' which King would deem to be of secondary importance, such as mood or style, and, above all, with the ambiguity signified by this 'dislocation' - including irresolution at the closure of the narrative. With Campbell, and this is as applicable to his long fictions as to his short stories, it is often the protagonists' situation and the experience of their journey, rather than the 'story' and the final destination, which attain greater significance.

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[33] King, *Misery*, p. 26; *On Writing*, p. 269. The notion of Wilkes as surrogate for the reader is one returned to immediately below. As noted by Palko and others, the character also functions as both critic and editor.

[34] Campbell, 'Horror Fiction and the Mainstream', p. 43. On the influence of Resnais, see also Campbell, 'My Roots Exhumed', p. 5 (alluded to in my introduction, footnote 34).

Moreover, it is ambivalence, especially moral relativism, and the absence of a simple Manichean opposition between good and evil, that characterises the most profound contrast between the two writers. Despite an aforementioned desire for critical recognition, King has also described himself as a producer of 'plain fiction for plain folks'.[35] The self-deprecation belies an acute and commercially canny awareness of readership, and a perceived need for both accessibility and for giving this envisaged readership what it wants. Implicit in this self-description is thus a belief in a final unambivalence with respect to fundamental moral clarity – the reader may be 'challenged', but not so much as to invalidate a text's marketability - and formal closure: King is, fundamentally, a populist *par excellence*. For example, the novel *Misery*, King has argued, is about 'the redemptive power of writing'.[36] There is no question in its dramatic composition about whom the reader is meant to sympathise with. The relationship between Sheldon and his nemesis, Annie Wilkes, is complex, but it is finally unambiguous. Wilkes represents a demonised, arguably over-heated, composite of the Victorian 'Constant Reader', an 'Angel of Death' and – in a sign of the author simultaneously deploying whilst seeking to critique several generic tropes at once - 'graven images worshipped by superstitious African tribes in the novels of H. Rider Haggard, and stories, and doom'.[37] A mass murderer whose victims include babies, it is imperative that the 'dangerously crazy' Wilkes dies, not just for Sheldon's survival, but for the satisfaction of King's anticipated reader.[38] Despite a false coda involving a cat and a sofa, she is duly eliminated, as are George Stark, the antagonist in *The Dark Half*, or the finally murderous Morton Rainey in *Secret*

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[35] King, Afterword to *Different Seasons* (London: Hodder, 2012 [1982]), pp. 669—79 (p. 676).
[36] King, *On Writing*, p. 195.
[37] King, *Misery*, pp. 71, 19, 8.
[38] Ibid, p. 10.

Window. The appearance of resolution and closure is all-important in these narratives. By comparison, there are more victims than villains, and no easy 'answers', in Campbell's imaginative universe. Joshi, with King's fictions in mind, rightly praises Campbell for rarely taking recourse to such simple 'moral fantasy' in his own fictions, on the grounds that he 'is far too aware of the triumph of evil in the real world, or rather that good and evil are merely fronts of perspective' found in any individual or society.[39] Vitally, Campbell's works seek not to 'redeem', but, in contrast to King, to discomfort. Campbell has admitted to hoping 'that they will disturb the reader and make them look again at things they may have taken for granted', and 'engage with reality in some way'.[40]

Pre-eminent amongst the victims in Campbell's vision is the figure of the bibliophile: his fictions are populated by characters who write or who depend upon books for their survival. Campbell has described writing as 'a compulsion' and has even likened the activity to substance abuse.[41] In a typically confessional 1995 essay, he argues:

> [l]et me hazard the theory that creativity is or can be a form of addiction, to the emotional highs and imaginative pleasures it brings. The perhaps inevitable obverse or side effects are depression of comparable intensity. […] Depression is apparently the price I pay for having developed a gift to the point that it gives me my greatest pleasure. Sometimes that compensation can seem only just enough.[42]

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[39] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 69.
[40] Interview in Kermode, 'Radical, Political and Ethical Implications', pp. 33, 34.
[41] Best, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell'.
[42] Campbell, 'Writing and Depression', *Necrofile* 15, (Winter 1995), repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 336—40 (p. 337).

The allusion to a form of mental illness reinforces the impression of a sour tone, demarcated by paranoia and obsession, as seen above with *The Face That Must Die* and other texts. It is a tonality that is largely absent in King's 'plain', deliberately accessible writing, but which is pervasive in Campbell's. Another of King's author-protagonists, Thad Beaumont in *The Dark Half*, conscious that he has materialised a monstrous alter-ego in the form of the murderous Stark, defends himself on the grounds that he 'had only wanted to find a way to write another good story, because doing that made him happy'.[43] By contrast, contentment of any kind is in short supply in Campbell's fictions, in which characters act, more often than not, under 'compulsion'. Moreover, as will be seen, the validity and morality of their actions are open to question. Transposed explicitly to the bibliophile protagonist, the creative manifestation of this 'compulsion' in Campbell's vision are obsessive, haunted and paranoid figures, unreliable narrators seemingly traversing across or entrapped within a bleak and threatening landscape. None embody these qualities more vividly than the protagonists of Campbell's novellas, *Needing Ghosts* and *The Booking*. The next section outlines the theoretical and comparative status of both in the context of Campbell's other fictions, and analyses his approach to the novella. Campbell's use of this medium, a form of intermediate length between the short story and the novel, is itself highly deliberate, and deserves a degree of attention that it has not hitherto received.[44]

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[43] Stephen King, *The Dark Half* (London: Hodder, 1989), p. 394.

[44] There is a surprising dearth of general criticism on the novella compared to the short story and the novel forms, but see, for example, George Fetherling, 'Briefly: The Case for the Novella', *Seven Oaks: A Magazine of Politics, Culture & Resistance*, 22 January 2006, <https://archive.li/20120912031610/http://www.evenoaksmag.com/commentary/94_comm1.html> [first accessed 1 June 2019].

2. Campbell's Oneiric Texts and the Novella Form

Needing Ghosts and *The Booking* cover some familiar urban Gothic terrain. As discussed above, Campbell's metropolitan settings are distinctively bleak. They typically recount the experience of an individual consciousness, an experience that has the quality of a dystopian nightmare. Like the ill-fated Gregor Samsa in Franz Kafka's novella *The Metamorphosis* (1915), *Needing Ghosts* opens with its hero waking alone and vulnerable in the dark. Simon Mottershead lacks 'sense of his body', is surrounded by 'hints of shapes' and fancies that he hears voices whispering (p. 9). Both *Needing Ghosts* and *The Booking* appear to equate commercial development with the encroachment upon, and decay of, pre-existing civic structures and values. The library in *Needing Ghosts* is encased in a shopping mall 'through an arch of massive concrete blocks reminiscent of the entrance to an ancient tomb' (p. 28). On a similarly elegiac note, the bookshop setting of Campbell's later text is located on 'the nearest street the precinct hadn't encompassed or destroyed yet', one that has been seemingly 'abandoned by the new development and by humanity itself' (p. 12).[45] As James Goho argues, with reference to Campbell's short stories, the author 'animates the city as a modern Gothic space'.[46] The reference to entombment in *Needing Ghosts* echoes Baudrillard's description of the 'cemetery' function of postmodern urbanity, settlements that are now 'ghost towns, cities of death'.[47]

This affinity demonstrates how Campbell's fictions appear to adhere to the invidious vision of human autonomy that characterise a certain trend in

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[45] Campbell, *The Booking* (Portland, OR: Dark Regions Press, 2016). All subsequent references are to this edition.
[46] James Goho, 'An Archaeology of Urban Dread: The Short Fiction of Ramsey Campbell', in *Ramsey Campbell: Critical Essays on the Modern Master of Horror*, pp. 55—89 (p. 60).
[47] Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death,* trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Thousand Oaks, 1993 [1976]), p. 127.

postmodernist thought. Indeed, such Baudrillardian concepts as the simulacra and the hyperreal themselves suggest human immersion and 'entombment'. As with Kirk Morris in the much earlier narrative 'Concussion', the protagonists of *Needing Ghosts* and *The Booking* encounter challenges both to their sense of self, and to any sense of social bearing that would enable them to maintain control over the reality they inhabit. To some theorists, the consequences for the subject of lack of any jurisdiction over its experienced spatial and temporal spheres are acutely invidious. For example, Jameson's argument on the lack of free will of the postmodern self, if applied to the author as protagonist, would inhibit their potentiality. His reasoning infers creative incoherence, if not impotence:

> If indeed the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold, to organise its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but "heaps of fragments" and in practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory.[48]

Such 'cultural productions' would also, according to this deeply pessimistic paradigm, be necessarily non-polemical and ambivalent, because '[t]he indignant moral denunciation of the other becomes unavailable'.[49]

Applying such concepts to an interpretation of Campbell, it is apparent that his work dramatises the threat to the humanist perception of a coherent, autonomous and controlling self. This is particularly the case with Campbell's oneiric fictions, a significant sub-grouping within his corpus, to which both *Needing*

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[48] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 25.
[49] Ibid, p. 46.

Ghosts and *The Booking* belong. Dreams and their relationship with the reality of the conscious, 'real' world are a topic to which Campbell has returned repeatedly throughout his career. For instance, the ensemble novel *Incarnate* from 1983 proposes and elucidates the predatory nature of dreams. This 'dream world', one character insists, is 'alive', a sentient force of malevolence that 'wants to feed on what we call reality, feed on it so it can take its place'.[50] *Incarnate*, one of Campbell's longest fictions, is, like *The Nameless*, a fascinating if occasionally artistically and intellectually opaque melange of ideas, not all of them, as Joshi notes, fully formed.[51] By contrast, in referring to Campbell's short stories in *Demons by Daylight,* for example, Joshi singles out for praise the writer's representation, via 'an intense almost stream of consciousness' technique, of a given protagonist's 'mental state as he or she becomes insidiously enmeshed in the bizarre'.[52] There is a comparability of scale between the short story's focus upon the individual and the description of the novella given in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms,* as a work 'usually concentrating on a single event or chain of events, with a surprising turning point': both tend to economy.[53] Joe Fassler describes the latter form as 'a narrative of middle length, that can be read as a single setting'.[54] The evocation of an image of domestic comfort here, akin to a long M. R. James ghost story, does not, admittedly, suggest an immediate affinity between the novella, which emerged in Europe as a predominantly realist mode of narrative in the late eighteenth century, and the disorientation and

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[50] Campbell*, Incarnate* (London: Macdonald & Co., 1990 [1983]), p. 427. The theme is developed rather more succinctly in a later novel, *The Grin of The Dark* (2007), discussed in Chapter Four.
[51] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 84.
[52] Ibid, p. 109.
[53] Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 254.
[54] Joe Fassler, 'The Return of the Novella, the Original #Longread', *The Atlantic*, 24 April, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/04/the-return-of-the-novella-the-original-longread/256290/> [first accessed 1 June 2019].

challenges posed by postmodernism. Nevertheless, I wish to take up and engage with Ian McEwan's similar claim that the brevity of the novella appeals to readers because 'you can hold the whole thing structurally in your mind at once'.[55] With respect to Campbell's oneiric fictions, the novella form, by virtue of its aforementioned inherent focus on a single character and condensed time frame, allows for expansion beyond the constraints of the short story, but it also affords a tighter and more coherent forum for analysis of portrayal of the subject and its relationship with extratextual reality. Further, the kind of representation lauded by Joshi in Campbell's short stories, that is of the isolated and paranoid psyche amidst condensed temporal and spatial terms of reference, is even more effectively developed aesthetically in Campbell's use of the longer form. It is the *challenge* to notions of structure and control, to 'holding the whole thing in your mind at once', that confer upon these narratives their power and philosophical richness.

Needing Ghosts was Campbell's first substantial novella. It remained his only such text for over two decades, but it was followed over thirty years later by three others in relatively quick succession: *The Last Revelation of Gla'aki* (2013) and *The Pretence* (2016), as well as the same year's *The Booking*.[56] In one respect, Campbell's use of the form accords with established generic tradition set by texts like Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and, within weird fiction, Blackwood's *The Willows* (1907) or Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936). As indicated, Campbell's entries in the field, at least in the case of *The Booking* or *Needing Ghosts*, appear to exemplify the urban Gothic, replete

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[55] Anonymous, 'Ian McEwan Claims the Novella is Better Than the Novel', *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October, 2012, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/9608935/Ian-McEwan-claims-the-novella-is-better-than-the-novel.htm> [first accessed 1 June 2019].
[56] There are aesthetic reasons for this, alluded to below.

with that sub-mode's presentation of paranoia and decay. Yet Campbell's readiness to use the novella format also constitutes another important contrast to King, whose own oeuvre contains a number of works like *IT* (1986), running to over a thousand pages, that dwarf *Incarnate* in length. King, to 2020, had produced only three standalone novellas in his career to date, *Cycle of the Werewolf* (1983), *Gwendy's Button Box* (co-written with Richard Chizmar, 2017), and *Elevation* (2018), but ten collections of fictions of varying sub-novel length.[57] He has memorably described the novella as 'a really terrible place, an anomaly-ridden literary banana republic'.[58] King's tone here is typically hyperbolic and humorous, but the approach to the form shown is soberly utilitarian, driven by concern about 'genre markets'.[59] For example, in his foreword to *Four Past Midnight* (1990), King states baldly that one raison d'être for his previous anthology *Different Seasons* (1982) was that it contained stories 'which were too long to be published as short stories and just a little too short to be books on their own'.[60] In contrast to this largely pragmatic, even prosaic, approach to the production of novellas, Campbell has more specific aesthetic intentions in utilising this format. In an interview given in 2016, he states that a publisher:

> approached me to contribute to his ongoing series of novellas of
> psychological horror, and *The Booking* was the result […] developing a
> couple of ideas that had been waiting for the impetus. The crucial point
> about novellas for me [is that] I'll only write one if I feel that the form is best

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[57] Certain works, for example *The Body*, which first appeared in *Different Seasons,* have, of course, been published individually since, often as a 'tie-in' to cinematic adaptations of which *Stand by Me* (Rob Reiner, 1986) is an example.
[58] King, Afterword to *Different Seasons*, p. 673.
[59] Ibid, p. 674.
[60] King, Foreword to *Four Past Midnight* (London: Hodder, 1990), pp. 1—7 (p. 5).

suited to the idea. That is to say, it mustn't be an extended short story, nor

yet a condensed novel.[61]

In the case of both *Needing Ghosts* and *The Booking,* this deliberation is borne out

by the notable and highly stylised illustrations, by Jamil Akib and Santiago Caruso

respectively, accompanying the first editions of both texts. Akib's cartoonish and

grotesque caricatures of human figures for *Needing Ghosts*, complete with long

legs and bug eyes, viewed from below, serve to intensify the text's Kafkaesque

atmosphere of distortion, nightmare, paranoia and persecution. The presence of

his and of Caruso's contrastingly more ethereal cobweb and spiral-themed artwork

for *The Booking*, reflecting the seeming 'enmeshment' of that novella's protagonist

in a 'bizarre' netherworld, contributes to the impression of these texts as being

carefully produced for and marketed at a niche base of readers.[62]

However, beyond the packaging of his work, the recurrence of 'intensity' as

an adjective in relation to Campbell is striking, both in what little criticism has been

thus far undertaken of his fictions to date and in the writer's paratextual material.

Expressing strong opposition to what he sees as a tendency towards evocation of

the historical past in supernatural tales by writers like Susan Hill, Campbell has

declared that:

> For me at least, nostalgia muffles the effect of any good ghost story:
>
> I don't want to feel comfortably distant from the supernatural experience he
>
> [the writer] seeks to communicate, I want the experience to be

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[61] Best, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell'.

[62] For example, *The Booking* was the third in a series of psychological horror long fictions for Dark Regions Press's Black Labyrinth Imprint series, all intended to be illustrated by Caruso. Fassler (in 'The Return of the Novella') also notes a revival outside the horror genre in Melville House Publishing's *Art of the Novella* (founded 2002) and *Contemporary Art of the Novella* (2006) series. King's works have also, although infrequently, featured illustrations, for instance Bernie Wrightson's for *Cycle of the Werewolf*.

communicated as intensely as possible. […] The same is true for the horror

story, a genre recurrently overtaken by nostalgia. [63]

In contrast to the conservative Hill, Campbell thus usually displays a propensity for

contemporary settings for his fictions. Simultaneously, Campbell's admission that

he is an intuitive and instinctive writer who is striving to achieve certain 'intense'

psychological effects in this way has led commentators like Lane and Goho to

describe his work as being somewhat *a*political as a consequence. Writing of

Campbell's novels in the early 1990s, Lane notes that their 'essential concerns

become personal responsibility and the integrity of the self in different times' and

that a political focus is 'less visible'.[64] According to Goho, Campbell 'does not or

tries not to write about society'.[65] Whether one defines Campbell's work as

postmodernist or not, and Hutcheon, for one, defines such fictions as being

'resolutely historical and inescapably political', even cursory analysis of a socially

aware text like *The One Safe Place* makes obvious that these readings of

Campbell's vision are, or were to become very quickly with hindsight (Lane's

article dates from 1993), incomplete and therefore unsatisfactory.[66] I agree that

artistic and philosophical concerns, having in fact been present from the beginning

of Campbell's career, progressively attain more prominence in his fictions.

Nevertheless, this study has so far demonstrated that Campbell's work is also

engaged in sociopolitical critique, albeit often obliquely. Despite a focus upon

psychological interiority, and in spite of their presenting an obvious formal contrast

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[63] Campbell, 'Dig Us No Grave', p. 34.
[64] Lane, 'Beyond the Light', p. 50.
[65] Goho, 'Archaeology of Urban Dread', p. 60.
[66] Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 4. It must be qualified that key concepts such as commodification, simulacra and hyperreality proposed by Jameson and Baudrillard and associated with postmodernism arguably *do* tend towards a disengaged sociopolitical stance, in that they suggest the subject's powerlessness and favour nihilism. It is this dystopian or 'pessimistic' sense of disempowerment which theorists like Hutcheon seek to address in advocating the possibility of critique.

to the social realism and naturalism of novels like *One Safe Place* or *Obsession*, both *Needing Ghosts* and *The Booking* also feature protagonists who seek to extract meaning and exert autonomy over their own lives, but who are, or who feel intensely dependent upon, and at the mercy of, external forces that deprive them of such controls. Further, they are key texts in that, separated by a quarter-century, in juxtaposition they serve to showcase a development within Campbell's vision which demonstrates a responsiveness to sociopolitical change, with the advent of advances in technology. The next section examines the complex and prescient mediation of what appears to be the paranoid author figure in the first of these works, *Needing Ghosts*, in order to establish how this character represents the postmodern subject.

3. The Author Who Haunts Himself: *Needing Ghosts*

Appearing mid-way through Campbell's long career, this 1990 novella is a central text in understanding Campbell's vision. It is also a hybrid one, combining seemingly contradictory elements of the personal and humanist perspective with literary postmodernism, a tendency denoted by thematic resistance to notions of egocentrism, ascription of cultural meaning and historical placement. 'The reader must decide how autobiographical *Needing Ghosts* may be', Campbell claims regarding his novella in a later essay, 'in particular, the image of a writer wandering the streets of an unfamiliar town and not finding his books in the shops'.[67] Campbell's noncommittal statement notwithstanding, *Needing Ghosts* certainly functions in one respect as thinly veiled autobiography. It is his most sustained and concentrated portrait of the travails of a professional writer and the

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[67] Campbell, 'Writing and Depression', p. 339.

tensions encountered in an author's relationships with other writers and audiences. In the course of events, the novella's protagonist, Mottershead, named after a bookshop employee acquaintance of Campbell's (and, like his creator, a married father of two) does indeed embark on a quest in which 'the compulsion to find himself on the shelves' becomes 'stronger than ever', and the prospect of failure to do so prolongs the 'black depression which seeps through him like poison' and 'terrifies' him (pp. 47, 52). As with so many of Campbell's lead characters, Mottershead is passionate about literature. His ultimate ambition is to run a bookshop containing works by 'forgotten authors' (p. 21). This is envisaged as a sanctuary, where Mottershead 'can choose to resurrect whatever they achieved as the fancy guides him', and the sensation makes the character 'feel as if he has found within himself a power he wasn't aware of possessing' (p. 22). The parallels with Campbell's own varied and substantial paratextual activity here, specifically the revival of works by neglected writers like Ross, are unmistakeable. Mottershead thus clearly serves as an instance of what Waugh describes as 'surfiction', in which, without resorting to extradiegesis, the author, or a surrogate for the author, is deliberately incorporated into a narrative.[68]

Concurrently, whilst it displays authorial self-consciousness, *Needing Ghosts* is also, by Campbell's admission, the most subconsciously driven and, in form, 'close to surrealism' of his longer fictions.[69] If his most successful short stories, according to Goho, are 'a grim updating of [James Joyce's] *Dubliners*,' then *Needing Ghosts* is surely Campbell's emulation of the same author's

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[68] Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 3.
[69] O'Sullivan, email correspondence with author, 12 April 2019. Campbell is using the descriptor 'surrealism' in a loose, ahistorical sense as opposed to alluding specifically to the historical Surrealist movement identified with the 1920s and 1930s.

Ulysses.[70] In a refrain of the fractured and elliptical narrative structure of 'Concussion', the novella's plot is a hallucinogenic odyssey. It purports to relate a day's experience in the life, or the dream life, of an amnesiac writer. The narrative follows Mottershead from the moment he awakes, through his travels across an unnamed city, the vicissitudes and repeated sense of déjà vu that he experiences along the way, and, eventually, his attempts to return home to reunite with his family – whom he finally finds apparently murdered by his own hand. The ambivalence around the reality or non-reality of their deaths is crucial. It again invites comparison with *American Psycho*, Ellis's almost exactly contemporary study of a real or imagined murderer, an affinity I return to shortly.

During the course of Motterhead's darkly picaresque journey to this point, as he delivers an ill-received address to a group of fellow writers and tries to track down copies of his work in retail outlets, the protagonist encounters a series of bizarre, unsympathetic, insinuating and even menacing figures. In support of the view that there is some similitude between surrealism and postmodernism as well as modernism, the presence of these beings and their largely unexplained hostility exemplify what Jerry Aline Flieger describes as a 'paranoid modality' characterising much postmodern writing.[71] Campbell's fictions, unfortunately but unsurprisingly considering the critical neglect outlined in my introduction, are not included in Flieger's own cogent analysis. Nevertheless, with *Needing Ghosts*, Campbell, like Pynchon or Auster, presents a protagonist who is, as Flieger describes, 'haunted by cryptic characters, at once ubiquitous and maddeningly

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[70] Goho, 'Archaeology of Urban Dread', p. 76.

[71] Jerry Aline Flieger, 'Postmodern Perspective: The Paranoid Eye', *New Literary History*, 28.1 (Winter 1997): 87—108 (p. 90). In magic realist or oneiric fictions, of which Campbell's texts under discussion here are examples, fantastic elements are present within a realist narrative. These attest to the continuing influence of surrealism beyond its identification with the specific cultural and historically delineated Surrealist movement.

elusive, sinister shadows which the hero can't quite figure, or finger'.[72] Such unreliability of perspective is, of course, symptomatic of the larger-scale disparagement of *all* authoritative discourse under the various postmodernist critiques proposed by Jameson, Baudrillard and Lyotard. To appropriate the latter's terminology, the certitude of waking reality, like religious dogma or political ideology, can be interpreted as another illusory metanarrative, perched on the precarious and vulnerable foundations of convention.

In the context of a specifically *Gothic* linkage to the postmodern, the situation of the protagonist in *Needing Ghosts* seems to exemplify the 'struggle for self-knowledge, definition and access to the real' that Beville describes as the 'engine' propelling Gothic-postmodern narratives.[73] As an amnesiac, Mottershead is an inherently unstable subject. He is subject to extreme anxiety about his own sanity against the worsening 'madness' of his situation. Mottershead is also the victim of depression, a sensation likened, as he struggles to remember past events, to 'a black pit into which he is falling with increasing speed' (p. 66). The comparison of psychological anguish to a dark 'pit' of despair is entirely conventional, but the protagonist's vulnerability also throws the veracity and authority of his perspective into doubt. It renders him, like Patrick Bateman in Ellis's *American Psycho*, an acutely unreliable narrator. As with Mottershead's recollection that '[i]n one of his stories a man who's obsessed with the impossibility of knowing if he's died in his sleep convinces himself that he has, and is dreaming' (p. 73), the division between dream and reality, or of the memory of reality, is elided. This state of ambiguity is articulated repeatedly through interrogative

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[72] Ibid, p. 90.
[73] Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism*, p. 54.

narrative. Thus, for example, Mottershead's remembrance of a walk in the park with his wife and children could alternatively be 'something he wrote or intended to write?', and the final hope that his family will return is undercut by the uneasy, questioning recollection, '[h]asn't he tried this before, more than once, many times?' (pp. 54, 80).

The sense of precognitive psychological experience or déjà vu naturally evokes Sigmund Freud's description of the uncanny, as 'that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar'.[74] *Needing Ghosts* can be interpreted as perhaps Campbell's most sustained fictional exposition on the theme of the uncanny. The narrative focuses upon the perspective of one 'anchor' character. It is a perspective from which events external to that character, marked by ambiguity between and the constant threat posed by or eruption of proximate surrealistic 'fantasy' into a besieged 'reality', can be perceived as the projections of a damaged psyche. In Motterhead's quest, the text additionally has affinities with what Hutcheon describes as historiographic metafiction's tendency to 'use memory to try to make sense of the past'.[75] It is testament to the complexity of Campbell's fiction - the novella''s rich allusiveness, mixed tonal register and, in the mode of Resnais, its ambiguity - that such varied readings as, for example, the psychoanalytical, are possible. *Needing Ghosts* affords multiple interpretations of and ascription as to its final textual 'meaning', For Joshi, the novella's writer protagonist has '*fallen into his*

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[74] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919), in *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 121—162 (p. 124).

[75] Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 118. However, it must be qualified that none of Campbell's fictions would strictly qualify for inclusion in Hutcheon's key categorisation as historiographic metafiction, as, unlike novels by Peter Ackroyd (with *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*, 1983, et al) and others that she selects, they do not centre upon 'real historical events and personages' (ibid, p. 5).

own fictional universe'.[76] However, a more purely metaphysical interpretation is also as valid. As Steven J. Mariconda argues, the text may also be read as the reverie, life review and exploration of alternate realities of a dying man seeking 'the endless sunlit forest' (p. 80).[77] Here, as ever with Campbell, an acute awareness of both literary and cinematic precedents are evident. Thematically and structurally, *Needing Ghosts* recalls texts as varied as Ambrose Bierce's 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge' (1890), William Golding's novel, *Pincher Martin* (1956) and Adrian Lynne's film, *Jacob's Ladder* (1990). All of these works are marked by disrupted temporality and by the protagonist's stream of consciousness, and concluded with their deaths. With similar implications, the bus driver's ominous reply to Mottershead, that '[y]ou'll end up where you need to go' (p.64), echoes E. F. Benson's short story 'The Bus-Conductor' (1906) and its adaptation in the portmanteau film *Dead of Night* (Basil Dearden and others, 1945) as the 'The Hearse Driver' segment. The framing story of *Dead of Night* also features a character like Mottershead that experiences déjà vu and appears to commit murder, and who, in a surrealist climax, finds himself trapped in a recurring nightmare.[78]

Campbell's acute literary and cinematic sensibilities are reflected in the transmutation of many familiar tropes drawn from Western cultural tradition in *Needing Ghosts*. These include the figure of Charon the ferryman from classical Greek mythology. This psychopomp is updated in the forms of both the bus driver and, especially, the 'unlit' ferry with its silent and largely unseen crew that finally

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[76] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 86, emphasis in original.
[77] Steven J. Mariconda, Review of *Needing Ghosts* and *Midnight Sun*, *Studies in Weird Fiction, 9* (Spring 1991), cited in Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 86.
[78] The French science fiction short film *La Jetée* (Chris Marker, 1962) and Martin Scorsese's dystopian satire on American 'yuppie' culture, *After Hours* (1984) employ a similar self-reflexive and circular structure.

takes Mottershead over water to his island 'home' (pp. 13, 70). However, for the

most part Campbell adopts familiar trappings of the horror genre, right until the

moment Mottershead finally enters 'the locked room' (p. 78) with its dreadful

secret. Familial concerns are conventionally understood to be central to the genre

from the founding Gothic fictions such as *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

Accordingly, threats to the family unit have been a preoccupation of Campbell's

since the advent of his own paternity in the 1970s – whether that threat is averted,

as in *The Claw*, or pursued to a tragic conclusion, as it is in *The Long Lost*, *The

House on Nazareth Hill*, and, seemingly, this text. Mottershead's wife and

daughter, even when he perceives them as alive, are portrayed as animate and

sentient corpses, their hair 'grey with dust' (p. 65). As such, they are the last in a

gauntlet of sinister but familiar generic presences, from the 'six men wearing dark

suits' (p. 15) who watch Mottershead at the bus stop to the human-animal hybrid

nurse at the 'Wild Rest Home'. The latter's 'face like a hound's skull, pallid flapping

belly, limbs white and thin as bones (p. 62) suggests a fusion of carnivalesque

grotesquerie and death-symbolism. Campbell in fact evokes several cultural

phobic pressure points (here, amongst others, fear of chimeric inter-species

degeneration). Some derive directly from the Gothic mode, even the period of

medieval historical Gothic, as when the upper storeys of shops appear to

Mottershead to be populated by 'gargoyle'-like figures (p. 43). The half-seen

presence that threatens him on the bus, with its 'hint of a face in the air, a

glimmering of eyes and teeth' and 'thin white fingers' (pp. 66—7) clearly mimics

the reticence of M. R. James's ghost stories, along with that writer's taste for

emaciated but malevolent spectres. Elsewhere, as in the references to

'unpleasantly red-eyed' beckoning mannequins, a taxi driver's 'curly red wig' and

'dollish eyes' and a two-foot-high doll the head of which the hero stamps on in a

climatic fit of revulsion (pp. 25—6, 70), the text draws variously upon a rich vein of

autonomatophia, coulrophobia and pedophobia.[79]

However, most significantly in this macabre procession the protagonist is

stalked by his own doppelgänger, a black-gummed entity with a loose skull cap.

Malevolent doubles and impostors also feature in two of Campbell's preceding

longer fictions, *Incarnate* and *The Influence*. In both these instances, though, the

victim and villain had been a child, whereas *Needing Ghosts* marks the first

substantive deployment of this entity in relation to an adult subject, and this trope

was to attain great prominence in several of Campbell's twenty-first-century

fictions. I shall return in more detail to the generic figure of the doppelgänger in my

discussion of Campbell's mediation of the posthuman in Chapter Four. The

antagonistic and unsettling nature of social interactions in his fictions discussed in

the previous chapter are, though, manifested *in extremis* in this text. Mottershead

displays an immediate and intense dislike for this persistent interloper.

Disproportionately hostile to the stranger at every encounter, he refuses the man's

insistence that they have 'lots in common' and need to 'talk about ourselves' (p.

42), and eventually removes his teeth to silence him. It is only at the end of the

narrative, when Mottershead sees the videotape of himself 'gripping his scalp' (p.

74) that the extremity of their encounters, insinuating and over-familiar on the

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[79] The first and last of these are also alluded to, famously, in Freud's 'The Uncanny', p. 141. For interesting if frustratingly brief surveys of the role of dolls in the genre, see Leigh Blackmore, '"A Puppet's Parody of Joy": Dolls, Puppets and Mannikins as Diabolical Other in Ramsey Campbell', in *Ramsey Campbell: Critical Essays on the Modern Master of Horror* (pp. 23—46), and Sandra Mills, 'Discussing Dolls: Horror and the Human Double', in *The Palgrave Handbook to Horror Literature*, ed. by Kevin Corstorphine and Laura R. Kremmel (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, c.2018), pp. 249—55, which focuses on Campbell's first novel, *The Doll Who Ate His Mother* (1976). My own analysis in Chapter Four of his coulrophobic long fiction, *The Grin of the Dark*, is intended to add to scholarship in this still overlooked field.

stranger's side, antagonistic and finally violent on the writer's, and their significance, are retrospectively explained.

It is with the writer's confrontation with a being that is in fact himself that the centre of the 'labyrinth' of *Needing Ghosts* is reached. In Campbell's vision of authorship, the haunter is himself haunted, and becomes his own 'other'. Mottershead's tormentor's eyes are described as 'looking as if being compelled to see too much has swollen them almost too large for their sockets' (p. 42). At one level, *Needing Ghosts* can be interpreted as Campbell's updating of Lovecraft's short story 'The Outsider' (1921), with writers as denizens of the windowless, asylum-like 'soundproof room' (p. 31) and the author-protagonist, like the unnamed narrator of Lovecraft's tale, as much the source of fear as its victim. Campbell satirises, almost embraces, the socially marginalised, even pariah, status popularly associated with the horror author. Mottershead, on leaving his house, strikes an ironic and defiant note. He reflects that:

> [h]e isn't surprised to find himself alone on the road; presumably nobody
> else rises at this hour. He can't recall ever having met his neighbours, but if
> they want to avoid him, that suits him. 'He's out again,' he announces at the
> top of his voice. 'Lock your doors, hide behind the furniture, pull the
> blankets over your heads or he'll know you're there.' (p. 12)

Mottershead's fellow writers at the library are portrayed as similarly eccentric. As exemplified by the 'harrumph'-ing red-faced man (p. 34), they present a motley collection of the earnest and the querulous, obviously drawn from, if caricaturing, Campbell's real-life observations of such assemblies. There is no doubt that Campbell himself views the entire narrative as being at least partly 'comic' (acknowledgements in *Needing Ghosts*, p. [5]), as demonstrated when

Mottershead finds only pederast pornography of borderline legality bearing his name in one bookshop, and, in an episode neatly spoofing Lovecraft's anti-miscegenation text 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth', is berated by its staff, who are all dressed as bridal frogs to promote a children's book.

The overall register of Campbell's text, though, is intensely serious. The core scene is Mottershead's ill-fated address to the writers' group. It is nakedly autobiographical, to the extent that any pretence of division between fictional text and factual paratext largely disappears. In an otherwise stilted and uncompleted performance, Mottershead, in a moment and passage of lucidity, articulates his creator's view on the isolation of the writer, and the centrality of and 'compulsion' involved in the act of writing:

> Nobody except a writer knows how it feels to be a writer. […] I'll tell you how it felt to me. […] Every day I'd be wakened by a story aching to be told. Writing's a compulsion. By the time you're any good at it you no longer have the choice of giving it up. It won't leave you alone even when you're with people, even when you're desperate to sleep. […] it's like seeing everything with new eyes. It's like dreaming while you're awake… (p. 34).

The text's continuous representation of a single consciousness confers upon Motterhead's pronouncements at this point a sense of urgency and of authority. He goes on to liken the writer's mind to a spider, 'which is trying to catch reality and spin it into patterns' (p. 34). This underlines the novella's representation of the creative urge, akin to dream, as being both sentient and predatory. Reality is 'raw material to be shaped', woven, cobweb-like, by the hapless writer, and the narrative reveals that the impulse 'continuing to make demands on him after he had lost the power to write' (p. 74) is responsible for Mottershead's insanity. In a

strikingly vivid image, conveying tenacious malignancy, it is compared to 'teeth buried in his brain, growing rat-like at its substance' (p. 70). This is a fiercely paranoiac interpretation of creativity. Its association with the predatory stands in stark contrast to King's concept of telling stories to generate personal 'happiness'.

The implications of this self-inflective, anti-narrative stance are profound, for both the author as surrogate for the subject and, by implication, the reader. For like *American Psycho*, *Needing Ghosts* seeks to 'disturb' and disorientate the latter. The deployment of a present tense narrative mode, as in Ellis's novel, is implicitly anti-nostalgic. It removes the sense of comfort for the reader afforded by retrospective reportage, conferring instead a documentary immediacy and unpredictability upon Mottershead's experiences and their outcome. Further, use of the present grammatical tense intensifies an impression of the subject's entrapment in an eternal, nightmarish cycle: Mottershead is caught in an environment that has substituted a temporal circularity for the certainties of linearity and progression. 'As a child', the narrator relates, 'he hoped life would never end; when he grew up he was afraid it might not' (p. 77). Recounted in a perpetual present, this narrative is thus far from adhering to the traditional form of the Künstlerroman. There is no sense of 'growth' of experience in *Needing Ghosts* towards maturity. Rather, as in *American Psycho*, the impression is one of the subject's stasis and entrapment. The repeated evocation of existential crisis, as Mottershead's surroundings 'appear to be losing their depth'; his own reflection 'shimmers like disturbed water', and 'blackness' seems about to 'consume' him (pp. 9, 52, 50), echoes the protagonist's condition in Ellis's novel. Bateman

describes himself similarly as being perpetually in 'some kind of existential chasm', in which he is 'simply imitating reality', or 'simply was not there'.[80]

As in King's novel *Misery*, Campbell's work includes within itself a commentary upon its own narrative. This is expressed in the form of the fictional text within the text, *Cadenza*. Described by Mottershead as 'my best book' (p. 36), and the quarry of his intense search throughout the narrative, its opening sentence, 'He knows this dark' (pp. 9, 27) – a quintessentially existentialist statement - is also the opening sentence of the novella itself. The text is thus in a sense caught in its own 'web', self-contained and self-reflective. Its name evoking a masterpiece, the virtuoso performance of the artiste, *Cadenza* represents not so much the 'found manuscript' in Campbell's version of the literary Gothic, as it does the lost text. *Cadenza* affirms the centrality of writing as a theme, serving as a symbol of the loss of ownership and control wielded by the author over their work. Yet moreover, taking Mottershead himself as representative of the subject, it also has an ontological resonance, for it symbolises the subject's simultaneous desire for and the loss of control over meaning. The attainment of such security is a common goal for characters in Campbell's fictional universe. Whether they are protagonists, antagonists or minor figures, like the disaffected and discontented attendees of the 'Undying Light' meetings in *The Nameless* (p. 167), they seek 'faith' or 'anything that would explain their lives'. Unlike 'Misery Returns' or the 'Memory Lane' scrapbook, which function in *Misery* respectively as Sheldon's means of survival or a record of Wilkes's warped psychosis ('like a novel so disgusting you just had to finish it'), the function of *Cadenza* is presented as being, through its self-consumption and circularity, fundamentally meaningless, and

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[80] Ellis, *American Psycho*, pp. 179, 282, 376.

finally amoral.[81] As Ellis's Bateman states of his own narrative, the entire preceding text of *American Psycho*, '[t]his confession has meant nothing'.[82]

In a powerful metaphor for the disorientation and struggle of the subject, the writer literally loses control of his work. Mottershead finds that his own acquired and cherished copy of *Cadenza* physically slips from his grasp. He first loses his identity as author when his name disappears and then, in an image of surrealistic horror that recalls John Carpenter's film version of *The Thing* (1982), witnesses what had been his photograph develop 'a welter of legs', fall to the floor and scuttle through a crack beneath a skirting board (p. 37). This representation of the literary artefact itself as monstrous alterity is explicable in the context that such a response is symptomatic, and one form of articulation of, what Savu describes as 'crises of author, subject [and] representation' wrought by postmodernism.[83] These perceived 'crises', or transformations, could only intensify with rapid sociopolitical change and profound growth in communications. Campbell's later poioumenomic novella of psychological horror, *The Booking*, featuring not one but an entire bookshop of sentient tomes, was able not only to address these transitions more explicitly, but to engage with some key dystopian assumptions underlying postmodernist paradigms.

4. Defending Against 'The Dreadful Dark': *The Booking*

'In the computer age', Lyotard asserted at the close of the 1970s, 'the question of knowledge is more than ever the question of government'.[84] With hindsight, Lyotard's statement, in its allusion to the growth of technology and its rich

[81] King, *Misery,* p. 213.
[82] Ellis, *American Psycho*, p. 377.
[83] Savu, *Postmortem Postmodernists,* p. 13.
[84] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 9.

inferences regarding the availability, form, ownership and control of information and even surveillance by the executive over those seeking it, appears prescient, even poignantly understated. The ensuing decades were obviously marked by seismic sociopolitical changes with the ascent of neoliberalism, and by rapid developments in mass communications, bringing 'the computer age', in the form of personal computer, laptop or mobile phone, into every professional and domestic sphere.[85] An awareness of their exact nature and the sheer scale of their pervasiveness in contemporary life experiences could not have been available to either the theorist or the novelist during the pre-millennial period, when Campbell wrote *Needing Ghosts*.

Campbell's 2016 novella, *The Booking,* deftly combines consciousness of the contemporary with fidelity to both antecedence within the Gothic mode and the author's own created fictional universe. Its concept and setting evoke earlier texts such as M. R. James' 'The Tractate Middoth' (1911) or Blackwood's 'The Whisperers' (1912), in which the intellectual content of volumes from a former library haunt a protagonist in the present day, and Campbell's own short story, 'Cold Print' (1969), in its seedy, menacing and ultimately monstrous book seller. Campbell also set an earlier full-length novel in a bookshop, the semi-comic supernatural thriller *The Overnight* (2004). However, that text, in featuring a large ensemble of characters trapped in a modern commercial outlet, is necessarily episodic. Despite articulating a critique of corporate capitalism, represented by a store manager who fails to recognise the supernatural menace at work and

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[85] Amongst voluminous discourses, see, for example, *The Rise of Neoliberalism and Institutional Analysis*, ed. by John L. Campbell and Ove. K. Pedersen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), and Reuters, 'Computers in Use Pass 1 Billion Mark', 23 June 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-computers-statistics/computers-in-use-pass-1-billion-mark-garter-idUSL2324525420080623> [first accessed 1 July 2019].

persists in subordinating himself to his employers to the end, the novel's effect is diluted by Campbell's perceived need to stage mini-climaxes at the end of each chapter – in this case, through use of the 'cliff-hanger' plot device and the somewhat repetitious depiction of elaborate deaths for his sizeable cast.[86] The later novella is a tighter and richer hybrid. Within what appears as a highly traditional milieu, *The Booking* presents a concentrated microcosm of Campbell's individual and iconoclastic distillation of the postmodern.

The dramatic action of *The Booking* appears straightforward to delineate. In an unnamed urban community, a seemingly young, unemployed librarian, Kiefer Abloose, applies for and takes a job as a technician at 'Books Are Life', a cobweb-strewn antiquarian and second-hand bookshop. The narrative recounts Kiefer's relationship with its proprietor, Alfred 'Alf' Brookes, who is apparently a fusty, eccentric and cantankerous older man. Brookes seems to be a living and decrepit relic from an earlier, pre-technological era. His ill-fitting suit has 'frayed cuffs', while the man himself has a 'stringy neck' and - with dark connotations of generic alterity recalling 'Cold Print' - 'long fingernails' (pp. 14, 16). The bookseller also has pronounced technophobic and especially cyberphobic views, and an oddly possessive attitude to his stock. Despite his antipathy, Brookes wants Kiefer to create a website to advertise the store's wares, to catalogue them, and, seemingly, to record electronically Brookes' own proud magnus opus creation, a vast ledger of the shop's contents: 'a real book. One man's vision' (p. 40). Brookes, like Mottershead in *Needing Ghosts*, thus partly functions as an author surrogate, although the avatar is much less obviously autobiographical here, as

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[86] Campbell's earlier tragicomic serial killer novel *The Count of Eleven* manages such a critique more successfully through its character study of a protagonist/antagonist deconstructed by capitalism.

the character is not a professional writer. Brookes' vocation is proximate, more compensatory: as Kiefer reflects sardonically on his employer, he 'wanted to be a writer, after all' (p. 58). Rich in dialogue exchanges and unfolding almost entirely in a single setting, the text possesses a theatrical quality. Its human interaction enacted largely between Kiefer and Brookes, the narrative effectively becomes a 'three-hander', with the shop itself, its books 'fidgeting on the shelves' (p. 30), becoming another living collective presence. The place functions as an intensifier or silent chorus as the uneasy relationship between the 'two' men becomes more fractious and reaches a final crisis. Recalling the spirit of a Blackwood or M. R. James narrative, *The Booking* thus has a highly familiar locale, one which could seem, in the contemporary context, quaintly insular and anachronistic. Nonetheless, the text successfully reflects and mediates both external political and technological developments. Compared to *Needing Ghosts*, the later novella represents a widening of focus to consider the form, function and status of 'information' – in the form of the written word, literature itself - in what has become an electronic era. It does this while also continuing, and developing, Campbell's vision of the survival of literary creativity, the author and the subject.

In terms of establishing its scenario and its tonality, like *Needing Ghosts, The Booking* displays an overt alignment with the postmodern. Indeed, in contrast to its predecessor, Campbell makes explicit reference to external sociopolitical and economic contexts, conferring a topical relevance upon the Gothic trope of urban malaise. Kiefer is an instantly familiar analogue for the displaced victim of the austerity programme that had been deliberately implemented by British governments in the wake of the 2008 'Great Recession'. Kiefer, indeed, represents an economic 'everyman', in that he has previously experienced a long-term and

unsuccessful quest for employment, including submissions to 'the supermarkets

and the fast-food joints' as an over-qualified applicant (p. 9). Further, in a blatantly

topical reference, Kiefer discloses to Brookes that he had worked in public libraries

'until half of them were shut down' (p. 16).[87] The central character thus seems to

join John Horridge and other Campbell figures in incarnating the plight of the

subject under the 'present-day, multinational capitalism' described by Jameson.[88]

At the same time, Kiefer, like Mottershead in *Needing Ghosts*, undergoes an acute

existential crisis, losing his sense of memory of an existence prior to entering the

bookshop, or of the comfort afforded by the 'real world' (pp. 71, 76). Even Kiefer's

most valued relationship to another person, his supposed 'girlfriend' Cynthia,

becomes occluded. In what may be viewed as an enactment of Jameson's vision

of the failure of '[o]ur faulty representations of some immense communication and

computer network' and of Baudrillard's 'disappearance of the subject and its

identity', Cynthia's 'dwindling' image mediated by Kiefer's laptop - the certainty of

Cynthia's 'reality' signified only by her visage - begins to 'crumple' (p. 67).[89]

Moreover, in Kiefer's suspicion that '[n]o doubt he was being observed by security

cameras and perhaps by the guards' in the stores on both sides of the crowded

street' (p. 9), a sense of acute paranoia is immediately established. This depiction

and evocation of vexed psychological disorientation is sustained throughout the

ensuing narrative, crucially in the passive-aggressive relationship between Kiefer

and his apparent employer. It is an arrangement in which the former appears

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[87] See, for example. Deborah Summers, 'David Cameron Warns of 'New Age of Austerity'', *The Guardian*, 29 April 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/apr/26/david-cameron-conservative-economic-policy1>, and Daniel Wainwright et al, 'Libraries Lose a Quarter of Staff as Hundreds Close', *BBC News* online version, 29 March 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-35707956> [both first accessed 1 July 2019].
[88] Jameson*, Postmodernism*, p. 37.
[89] Ibid, p. 37; Baudrillard, *Perfect Crime*, p. 94.

never to know quite where he stands. Brookes' utterances, from the first, interrogative responses, 'Who's asking?' and 'Looking at it, were you?' (p. 10) to Kiefer's initial enquiry about the job, are consistently evasive, sardonic, sarcastic, and insinuating. Creating as much tension as mystery, both Brookes' language, recalling the deliberate minimalism of Samuel Beckett or Harold Pinter, and his behaviour are acutely disconcerting, not merely for the recipient, but for the reader. Campbell's ambiguous characterisation here again contrasts with the approach adopted by King, in which dialogue generally has a more straightforward and less opaque, 'plain' expository function that drives the narrative or all-important 'story' forward.[90] As in most of Campbell's texts, there are no 'villains' in *The Booking*. Much more overtly than the conflict between Mottershead and his loose-scalped revenant pursuer in *Needing Ghosts*, the later novella's denouement reveals that both characters, Kiefer and Brookes, are in fact the same man, and that Cynthia, although real, is not Kiefer Alfred Brookes' partner but his daughter. This demonstrates the intra-psychic anatomisation and fragmentation of the subject (here, the male psyche) that characterises many more familiar postmodernist fictions, exemplified by Chuck Palahniuk's novel, *Fight Club* (1996).[91]

Analogous to the deployment of *Cadenza* in *Needing Ghosts, The Booking* immediately presents a postmodernist self-reflexivity in terms of form, in this case with the almost incantatory and intensifying use of the refrain 'this text was all' (p.

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[90] One thinks, for example, of the opening sentence of *Secret Window*, in which 'John Shooter' warns the protagonist that '[y]ou stole my story and something's got to be done about it' – a statement that effectively summarises and propels the novella's entire plot. See King, *Four Past Midnight*, pp. 324—420 (p. 324).

[91] Again, in marked contrast to Campbell's work, Palahniuk's novel (and its cinematic adaptation by David Fincher, 1999), has generated much scholarship. See, for example, Jason J. Dodge, 'Spaces of Resistance: Heretopia and Transgression in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*', *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 26 (2015): 318—33 for a more detailed application of Foucault's concept that I have referenced briefly here.

9, passim). However, if *Needing Ghosts* presents the author-subject's ordeal in terms of an unending nightmarish circular journey, in which an empty and nihilistic meaningless is the feared 'meaning', *The Booking* enacts, in the most concentrated and claustrophobic form, Campbell's version of a heterotopia. Its near-single setting is akin to the poststructuralist 'idea' of the museum or library described by Michel Foucault, one in which an 'absolute breach' with traditional notions of temporality and a 'perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time' are experienced.[92] Like Caruso, the novella's illustrator, Campbell's text is itself surrealist and symbolic. The non-realist and allegorical quality is established early, via the protagonist Kiefer's confusion as to whether the bookstore is located in 'Fable' or 'Faber' Close (p. 12). Campbell's deliberate word play here teasingly presents alternation between fictions and publisher of fictions. This elision symbolises and foretells the shading between reality and fantasy, the material of insidious dream, which takes place in the ensuing drama. Once reached, the shop 'Books Are Life' itself seems akin, in retrospect, to what Foucault describes as 'a heterotopia of deviation', an environment in which an individual non-conformist consciousness has been placed.[93] As Brookes, the 'jailer' side of Kiefer's personality puts it, '[y]ou're already in my text. You're quite a character' (p. 76). In this case, the 'deviancy' appears to be the continuation of bibliophilia in an electronic era: not only Brookes', whose possessiveness suggests the neo-parental – 'I should have felt them go' he laments at one point – but Kiefer's, who later 'relish[es]' the physical weight of a book and 'the familiar sensation' of holding one in his hands, and who does not want to leave the sanctuary of the shop (pp.

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[92] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986): 22—7 (p. 26). Ostensibly a retail outlet, the 'shop' in *The Booking* has the preservative logic of a library or museum, in that none of its contents are really for sale or are ever absent for long.
[93] Ibid, p. 25.

34, 49). Its very name, 'Books Are Life', an imperative, conflates the survival of the text as physical artefact with the survival of the subject. The bewildering dimensions of the shop's premises present an uncanny realm of simultaneous desiccation and expansion, the labyrinth a metaphorical externalisation of the tortuous mental geography of the text's protagonist. Its narrative almost entirely confined to this space, one with walls 'that didn't look too much like the work of any builder' (p. 76), *The Booking* has the artificial, staged quality of a symbolist enterprise. To develop an analogy of deliberation, the text presents a symposium or workshop. It functions as a space in which competing views of the nature and future of literature, the conduit of information, and by extension the resilience and future of the data-generating and receiving subject, are voiced, and even interrogated – but without the unambivalent certitude of a final resolution.

From one perspective, *The Booking* articulates a familiar range of anxieties concerning the subject's control over itself and the reality it inhabits that are associated with postmodernism. These concerns are chiefly led by and channelled through, although crucially not exclusively, the medium of Brookes. The bookseller appears to be a representation of paranoia towards the technological trappings of the contemporary world. Brookes' adherence to preserving the written word, symbolised in the form of the ledger that he describes, ironically, as 'as solid as we are' (p. 41), represents a desperate attempt to preserve the integrity of the subject. Demonstrating a fear of a mass surveillance society familiar from George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948) and many other texts, Brookes views, and literally dissects, even the humble house fly (full of 'wires' and 'oil in the works') as an instrument of espionage and insists that the camera on Kiefer's laptop is switched off, so he 'won't be watched by electronics' (pp. 53, 28). He distrusts computers,

ascribing to them deleterious effects, at once monotonising, infantilising and hallucinogenic: '[t]hey thin your brain and take you where you never chose to go' (p. 17). Brookes attributes to cyberspace an arrogant sentience, believing that it 'thinks it's bigger than the whole of creation' (p. 47). The internet is also described as an actively malevolent consciousness, 'using' the subject for the purposes of consumption, with the aim of assimilating all information and ultimately turning everything 'into itself' (p. 37). Indeed, Brookes later compares the internet to an incapacitating agent:

> This net of yours, if you ask me it's more like a drug. It gets hold of your mind and weakens it, and then who knows what it can make you imagine, especially if you're in some kind of vulnerable state. (p. 68)

The language here directly echoes, and updates, Campbell's paratextual comment made two decades previously, and quoted earlier in this chapter, in which he likens the creative urge to an 'addiction'. The potency afforded by new technology, the infinite vastness of the web, is likened to a narcotic and presented as potentially being as harmful as it is creatively enhancing.

Brookes' paranoid worldview appears to be validated by other aspects within the text that ascribe an insidious, and invidious, quality to technology. Kiefer's struggle to find 'Books Are Life', an eventuality during which the icon on his phone seems 'more real than the identifiable streets' and where he expresses that 'he could easily have felt like an element in a computer game' (p. 12), suggest reality and the subject being reduced to virtual, even ludic representation. Like Brookes, Kiefer also maintains a wariness of the power of the internet. In an echo of Mottershead's sensation of being preyed upon by predatory forces in *Needing Ghosts*, he feels, remembering the online advertisement, 'as though the net had

fastened on a hollow in his brain' (p. 17). Later, there is seamless continuity between what Kiefer is told by the symbolically named 'browser' and the content of the conspiracy website, 'Wot They Dont Wancher Ter Know' (p. 37, sic), which he shortly thereafter discovers – by 'browsing'. This mutual reinforcement foregrounds a fear that because a microchip can store and convey vast amounts of information, and do so instantly, the possibility of individual authorship, the reality of the book as physical artefact and the pleasures of research, discovery and book ownership will all be invalidated. Even worse, the 'chip' can be used as an instrument of personal violation, simulating experience, and thus potentially becoming a weapon for the programming, manipulation and control of the subject by another. As the 'browser' insists, 'there's plenty they get up to without telling the likes of us' (p. 31). Such anxieties of paranoia are also familiar recurring themes in postmodernist theoretical and critical discourse. For example, Baudrillard argues that the possibility of independent thought is under attack from and nullified by 'a gigantic technical and neural simulation' in favour of 'the authority of the virtual'.[94] Flieger notes the rise of a popular perception of a surveillance culture amidst the widespread and now routine incorporation of personal information onto databases like credit rating systems. 'In the postmodern age', Flieger argues, the subject is susceptible to 'becoming programmable, given over by bits and pieces to communication which is circulatory and regulatory rather than progressive and circulatory'.[95] Campbell's text, with its references to 'electronics watching', and the ingenious or conspiratorial 'chip' (pp. 28, 83—4) that may or may not be in its protagonist's head, clearly appears to internalise the contemporary zeitgeist.

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[94] Baudrillard, *Perfect Crime*, p. 79.
[95] Flieger, 'Postmodern Perspective', pp. 87, 100.

However, conversely, *The Booking* also articulates a complex critique of this paranoid perspective. Kiefer, wary as he is, maintains a critical distance about being absorbed into the browser's microchip 'fantasy', a path that seems to him like '[y]ielding to the notion of being tied to the online web' (p. 13). The obviousness of and crudely colloquial misspelling of the website's name suggests a satirical distance on the part of the author from the notion of 'conspiracy'. Kiefer regards its espionage-related content sceptically, almost dismissively, as 'just another wild idea generated by the uncontrolled consciousness, too often close to deranged, that was the web' (p. 37). Rather, repeating a pragmatic perspective that has been consistent throughout Campbell's career, the protagonist advocates the continued viability of print by arguing to Brookes that 'I honestly don't think that the net will ever do away with books' (p. 39). This is a principled position explicit in and familiar from 'The Franklyn Paragraphs' and in the bibliographic settings of and passions expressed in many other fictions by Campbell, and it is a view also expounded in his paratexts. Yet the computer itself is also presented here as retaining a positive, life-affirming value. 'The lit screen' of his laptop, it is narrated:

> put Kiefer in mind of a refuge – today's version of the light the first humans were said to have kindled against the dreadful dark. He could almost have fancied that the onscreen image of a book was a talisman to fend it off. Surely the only darkness that could bother him was ignorance, and the computer was its opposite. (p. 36)

Stylistically, Campbell is again here marrying traditional, indeed ancient, motifs of folklore and literature (the talisman as a ward against evil) with the contemporary trappings of modern technology (the computer). Moreover, the text at this point recalls Diana Kramer's recourse to song, or 'a cry for healing', during the climax of

Campbell's much earlier novel on combatting the power of 'darkness' posed by fundamentalism, *The Hungry Moon* (p. 418), discussed in Chapter One. In Campbell's vision, the computer and the access to information that it provides has now supplanted music as a weapon against another controlling 'grand narrative', the dogma of 'ignorance'.

The ambivalent ending of *The Booking* foregrounds the tension between the text's representation of anxieties typifying postmodernism and its own profound iconoclasticism. According to Baudrillard, the era of mass communication is characterised by over-saturation, resulting in an overwhelming disempowerment of the human subject. It is an outcome that, in his pessimistic view, tends to 'evil':

> [o]ur culture of meaning is collapsing beneath the excess of meaning, the culture of reading collapsing beneath the excess of reading, the information culture collapsing beneath the excess of information, and the signs and reality sharing a simple shroud.[96]

Campbell's text, with its hero struggling to hold on to 'the real world' (p. 71), appears to literalise Baudrillard's pessimistic, funereal vision. There are an 'excess' of sentient volumes impinging upon the subject, and throughout the narrative Kiefer fears being subsumed and 'buried' beneath them. At the novella's climax, he is described as feeling:

> hemmed in on every side by a confusion of knowledge so hungry for assimilation that it wouldn't be satisfied until every scrap was stored in his head. Books had begun dropping to the floor like insects swarming out of a nest, and the familiar dull thuds revived his vision of a general collapse, of being buried under a multitude of books. (p. 79)

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[96] Baudrillard, *Perfect Crime*, p. 17.

However, the text concludes not on a note of fatalism but one of defiance, as the protagonist refuses to obey the forces of law and order, the police, and instead withdraws further into the shop towards another classically Gothic space, the mysterious hidden or 'furthest room' (p. 83). Crucially, the level of 'danger' entailed by doing this is, Kiefer insists to an unknown observer, 'exactly what I make it' (p. 83). This enigmatic non-closure invites two competing interpretations. According to one, Kiefer's utterance and the final scene signify the disintegration and withdrawal of the paranoid schizophrenic into psychosis, in which the subject is mentally overwhelmed, consumed by, and becoming synonymous with, the text. Such an interpretation retrospectively confers upon the novella's opening sentence, '[w]hen they found him, this text was all he had' (p. 9), the quality of posthumous elegy or obituary. Yet according to an alternative reading, by refusing to comply with conventional authority (the police, as is usual in Campbell's fictions, are uncharacterised and distant figures, representing surveillance, with no positive moral status), the subject has been able to strike out, to positively assert their will against the invalidating vicissitudes of contemporary life. It is possible in turn to derive two tentative conclusions from this more positive interpretation. One, what may be termed a 'pro-bibliophile' judgement, would ascribe an intrinsic value to the plethora of unregulated information, seeing it as inherently positive and personally enriching. Campbell, with *The Booking*, seems to align with what Savu suggests is an ability of 'the second generation' of postmodernist writers, to 'afford and celebrate the centrality of literature both as an aesthetic object and as a cultural artefact in a world increasingly sceptical of its value'.[97] A second conclusion would

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[97] Savu, *Postmortem Postmodernists*, p. 18. Most of the authors in Savu's study – Ackroyd, Peter Carey, Colm Tóibín and Michael Cunningham – are near-contemporaries of Campbell. Unlike Campbell, however, all of them have been adjudged by the Academy as writers of contemporary rather than genre fiction. Nevertheless, Savu's resurrection of 'the human' is important in

be that *The Booking* displays fidelity to what Savu notes as a tendency in some later postmodernist author fiction, 'its antihumanist bias notwithstanding', to *not* discount 'the human', that is the life experience, actions and values of the subject.[98] According to Savu, such new writers and fictions have affirmed the possibility of 'an individual subjectivity – for readers, characters *and* authors – that is constantly enacted or expressed in a myriad of representations'.[99] With respect to Campbell's novella, such 'myriad' complexity is suggested in this enigmatic and ambiguous ending, and the alternate perspectives upon it that are offered by the text.

Indeed, such an offering can be further interpreted as a challenge to the containment or 'holding' of content and meaning by the reader as receiving subject that had been cited by McEwan as a distinguishing feature of the novella. For, through the intense prism of the depiction of the experience of an individual consciousness that the novella offers, Campbell, with both these hybrid and symbolic texts, is dramatizing the desire and struggle for control of meaning in a 'reality' that seems as disorientating, precarious and potentially overwhelming as the restless contents and constantly expanding shelves in Brookes' bookshop. The depiction of the subject's almost literal subjugation in *The Booking* itself not only enacts Baudrillard's vision of the overwhelming dominance of simulacra within and over contemporary consumer culture. To apply Hutcheon's argument, through both such literalisation and the divided protagonist's scepticism, it offers a parodic perspective upon it, a perspective that she describes as a distinguishing feature of postmodernism. This is a propensity to critique the 'simulacrisation' of the present

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highlighting and harbingering a tendency in recent 'post-postmodernist' thought, a trend considered below in my Conclusion.

[98] Ibid, p. 14.

[99] Ibid, p. 244, emphasis in original.

by 'problematising the entire notion of the representation of reality and by therefore suggesting the potentially reductive quality of the new upon which Baudrillard's laments are based'.[100] Campbell's own vision is an iconoclastic as well as parodic one, because in his imaginative universe a liberal humanist perspective and values, all, of course, ostensibly antithetical to postmodernism, are both articulated and, as Brookes' arguable success in exerting a final state of independence suggests, not entirely lost.

As the reference in *The Booking* to the internet being a predatory 'mind looking for somewhere to live' (p. 39), indicates, the primary ontological challenge and potential threat to the integrity and future of the subject has been increasingly perceived to come from technology. In particular, such confrontation has come from the computer. In Campbell's vision as a horror writer, the computer serves the same function as a ouija or spirit board by virtue of both its potency and its potential danger, and is a recurrent presence in his longer fictions of the twenty-first century. It is to Campbell's metaleptic narratives, corporeal metafictions in which fictional beings intrude into and serve to interrogate what has been delineated as the 'real' world via the portal of the computer, that I wish to turn in the final chapter. Paying due attention to the role of digital technology in Campbell's late fictions allows scholarship to move beyond his critique of the postmodern subject, with its necessarily atomised and paranoid psyche, and into an examination of the ways in which such a subjectivity is being specifically transformed by digital communication technologies, or, in other words, to explore how the postmodern becomes *posthuman*. This shift involves switching the focus from the subject to the medium and the spectres and terrors that a disembodied

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[100] Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 223. They are also, of course, Jameson's 'laments'.

and instant form of communication, and in the case of the writer, the act of

creation, engender.

CHAPTER FOUR: 'GHOSTS' FROM THE MACHINE: POSTHUMAN TRANSFORMATIONS IN CAMPBELL'S LATE TECHNO-FICTIONS

1.Campbell, Postmodernism and Posthumanism

Aesthetically, the paranoid portrayal of computers, digital communication and the Internet articulated by the 'Alfred Brookes' persona in *The Booking* attests to Campbell's aforementioned concern with 'broadening the genre' and retaining topicality as a writer of contemporary horror fictions. This highly self-conscious approach, with its onus on currency, has not gone unnoticed by the minority of critics who have accorded Campbell attention. Joshi, for example, taking account of Campbell's long-term parallel careers as a film, DVD and music critic, has observed the writer's ongoing propensity to use 'all forms of art' beyond the written word at his disposal, and, latterly, to 'absorb new developments in technology to augment the horrors of his scenarios'.[1] This is the case even given the oscillation, noted in my introduction, between psychological horror and more overtly supernatural subject matter throughout Campbell's career. *The Booking*, a case in point, was followed immediately by a deliberate return to Lovecraftian themes and Campbell's own earlier, archaic mythos in the *Three Births of Daoloth* trilogy of novels. Nonetheless, such heterogeneity in itself attests to Campbell's continuing tendency for experimentation and to his versality. Foremost amongst the 'new developments in technology' that Campbell has absorbed, the Internet is now ubiquitous to the point of being all pervasive. This computer network has been aptly described by Herbechter as 'by far the most significant and socially

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[1] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 88; *Unutterable Horror*, p. 705.

transformative medium of western capitalist information societies within a few decades'.[2]

Herbrechter, as his own substantial study *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (2013) attests, is a scholar operating within an important and emergent cross-disciplinary theoretical trend.[3] Like postmodernism, posthumanism reconceptualises the human subject in its relation to both technology and the natural world. A posthumanist approach radically reconfigures the subject's own nature and its relational and even hierarchical status. The 'decentring of the human' through its imbrication in technological, medical and other networks, argues Cary Wolfe, 'is increasingly impossible to ignore'.[4] Also 'increasingly', according to Hayles, pioneering theorist in the field, the computer is actually 'taken as the measure of all things, including humans'.[5] For academics such as Hayles and Nayar, although the consequences of such hierarchical depriviledging need not be disempowering and negative (or, as Campbell's Brookes would phrase it, 'brain-thinning'), the subject is now 'an amalgam' or 'an assemblage'.[6] Indeed, as far as Nayar is concerned, the human explicitly amounts to 'an instantiation of a network of connections, exchanges, bondages and crossings with all forms of

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[2] Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 19.

[3] The field of posthumanist theory and criticism, embracing growth and innovations in nano-technology, neuroscience, biogenetic enhancement and much else, is a substantial one, and even an outline of its parameters and citation of all its leading specialists is beyond the scope of the present project. In the discussion which folows, I have cited scholars whose work, in my view, is most relevant to evaluation of literature and to Campbell in particular.

[4] Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 121.

[5] Arjen Mulder, 'How Does It Feel to Be Posthuman?': Interview with Katherine Hayles', in *The Art of the Accident: Art + Architecture + Media Technology*, ed. by Joke Brouwer, Andreas Breckmann [et al.] (Rotterdam, NL: Nederlands Architectuurinstuut : V2 Organisatie, 1998) <https://v2.nl/archive/articles/how-does-it-feel-to-be-posthuman> [first accessed: 1 February 2020].

[6] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman,* p. 3; Nayar, *Posthumanism,* p. 4. By contrast, Francis Fukuyama, in *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (London: Profile, 2002) takes a more alarmist, conservative view of the threat of biotechnology to 'alter human nature' and urges strict state regulation of activities such as cloning (pp. 7, 17).

life'.[7] Similar to postmodernism, posthumanism thus constitutes a challenge to the subject's autopoietic autonomy, that is, to the master or 'grand' narrative of Enlightenment liberal humanism. At stake, and under implicit threat, are humanism's associated notions of possession of secure identity and uniqueness, and its senses of identifiable origin, teleological continuity and temporal closure.

Campbell's fictions, particularly in the twenty-first century, articulate an acute awareness and present a distinctive mediation of these theoretical currents. My previous chapters have analysed Campbell's treatment of meta narratives pertaining to religious belief systems, to late capitalist societal and political orthodoxies and to authorial practices and creativity, together with the fraying and disintegrating influences upon the subject that these engender – influences that generate and portray anxiety and terror. In widening my analysis beyond Campbell's meta horror analyses of the professional or aspiring writer, this chapter will focus specifically upon the presentation of variant and emergent technologies, which, it is posited, signify variations of a transformation or morphology of the subject more than its dissolution. After establishing the validity of applying posthumanist theory through tracing points of affinity with postmodernism, I will examine aspects of what is elucidated as the posthuman presence as it manifests in three of the author's key longer fictions. These are a linked if, unlike the *Three Births of Daoloth*, autonomous triptych of major works written in the decade preceding *The Booking*. Campbell's novels *The Grin of the Dark*, *The Seven Days of Cain* and *Think Yourself Lucky* are all texts, or, as I deem them, 'techno-fictions', that feature various, then new, forms of social media and digital

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[7] Nayar, *Posthumanism*, p. 5.

technology.[8] They are important works in explication of the evolution of Campbell's vision of the contemporary world and of the complex status of the human subject within it. The highly networked and digital 'reality' depicted explicitly in each of them serve to amplify his concerns, explored in previous chapters, about society and autopoiesis . These novels extend Campbell's already evident preoccupation with the capacity of the human to retain its integrity and its intelligibility to others and to itself. Moreover, their appearance coincides with what Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini have observed as a burgeoning 'growth in the posthuman academy' of theory and critical analysis since 2007.[9] In the course of exploring the posthuman content of these particular novels, my analysis explicates Campbell's unique exposition of the challenges to and transformations of subjectivity presented by this diverse, and still developing, set of paradigms.

Posthumanism as artistic phenomena, as opposed to an organised field of theoretical enquiry, is, of course, not new. Representation of the enhancement or even supercedence of the human has a significant literary history before Campbell, as Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Lovecraft's portrayal of a non-anthropocentric future and explicit reference to a 'post-human' race of super-intelligent beetles in his short story 'The Shadow Out of Time' (1936) famously exemplify.[10] In cross-disciplinary scholarship, seminal discourses on cybernetics by Norbert Wiener (1948), Ihab Hassan, whose article 'Prometheus as Performer'

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[8] They form a distinct grouping in contrast to other Campbell long fictions from the same period, notably *Thieving Fear*, *Creatures from the Pool* and *The Kind Folk*, in, as I demonstrate, the high profile that they all accord to technology.

[9] Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini, 'Preface', in *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), ed. by Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini, pp. xi—xxi (p. xiii).

[10] H.P. Lovecraft, 'The Shadow Out of Time', in *H. P. Lovecraft Omnibus* 3, pp. 464—544 (p. 498). Clarke and Rossini, in a prefatory chronology, push the timeline of literary posthumanism back even – and much - further, to Ratramnus of Corbie's 'Letter on the Cynocephali' (AD 865). *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, pp. xxv—xxix (p. xxv).

(1977) pioneered an application of posthumanist thinking to wider culture beyond

the sciences, and Donna Haraway's influential concept of the cyborg (1984), all

helped establish the breadth, legitimacy and vigour of posthumanism within

intellectual enquiry long before Hayles' work and the twenty-first century

expansion of scholarship noted by Clarke and Rossini.[11]

In an essay for the latter pair's *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the

Posthuman* (2017), Herbrechter himself notes an affinity between emergent

posthumanist positioning and the challenge to notions of a stable and unified self

in postmodernist literature. Postmodernist texts, he rightly maintains, already

implicitly destabilize notions of anthropocentric value systems and embodiment

through their presentation of ontological pluralities, reality as an artificial inter- and

metatextual construct, and occlusion of division between high and low cultural

forms. Amidst this tendency to destabilize, Herbrechter elevates Lyotard as 'the

thinker of the postmodern *par excellence*'.[12] This assessment ignores the

substantial contribution to postmodernism made by Baudrillard. Baudrillard's

argument, for example, on the dissembling proliferation of simulacra, to the extent

that '[e]lectronic media means light speed communication, but inderterminacy, no

more transcendence, or 'God'', seems at least at prescient.[13] Similarly,

Baudrillard's observation that '[t]he simulated disorder of things has moved faster

than we have' chimes with and anticipates the acceleration in computer-generated

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[11] Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Paris: Hermann & Co., 1948); Ihab Hassan, 'Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture? ', *Georgia Review*, 31.4 (Winter, 1977), pp. 830—50, and Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' (1984), repr. in *International Handbook of Virtual Learning Environments,* pp 117—158, <https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4020-3803-7_4> [first accessed 20 February 2020].
[12] Herbrechter, 'Postmodern', in *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, p. 55, emphasis in original.
[13] Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p. 196.

virtual reality seen in the contemporary, increasingly digital world.[14] Other critics,

for instance Aldana Reyes with Linnie Blake in specific relation to recent 'digital

horror' cinema, have more explicitly invoked and assimilated Baudrillardian

concepts. In a pithy definition of this new sub-mode, as applicable to literary as

much as cinematic representations, Blake and Aldana Reyes refer to digital

horror's proclivity to explore 'a digital age governed by informational flows,

rhizomatic public networks, virtual simulation and visual hyper-stimulation'.[15] I

return to these scholars' contribution as it may specifically be applied to

Campbell's work later.

However, Herbrechter is right to cite Lyotard's collection of essays *The*

Inhuman: Reflections on Time as being a seminal influence on posthuman theory.

Lyotard's earlier volume, *The Postmodern Condition*, which I have cited above,

had already warned of the propensity of the growth of science, the 'technological

megalopolis', to signify 'cultural imperialism' and 'produce not the known but the

unknown', although the philosopher's recommendation for 'free access to memory

and databases' seemed to present an optimistic, and perhaps arguably

retrospectively naïve, gloss upon such technological expansion.[16] *The Inhuman*,

by contrast, promotes fully the alienating, 'other'-ing aspect of technology. In 'a

blow to human narcissism', technology is perceived as having invented the

human, rather than vice versa.[17] According to this non-Cartesian idiom,

developments in fields such as Artificial Intelligence see the subject 'becoming'

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[14] Baudrillard, *Perfect Crime*, p. 101.

[15] See, for example, Linnie Blake and Xavier Aldana Reyes, 'Introduction: Horror in the Digital Age', in *Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic and the Found Phenomenon* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016), ed. by Linnie Blake and Xavier Aldana Reyes, pp. 1—13 (p. 3).

[16] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, pp. 60, 27, 60 and 69. Lyotard, in his democratic ruminations, could not have anticipated organisations like News Corp and the growth in subscription 'pay-per-view' services.

[17] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 [1988]), p. 45.

and 'inhabited' by the non-human, developments which generate and foster sensations of 'threats and terror'.[18] Moreover, consciousness is divided from corpereal materiality: '[t]he separation of Thought from the Body', Lyotard argues, 'leaves behind a poor binarised ghost of what it [the whole human] was before'.[19] It is the poignant as well as divided figure of this 'poor binarised ghost' that attains centrality in my discussion here.

The notion of an encroachment upon or presence within a vulnerable and itself divided subject by the non- or inhuman is a significant point of continuity between postmodernism and posthumanism. This is demonstrated in Clarke and Rossini's own similar argument that posthumanism 'observes the inhuman or non-human other inhabiting the ostensibly human and so deconstructing the humanist concept of the human'.[20] The keen internal sense, or, as Michael Sean Bolton describes 'dread', that alterity 'already inhabits' the subject also, and crucially for an analysis of Campbell's work, manifests itself in an emergent sub-branch of cultural studies within posthumanism: the posthuman Gothic.[21] According to Bolton, the fear of the subject's distintegration that characterises literary postmodernism is replaced in the posthuman Gothic by anxiety as to its integration or supercedence, a fear of 'what we will become and what will be left of us', that is, of a 'continued existence [but] reconstituted' as something else, something 'other'.[22] As Bolton's own work on the encroaching 'technological other' attests, and as Heise-von der Lippe also argues, this new tendency within posthumanist cultural and especially literary studies serves to counter an extant bias in the field

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[18] Ibid, p. 67.
[19] Ibid, p. 17.
[20] Clarke and Rossini, Preface, *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*, p. xiv.
[21] Michael Sean Bolton: 'Monstrous Machinery: Defining Posthuman Gothic', *Aeternum: The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies*, 1.1 (June 2014): 1–15 (p. 5).
[22] Ibid, pp. 3, 2.

towards the analysis of science fiction.[23] Science fiction had been singled out by

Marshall McLuhan in his seminal *The Media is the Massage* (1967) as the

optimum literary mode for 'enabl[ing] us to perceive the potential of new

technologies', and is described by Herbrechter as 'the most posthuman of all

genres'.[24] To a degree, texts like *Frankenstein* or, especially, 'The Shadow Out of

Time', display a fidelity to science fiction, while the work of authors like Ballard and

Philip K. Dick have conventionally been, in part or totality, associated with the

genre. As far as posthumanism is concerned, posthuman Gothic studies represent

an attempt to incorporate a seemingly incongruous mode, the apparently archaic,

historically delineated and preoccupied Gothic, under the same intellectual

firmament of posthumanism as the more obviously compatible futurological and

speculative concerns of science fiction. Yet, taking further Botting's argument that

Gothic 'engenders a new relationship between technology and the supernatural',

Heise-von der Lippe points out that the Gothic mode, in contrast to science fiction,

pre-emptively contemplates the negative 'horrors of technology' by virtue of its

being a literature that is *already* explicitly defined by anxiety and liminality.[25] Neatly

tying Gothic, posthumanism and postmodernism together, she observes that:

> [t]he posthuman's decidedly uncanny connations are rooted in the subject's
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> incapability to [sic] abject its monstrous/posthuman features in the process
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> of trying to establish a coherent identity narrative – a discursive feat that is,
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> moreover, highly problematic after postmodernism.[26]

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[23] Ibid, p. 4.
[24] Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*, co-ord. by Jerome Agel
(London: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 124; Herbrechter, *Posthumanism,* p. 116.
[25] Fred Botting, *Limits of Horror: Technologies, Bodies, Gothic* (Manchester: Manchester University
Press, 2008), p. 86; Heise van-der Lippe, 'Introduction: Post/human/Gothic', p. 5, emphasis added.
[26] Heise-van der Lippe, 'Introduction: Post/human/Gothic', p. 6.

Such a linkage of monstrous alterity, a central tenet of horror, with posthuman paradigms serves to validate a consideration of horror fiction in conjunction with the latter. It is, I argue, particularly relevant for my discussion of Campbell, whose desire to probe generic boundaries and admiration for Ballard and Dick are a matter of record.[27]

In their introduction to *Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic and the Found Footage Phenomenon* (2016), Blake and Aldana Reyes outline three sources of fear engendered by a computer based, technologically advanced society: the online experience of surveillance, exposure to the predation of strangers 'from beyond', and digital haunting's 'impact on human identity'.[28] Campbell's fictions mediate and engage with all three varieties of persecution, of 'haunting', but it is the last two that I wish to focus upon here. In contrast to the depiction of psychic fragmentation in *The Booking* and *Needing Ghosts*, and the ambivalence of the apparitions in the latter (which may or may not be manifestations of Mottershead's psyche), all three novels discussed in this chapter present more explicitly supernatural narratives of alterity. It is important, however, to define what these narratives and the metaleptic entities contained within them are *not*. Campbell's fictions have not been, to date, concerned with futurology, Artificial Intelligence, the depiction of cyborgs or robotic characters or transhuman or species-ist themes – the latter a preoccupation for example for Nayar, one of the few posthumanist theorists or critics, thus far, to engage with literary genres and to do so beyond science fiction. Nor, crucially, are Campbell's 'ghosts' strictly

[27] See, for example, McWilliam, 'Ramsey Campbell Interviewed', in which Campbell acknowledges Dick as being 'a favourite', and the naming of a character after Ballard in *The Seven Days of Cain*, discussed later in this chapter.
[28] Blake and Aldana Reyes, 'Introduction: Horror in the Digital Age', p. 3.

defined as simply deceased human figures from the past, even, as will be seen, the figure of 'Tubby Thackeray' or the force that he represents in *The Grin of the Dark.* Whether they are entities metaphysically outside normal human comprehension of parameters of life and death, projections of aspects of personality, or fictional characters created within the text's own diegesis, the 'strangers' and disembodied virtual lives in Campbell's version of hauntology are more ontologically and philosophically challenging. In comparison with the conventional 'ghost', with its connotations of incorporation within the somewhat formal and formulaic structure of the ghost story, the definition of spectrality offered by Julian Wolfreys, that is as a presence, 'neither living nor dead', seems more apposite to the presentation of the metaleptic entities or 'poor binarised ghosts' in Campbell's fictions, and especially to the unsettling effects wielded by their manifestation in experiential reality.[29] In defining the spectral, Wolfreys argues that:

> there is, there *takes place*, an arrival from somewhere else, made manifest as a figure of otherness disrupting orders and systems of representation, logic, and so forth, and which, in arriving, returning, or coming to pass, traverses and blurs any neat analytic distinction.[30]

The imminence, presence or advent of the entity thus in itself attains centrality. Each 'arrival' or interloper in Campbell's techno-fictions considered here articulates themes of monstrosity, or at least instability, disruption and transformation, and, ultimately, can be shown to reflect and contribute to philosophical debates informing posthumanism. The three novels discussed each

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[29] Julian Wolfreys, 'Spectrality', in *Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, II, pp. 638—44 (p. 639).
[30] Ibid, p. 638, emphasis in original.

employ, and reinterpret for a technologically-advanced era, familiar generic antecedents and leitmotifs from the Gothic. *The Grin of the Dark* draws on a tradition of coulrophobia and the ambiguous, sinister quality latent in dark comedy, especially the carnivalesque, to explore fear of subsumation into alterity and of what the transformed subject may become. Campbell's 2014 novel, *Think Yourself Lucky*, revisits the doppelgänger and dual personality traditions familiar from Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and, most obviously, Robert Louis Stevenson's novella *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) in addressing embodiment. In also returning explicitly to the social concerns of earlier novels explored in my second chapter, the text re-examines the subject's socially-inflected potentiality for violence in the context of more recent technological developments. Finally, the intermediate novel, *The Seven Days of Cain*, among Campbell's most cross-generic long fictions and perhaps, alongside *Needing Ghosts,* his most thoroughly exploratory artistic and philosophical statement, updates Shelley's *Frankenstein* to articulate the posthuman created being's fear of isolation, loneliness and abandonment.

Campbell himself, characteristically, has eschewed any such posthumanist theoretical perspectives, or (in contrast to Ligotti, for example) ambitions to make a philosophical treatise or statement. Consistently, he has intended, as his website declares, to 'write horror' and thus create narratives of fear – in these cases, nightmares of autopoiesis. As noted in the first chapter of this thesis, early in his career Campbell had concocted a working formula by which an ordinary, that is working or middle class, protagonist is threatened by 'something out there that is out to get them for whatever reason'.[31] *The Grin of the Dark*, the first of the novels

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[31] Jones, '*Weird Tales* talks with Ramsey Campbell', p. 66.

I consider here, in which the protagonist-victim's very access to a plethora of media and technologies exposes them to an ancient and malevolent force that is using these new forms of communication as a conduit, appears to conform most fully to the classical, Lovecraftian notion of an external threat from 'out there'. The reality is, however, more complex than it appears.

2. 'Some Older and More Savage God': Technology as 'New Religion' in *The Grin of the Dark*

Campbell has described his 2007 novel as a dark comedy 'of derangement and chaos'.[32] Prior to the *Three Births of Daoloth* trilogy, *Grin of the Dark* presents the author's most sustained attempt to unify the Lovecraftian cosmic vistas seen in *The Hungry Moon* with the portrayal of a besieged individual psyche, as portrayed in *Needing Ghosts*. This is crystallised in a first person and present tense narrative, conveying sensory immediacy to the experiences and growing paranoia of Simon Lester, the novel's protagonist. Despite his initial assertion that 'I'm going to take charge of my life' (p. 7), Lester is another of Campbell's unreliable narrators.[33] Like Kiefer in *The Booking*, and most other lead characters in Campbell's oeuvre of the embittered, Simon is economically compromised and socially marginalised. The narrative's setting is a familiar, urban one, replete with keenly depicted mundaneness, frustration and drudgery. A media studies graduate, whose career in film journalism has been truncated by a libel scandal that closed a magazine to which he contributed, Lester scrapes a living working in video and petrol station shops. He also struggles in his relationships with his

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[32] McWilliam, 'Ramsey Campbell interviewed'.
[33] Campbell, *The Grin of the Dark* (London: Virgin Books, 2008 [2007]). All subsequent references are to this edition.

partner, Natalie, whose young son, Mark, is his only real ally, and with Natalie's parents, who disapprove of him and also happen to be his landlords. In an apparent positive turn of fortune, Simon accepts a lucrative commission from Rufus Wall, his former university tutor, to turn his undergraduate dissertation on early silent film comedy into a monograph. Specifically, Lester is encouraged by Wall to expand his research on Tubby Thackeray, a once controversially anarchic but now largely forgotten stage and silent film comedian. 'Tubby Thackeray', it emerges, is the innocuous-sounding pseudonym of an early twentieth-century medievalist and occultist, Thackeray Lane, who has dedicated himself to propagating the 'joy of infantilism' (p. 255). In the course of an increasingly surreal narrative, Lester, among other bizarre events, witnesses a violent and sexually charged performance by a troupe of itinerant, silent clowns, is drawn into fractitious correspondence with a malevolent Internet chatroom poster operating by the login name 'Smilemime', and experiences hallucinogenic and debilitating episodes in Los Angeles and Amsterdam. Thackeray Lane is dead, and neither he nor Tubby appear to the hero in corporeal form. However, to deploy a circus analogy, Simon's endeavours to balance his life on a tightrope against the insidious attack of an apparently supernatural antagonist and without a safety net seem to end in failure. In the novel's climax, the protagonist plunges into, and is apparently subsumed in, an abyss of the eponymous 'dark'. Far from asserting 'control', he seems to lose his own identity and to assume a virtual, non-physical existence as his own previous nemesis, 'Smilemime'. Simon has finally become, like Tubby, or the force that Tubby incarnates, 'part of the Internet' (p. 317).

The plot of Campbell's earlier long fiction, *Ancient Images*, had also concerned the search for a 'lost' film. To an even greater degree than that text,

Grin of the Dark showcases Campbell's meticulous research and experience as a film critic.[34] Allusions to real individuals like Mack Sennett or Stan Laurel and events, notably the Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle scandal (1921—2), are woven seamlessly into a fictional narrative. This narrative itself draws upon a range of film texts for its construction of both Tubby, whose perpetual grin evokes the antagonist in *Mr Sardonicus* (William Castle, 1961), and his pictures, from the asylum-set climax of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920) to the appearance of multiples of the titular actor in the surreal comedy, *Being John Malkovitch* (Spike Jonze, 1999).[35] However, *Ancient Images*, in that its denouement concerns 'cursed land', takes final recourse to pre-cinematic 'folk horror' conventions. With some justification, Joshi criticises the earlier novel for thus 'failing to probe the many interesting philosophical issues it raises', such as the diversification and social roles of media or the relationship between film and reality.[36] In contrast, as Richard Bleiler notes, *Grin of the Dark*, with its protean, multi-media antagonist, reflects and mediates 'a recognizably data-driven and mutable twenty-first-century world'.[37]

The story outline given above barely conveys the complexity of this text, which is both seemingly technophobic and playful. To a degree greater even than his earlier tragicomic serial killer narrative, *The Count of Eleven*, *Grin of the Dark* represents Campbell's most overt and sustained combination of comedy and

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[34] The 2009 novel, *Creatures from the Pool*, in its blend of real-life secondary sources and the purely fictional, similarly conveys the author's conscientiousness as a local (Merseyside) historian.
[35] In addition to *Mr Sardonicus*, Tubby's permanent grin also recalls *The Man Who Laughs* (Paul Leni, 1928), an adaptation of Victor Hugo's novel, *L'homme qui rit* (1869), although foregrounding the grotesque rather than the historic or tragic.
[36] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 92; *Modern Weird Tale*, p. 146.
[37] Richard Bleiler, 'Ramsey Campbell and the Twenty-First-Century Weird Tale', in *Ramsey Campbell: Critical Essays on the Modern Master of Horror*, pp. 47—54 (p. 50). Bleiler, disappointingly, does not explore in detail the philosophical ramifications beyond an obvious comparison of technology in the two novels.

horror. The novel, with its ill-fated protagonist on a quest for 'lost' artefacts, displays formal fidelity to horror tradition. Campbell's uncharacterised, infantile 'greedy chaos' (p. 340) obviously recalls Azathoth, blind, idiot god from Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, a being first alluded to in the novella *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* (1926). The likening of Tubby himself to a long-legged 'grasshopper with a man's face' (p. 121) inciting anarchy amongst his audience again recalls the Martian insects and their combination of ancient, alien intelligence and dominion over primal humanity in Nigel Kneale's teleplay, *Quatermass and The Pit*. *Grin of the Dark* itself may be interpreted as a conscious cross-media updating by Campbell of the then fashionable 'found footage' subgenre, a trend popularised by *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999) and described as 'highly Gothic' by Blake and Aldana Reyes.[38] Simon pursues Lane's elusive films, and the text of the novel itself finally becomes Lester's own testament or 'found footage'.

In particular though, from the protagonist's first glimpse of a grinning 'moon-faced man in evening dress' (p. 1) eyeing him from a barge, *Grin of the Dark* draws explicitly upon another familiar cultural as well as generic trope: the 'evil clown' figure. Coulrophobia had had a high profile in the Anglo-American zeitgeist in the two decades preceding the novel's appearance. It was published in the wake of the crimes and execution of the media-labelled 'Killer Clown' John Wayne Gacy (1942—94), the release of films like *Killer Klowns From Outer Space* (Stephen Chiodo, 1988), and literary works by Alan Ryan, (*Dead White*, 1983), King (the aforementioned *IT*, first adapted, for television, in 1990) and Ligotti ('The

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[38] Blake and Aldana Reyes, 'Introduction: Horror in the Digital Age', p. 4.

Last Feast of Harlequin', 1991).[39] An allusive and metatextual novel, *Grin of the Dark* at one point presents a partial, pseudo-historical account of the origins of clowning, from the medieval Feast of Fools splintering into the Troupe of Fools and the Black Mass, to the near present. Campbell even acknowledges Ligotti's story directly in the passing reference: '[c]ertainly the Troupe had been heard of in the town of Mirocaw' (p. 255).

However, the significance of the text's deployment of the clown trope lies not especially with its originality, referentiality or the historical accuracy, or otherwise, of associating the Troupe with Satanism, but its purpose and cumulative effect. For example, in comparison with Ligotti or King's carnivorous, people-eating entities, Campbell's Tubby Thackeray presents an alterity of the insidious. Half glimpsed, overheard or dreamed about by the protagonist almost until the end, Thackeray's encroachment upon Lester's quotidian existence emulates the approaching threat in an M. R. James narrative. The professor's trepidation regarding the approaching figure in his dream in James's '"Oh Whistle, And I'll Come To You My Lad"', that '[t]there was something about its motion that made Parkins very reluctant to see it at close quarters', is echoed explicitly in one of Simon's own nightmares.[40] In Campbell's reboot for the twenty-first century, the beach is replaced by the monitor. Defamiliarised, the personal computer becomes a portal for 'other'-ness:

> The yellow keys rattle like boxes […]. The screen is no longer featureless.

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[39] On Gacy, see, for example, Terry Sullivan and Peter M. T. Maiken, *Killer Clown: The John Wayne Gacy Murders* (New York: Pinnacle, 1983) and numerous other interpretations in print and televisual media. Both King and Ligotti, as stated, have now generated sizeable scholarship. For a Bakhtinian reading of 'Last Feast', for instance, see Jason Marc Harris, 'Smiles of Oblivion: Demonic Clowns and Doomed Puppets as Fantastic Figures of Absurdity, Chaos, and Misanthropy in the Writings of Thomas Ligotti', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 45.6 (December 2012): 1249—65.
[40] M. R. James, *Penguin Complete Ghost Stories*, p. 83.

Its sides extend backwards to form the floor and walls and ceiling of a

corridor. Though it appears to stretch almost to infinity I can just distinguish

a figure that is waiting at the end. It's approaching, or am I? I would very

much prefer it to keep its distance. (p. 109)

As in a typical James story, the entity itself is described as repellantly inhuman:

'cold', 'pale and glistening', limbless, resembling 'a jellyfish', and displaying an

unwelcome penchant for slithering under the protagonist's bed (p. 198). Like

James's hapless Professor Parkins, Lester dreads his tormentor's proximity and

touch. In the novel's climax of physical horror, Simon finally watches helplessly as

'it clambers limblessly up my body and closes over my face' (p. 338). *Grin of the

Dark* in one sense thus presents a classic 'possession' narrative in succession to

earlier Campbell novels like *The Parasite*, which the author had described as 'a

study of the derangement of a personality' by another, invasive one.[41]

What confers upon the later novel greater ideological complexity is that the

clown, by virtue of its inherent anarchy, symbolises iconoclasticism. It is the

perfect, irreverent inhabitant of the kind of contemporary world described by

Baudrillard in *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1987). This is a landscape denoted

by 'obscenity', saturated with information, in which '[e]verything eludes itself,

everything scoffs at its own truth', and attainment of this 'truth', that is, reality, is

'*quite simply impossible'*.[42] The online ticket booking system for the troupe,

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[41] Campbell, 'A Small Dose of Reality', *Fantasy Review*, 8.11, (November 1985), repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 294—300 (p. 295). The victim in *The Parasite* is female, and Campbell specifies that the 'invasion' is that 'of a female personality by a (dormant) [because dead] male' (p. 295), with 'rape' acting as 'central metaphor' (p. 296). Like several of Campbell's short stories, notably 'Cold Print' (1966), 'The Staircase' (1968) and 'The Telephones' (1976), *Grin* lends itself profitably to Queer studies analysis. However, it is the ontological significance of, rather than sexual threat posed by, the novel's antagonist that concerns me here.
[42] Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, trans. by Bernard Schütze and Caroline Schütze (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012 [1987]), pp. 26, 62, emphasis in original.

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'Clwons [sic] Unlimited' (p. 29) – 'clwons' itself being a play on 'clones' – later mysteriously disappears without trace. In the manner of Luis Buñuel's surrealist comedy *L'Age d'Or* (1930), Lane's comedy films, as when Tubby's 'hilarious face' is substituted for those of 'a queen, mayor, monk, mitred bishop or archbishop and a long-haired saint with a rakish halo' (p. 103), 'scoff' at or satirise figures of secular and religious authority. In another short, Tubby's head is described as smashing through the back of a nativity tableau and appearing 'above the occupants of the stable like a manifestation of an older and more savage god' (p. 272). Like *The Hungry Moon* amongst Campbell's earlier novels discussed above, *Grin of the Dark* thus presents subversion of the 'grand narrative' of organised religion, especially Christian religion.[43] Yet, summarised in its protagonist's exasperated temptation 'to wonder aloud if faith in technology is the new religion' (p. 267), of greater centrality is the burgeoning 'technology' perceived as replacement.

The novel, Campbell's most hard- and software dominated long fiction to date, presents a contemporary world in which McLuhan's vision of an 'electric technology' that pervades and reshapes all aspects of both social relations and personal life has been realised.[44] *Grin of the Dark* actualises the theorist's notion of media reflecting and even simulating human consciousness, but also, in reciprocation, 'leav[ing] no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered'.[45] 'We're all part of the Internet', its narrator declares, 'exactly as we've made it part of us. We've added it to human consciousness' (p. 340). Expanding information technology, new forms of social media and, above all, the greater connectivity

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[44] McLuhan and Fiore, *Medium is the Massage*, p. 4.
[45] Ibid, p. 26; Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001 [1964]), pp. 3—6.

afforded by the Internet may be interpreted as proffering greater freedoms,

enhanced communication and instant gratification. However, as Blake and Aldana

Reyes point out in their study of digital horror films, nothing is really 'free': such

enhanced technology has 'itself become widely monitored in the interests of

maintaining the global hegemony of corporate capitalism'.[46] In Campbell's

imaginative universe, the 'Frugo' organisation, described by Sawyer as 'a global,

faceless corporation', fulfils this role.[47] The organisation serves as a leitmotif or

backdrop in many of Campbell's late works including *The Overnight* and the three

novels I discuss here. In *Grin of the Dark*, almost Lester's first action is to register

a 'Frugonet' email address, thus signalling immediately his own enmeshment in

the 'system'. A wryly humourous scene in which Simon's party have to use a

mouse just to communicate orders to a restaurant kitchen (p. 143) suggests the

absurd drawbacks of over-dependence on technology. Simon's subsequent

financial misfortune, in which he becomes overdrawn and encounters the

bureaucratic claim that his declined credit card 'needs your number', because

'[e]veryone needs a number now' (p. 189), dramatises McLuhan's claim that

information retrieval and data banks 'form one big gossip column that is

unforgiving, unforgetful and from which there is no redemption, no erasure of easy

'mistakes'.[48] In posthumanist terms, the protagonist is diminished by the seemingly

autonomous and sentient machine, a new, altered reality that appears to belie a

bank official's sarcastic assurance that 'computers don't make payments on their

own' (p. 267). The hapless Lester seems to meet, and indeed literalise with his

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[46] Blake and Aldana Reyes, 'Introduction: Horror in the Digital Age', p. 5.
[47] Sawyer, '"That Ill-Rumoured and Evilly-Shadowed Seaport"', p. 15.
[48] McLuhan, Fiore, *Medium is the Massage*, p. 12.

card, Herbrechter's observation that '[g]lobal virtual capitalism needs an equally plastic and flexible individual subject'.[49]

From one perspective then, the novel is a satirical portrait of technophilic cultural trends, carried almost to the point of obsessive fetishising. This obsession is, conveyed most obviously by a narrator-protagonist who largely works and lives by screen monitor. Simon has access to and uses a range of media in addition to videotape, such as mobile phones and DVDs, and online tools like eBay, email and the Internet Movie Database with its chatroom – resources that either did not exist or were in relatively limited and unsophisticated form when *Ancient Images* was written. Conversely, however, much of the narrative focuses upon the potential of this greatly enhanced digital world to generate fear, and the compromised subject's increasing *lack* of control, both against predation by strangers and of their own ontological integrity.

Campbell's text presents a comprehensive Gothic interpretation of old and emergent technologies. There are constant insinuations of an undefined malevolent supernaturalism acting against the protagonist, such as a videotape from which a Thackeray film excerpt myseriously disappears, 'except for static that hisses in a rhythm I could imagine is actively gleeful' (p. 54), or Simon's feeling that 'someone or something has gone to ground' inside his computer (p. 110). Aesthetically, such details, alongside the continuous half-glimpses of sinister, grinning figures and overheard laughter, may seem repetitious and overdone, but they convey a powerful sense of the accretion of evil. Further, in its treatment of two negative phenomena experienced online, trolling and malicious software or

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[49] Herbrechter, *Posthumanism*, p. 28.

computer 'viruses', the text suggests that this force is actively empowered by the
increasingly digital world.

Demonstrated by the presentation of the malign troll Smilemime, the
network confers a persona or mask of anonymity.[50] The practice of trolling, that is,
online attack upon one consciousness by another, an assailant who may or may
not be known to the victim but who uses the disguise of an assumed identity, is
returned to in representation of social media in the later two novels I will discuss,
especially *The Seven Days of Cain*, but it is given its first representation in *Grin of
the Dark*.[51] Smilemime is an arrogant, vicious and cynical presense that
undermines Lester constantly, denying the expertise and even identity of the
protagonist whom he deems as 'Mr Questionnable' (sic, p. 59) in tirades of
deliberately misspelt, consonant-laden postings. Trolls are explicitly dehumanised
and supernaturalised in the text, likened to '[m]onsters' that the Internet has
somehow dredged up 'from the depths', 'let loose', or even 'created' (pp. 158,
301). Confirming the intention to confer an aura of supernatural mystery, it is left
unresolved whether Smilemime is in fact an alias for Lane, his alter ego Tubby, or
the force that both represent.[52] Psychologically, Smilemime always seems to be
one step ahead of Lester. His derisive and hectoring tone resembles a 'maniacal
and mechanical laughter' (p. 301), a phrase neatly combining Gothic madness and

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[50] The literature on behaviours in relation to the Internet is substantial. See, for example, Yair
Amichair-Hamburger, 'Personality, Individual Differences and Internet Use', in *The Oxford
Handbook of Internet Psychology*, ed. by Adam Joinson and others (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 2007), pp. 187—204. Amongst differences to face-to-face interaction, Amichair-Hamburger
identifies greater anonymity, control over time and pace of interaction, and 'ease of finding others'
(pp. 187—188).

[51] Amongst many definitions of the internet slang term 'troll', see, for example, that given by Claire
Hardaker, as a computer user whose 'intention(s)is/are to cause disruption and/or to trigger or
exacerbate conflict for the purposes of their own amusement.' 'Trolling in Asynchronous Computer-
mediated Communication: From User Discussions to Academic Definitions', *Journal of Politeness
Research*, 6.2 (2010): 215—42 (p. 237).

[52] Or indeed all of these and Lester himself, a point which is returned to shortly.

new technology, that the hero-victim at one point overhears. Yet, like the source of

the sound, the troll remains intangible, invisible. In reality, not all such malicious

posters have the inclination, let alone technical ability, to create and distribute

malicious software. However, Campbell's novel explicitly associates the invisible

troll with another 'unseen' menace, the computer 'virus'. Deploying a metaphor of

infection, the text infers that the network has enabled its dissemination. Lester

describes Smilemime's messages as 'multiplying like a virus in his dreams' and

feeling as if the entity's 'monomania has invaded his skull' (pp. 135, 156). He later

suffers the indignity of seeing his work misattributed to another writer, and, finally,

corrupted completely by 'some kind of virus' into incoherent 'rubbish' (pp. 260,

301). Even Lester's social interactions gradually become contaminated and

debilitated, as when he and Mark are described 'infect[ing] each other with

painfully silent mirth' (p. 288). Although obviously a literary and not a film text, *Grin

of the Dark* therefore seems to chime with what Steffen Hantke identifies as a

'digital anxiety' trend in cinema, in which technology serves as 'a conduit for

malignant forces travelling along the network's arteries'.[53] A still more useful

analogy, to a point, is with Neal Kirk's concept of 'networked spectrality', denoted

by polymorphous, shapeshifting and 'omnipresent' ghosts that have taken on 'the

unbounded, multiple, distributive and participatory qualities of our digital networks',

rather than a singular identity and location of 'haunting'.[54]

The climax of Campbell's novel, in which the Internet is revealed as 'the

portal' that 'can never be closed' (p. 317) aligns with Kirk's description of an

[53] Steffen Hantke, 'Network Anxieties: Prefiguring Digital Anxieties in the American Horror Film', in *Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic and the Found Footage Phenomenon*, pp. 17—28 (p. 18).
[54] Neal Kirk, Networked Spirituality*: In Memorium* [sic]*, Pulse* and Beyond', in *Digital Horror: Haunted Technologies, Network Panic and the Found Footage Phenomenon,* pp. 54—65 (pp. 59, 57).

'apocalyptic digital contagon' acting through portals and websites in films like *Pulse* (Jim Sonzero, 2006).[55] In *Grin of the Dark*, Rufus Wall's exposition indicts the Internet for spreading this 'contagion', and Simon for unleashing it:

> It's his [Lane/Tubby's] ideal medium, the one he's been waiting for, or whatever he represents has. […] Everything's true on the net, and it lets anyone use a mask who wants to. It's the medium he kept talking about. […] he'll be everywhere, or what's used him for a mask will. You've seen to that. (p. 335)

Combining the analogy of viral transmission with survivalist instincts, Wall insists that '[y]ou have to pass him on to other people' (p. 335). Evidently, the 'curse' motif is another longstanding staple of the genre. It had already been updated to assimilate modern technology in texts like *Ringu* (both Kōji Suzuki's 1991 novel and Hideo Nakata's subsequent 1998 film adaptation), in which unwarily watching a video precedes dabbling in the Internet as a means of summoning a malevolent and malignant spectre. However, Campbell's text, whilst ostensibly being a conservative, cautionary tale like *Ringu*, is arguably more ontologically challenging than the earlier, revenant narrative. Also, unlike *Pulse*, which finally portrays its infection by ghosts of the dead in terms of global catastrophe, *Grin of the Dark*, despite Wall's pronouncements regarding the force's universality, presents an 'apocalypse' that is far more personal in scope.

Campbell's novel foregrounds concerns around communication, isolation and victimisation, especially subsumation by and becoming 'other'. The protagonist's experience within the narrative is a journey of increasing sensory

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[55] Ibid, p. 60.

disorientation, in which boundaries between what is real and unreal become opaque. In contrast to, for example, King's *IT,* which finally becomes a Manichaen narrative of collective good against evil, clowning in *Grin of the Dark* signifies an escalating and unsettling 'comedy' of humilation. Lester variously falls flat on his face before an audience, feels repeatedly trapped in a 'witless' or 'ponderous' comedy routine, and has the embarassment in his keenly felt 'poverty' of perceiving that he has acquired 'a jester's cap complete with a silent bell' (pp. 193, 202, 263, 266). Tellingly, again deploying epidemiological terminology in one episode in which Simon is viewing a deteriorating microfilm, Lester describes feeling 'as if nonsense is spreading through the text – as if the silent clamour of Lane's misshapen language in my skull is infecting the historical record' (p. 257). In his analysis of the ontological implications of posthumanism, Herbrechter maintains that language 'cannot be trusted' as a guarantor of identity.[56] *Grin of the Dark* appears to anticipate and dramatise Herbrechter's argument. It is one of Campbell's most self-consciously lexiographic narratives, as attested to by its wordplay, deliberate misspellings, anagramatic chapter names and, above all, a protagonist whose control over speech deteriorates, to the point where 'struggle for coherence simply produces worse gibberish until my babbling gags on itself' (p. 338). Lester's verbal disenfranchisement precedes the psychological invasion of the subject by malign technology. As the narrator explains, '[o]nce the net captures you it can reprogram your mind, reconfigure you in its image' (p. 341), an idea refrained with Brookes's paranoia in *The Booking*. This 'reprogramming' accords with Bleiler's observation that 'the very essences of identity are fluid and malleable, for the underlying data that gave them meaning can be restructured',

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[56] Herbrechter, *Posthumanism*, p. 88.

but its significance can, I think, be taken further.[57] The novel's ending suggests a literalisation of Baudrillard's vision of human bodies themselves becoming 'superfluous', existing only 'as terminals of multiple networks'.[58] Simon's fate is to be removed from Natalie and others 'on the far side of the screen', and relocated with the click of a mouse (p. 336). In following Lane's invocation that '[h]e who opens the portal is the portal' (p. 317), the protagonist has himself become a disembodied consciousness and part of virtual reality. Lester seems to represent, *in extremis*, the 'deep-seated virtualization of human beings' which Baudrillard had envisaged as symptomatic of a culture 'in a state of socio-photo-and video synthesis'.[59] However, as noted by Sawyer regarding *Creatures of the Pool*, there is also a 'final, Ballardian embracing of the monstrous' in this novel.[60] The troll Smilemime's boast, '[t]hat's me in the middle of the web, and I've got tricks I haven't even thought of yet', is echoed in Simon's final undertaking (or threat) to 'keep posting my knowledge' (pp. 225, 341).

As a hybrid of horror and comedy, *Grin of the Dark,* to return to circus imagery, performs its own balancing act. On the one hand, as cosmic horror fiction it represents an update, or upgrade, from texts like *The Hungry Moon* in its depiction of an ancient and malevolent force using all the accoutrements of modern technology. However, as demonstrated by the fractured identity of the antagonist – Lane, Tubby, Smilemime, and finally Lester himself – what exactly this force *is* remains undefined. Campbell has declared that 'some tales try to hold the darkness back, while others illuminate it and its contents in an uncanny light,

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[57] Bleiler, 'Ramsey Campbell and the Twenty-First-Century Weird Tale', p. 52.
[58] Baudrillard, *Ecstasy of Communication*, pp. 24, 23.
[59] Baudrillard, *Perfect Crime*, pp. 27—8.
[60] Sawyer, '"That Ill-Rumoured and Evilly-Shadowed Seaport", p. 21.

or demonstrate that much of the dark is inside us'.[61] In its portrayal of external

predatory intelligence, *Grin of the Dark* seems to exemplify the second of these

options. On the other hand, the novel's mock-triumphant ending, which anticipates

Kiefer's defiant statement, '[i]t's exactly what I make it', in *The Booking* (p. 83),

suggests both internal desire and even anarchic joy at the possibilities open to the

transformed subject. This, plus the ambiguous corporeal status of its protagonist at

the novel's conclusion and the possibility, as with *The Booking* and *Needing

Ghosts,* that the entire preceding narrative may have been the outpourings of a

consciousness experiencing mental illness, suggests an iconoclasticism on the

part of the author. From one perspective, Campbell's dark comedy portrays

recognizable aspects of the imbricated postmodern and posthuman subject. The

historical verisimilitude denoted by the text's blending of a plethora of referents to

the real, such as Mack Sennet, with the entirely fictitious, like the invented film

director Orville Hart, mirrors the sensory disorientation of the protagonist in his

quest, in which the boundary between reality and unreality is opaque. This accords

with Baudrillard's argument regarding hyperreaity, that '[t]the more one nears truth

the more it retreats towards the omega point and the greater the rage to get at it',

a 'rage' which it proves 'impossib[le]' to master.[62] Further, whether *Grin of the Dark*

is interpreted as a portrait of creeping paranoid psychosis or as a supernatural

narrative, digital media is portrayed as pervasive, affective and realising

McLuhan's argument that '[a]ll media are extensions of some human faculty –

psychic or physical'.[63] Yet the ambiguity of the novel's conclusion, with its

protagonist's 'psychic' and 'physical' status uncertain, suggests that Campbell is

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[61] Klaehn, 'Reaching for the Awesome and Numinous', p. 314.
[62] Baudrillard, *Ecstasy of Communication*, p. 62.
[63] McLuhan, Fiore, *Medium is the Massage*, p. 26.

presenting such concepts without passing moral or value judgements. As remarked, his concerns have been primarily aesthetic, for 'broadening the genre' and for 'exploration of numerous different modes of horror fiction in search of the perfect form'.[64] In this light, *Grin of the Dark* may be interpreted not as a critique of postmodern subjectivity or the impact of globalisation upon it, but as a presentation of the subject in its atomised seclusion, an intimate apocalypse. In this comedy blending clowning traditions and ATMs, the reader is thus being presented with a last laugh on the author's part, as it were.

At one point in *Grin of the Dark*, the novel's protagonist, after realising that he may have imagined his visit to the circus and struggling to assert 'some sort of control', insists that '[w]riting is one way to make sense of the world' (p. 279). While this 2007 novel is a text focussed upon the impact of technology in all its variety of forms upon the subject, Campbell's later narrative *Think Yourself Lucky* turns more explicitly to both the exact nature of this transformed subjectivity and the status and responsibilities of authorship in the digital age. As a serial killer narrative, in which the only 'humour' is contained in the coruscating and cruel ruminations of its antagonist, *Think Yourself Lucky* presents immediate contrasts of subject matter and approach to its predecessor. An apparently non-Lovecraftian text, *Think Yourself Lucky* is nevertheless a work of supernaturalism strongly within generic tradition, and one that develops the theme of disembodiment. This time the ethereal alter ego depicted is clearly terrestrial, generated within and by a subject explicated as a writer in denial, rather than extraterrestrial in origin. In positing a being whose nature and behaviour is produced by the environment in

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[64] Campbell, 'Dig Us No Grave', p. 32; 'My Roots Exhumed', p. 4.

which the subject is imbricated, the text also marks a readdressing of the political

and social concerns of Campbell's earlier works discussed in previous chapters.

3. 'A New Species of Monster': Posthuman Sociopathy in *Think Yourself Lucky*

In contrast to its semi-comedic predecessor, *Think Yourself Lucky* reflects the

culture of austerity characterising British life at macro- and microlevels after the

financial crisis of 2008.[65] 'We're Still Left', the name of a bookshop that plays a

background if key role in the narrative, suggests both a defiance of and a

melancholy concession of isolated obsolescence against the dominant ideology of

neoliberalism. The novel's protagonist, David Botham, is another cowed and

economically compromised graduate. The son of two social workers working with

vulnerable people, Botham is employed at a Liverpool travel agency, 'Frugogo'.

Not only is the name a signposting manifestation of the author's default corporate

entity, but the outlet's viability itself is threatened due to its creeping anachronism

in an age of online travel services. As Andrea, David's former partner and now

overbearing line manager says, 'we're competing with the Internet as well' (p. 6).[66]

With her warnings about 'having to consider some reduction in the personnel' and

the compulsory need to 'feel we're all part of the firm' (pp. 33—4), Andrea is a

cipher for the brute impersonality of multinational companies. This working

environment is Campbell returning to what Joshi memorably described as the

white collar 'slow-burning hell' of petty office politics depicted in *Secret Story*.

Unlike that novel's Dudley Smith though, Botham pointedly insists that he is 'never

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[65] The economic environment engendered by the policies of post-2010 Conservative-led governments in Britain is delineated in my discussion of *The Booking* (2016), above.
[66] Campbell, *Think Yourself Lucky* (Hornsea: PS Publishing, 2014). All subsequent references are to this edition.

going to be a writer', and that he 'doesn't care for horror films' either (pp. 29, 83).

Despite repeated disclaimers regarding any desire for authorship, the reader

learns that David has casually attended a local writers' group. On hearing one of

his verbal tirades, the bookseller hosting it insists that David has the unique ability

to articulate people's repressed, negative feelings. The Internet, Kinnear

maintains, is 'democratising' (p. 6) the ability and opportunity to write. Feeling

under peer pressure at the time, Botham has suggested a title.

The novel's main narrative, presented conventionally in the third person and

past tense, recounts the protagonist's increasing horror as he realises that his

choice, 'Better Out Than In', has been adopted by a murderous web blogger using

the moniker 'Lucky Newless'. The name was a private childhood invention of

Botham's for an imaginary companion. Worse, Newless's victims, who each seem

objectively to be the subjects of unfortunate accidents, are all known or connected

to Botham in some way. The entity Newless has the ability to conceal or reveal its

appearance at will. Though rarely seen except by these casualties, third parties

like a security guard comment on an uncanny resemblance that the stranger, 'the

other feller' (p. 140), bears to Botham. In contrast with *Grin of the Dark*, where the

force of supernatural alterity is an insidious but emergent presence, Campbell

interpolates this main narrative with a second, parallel one from the outset, told in

first person and present tense from the perspective of the antagonist. Reproducing

its web log postings, these chapters express Newless's highly misanthropic

worldview and its perpetually 'unfinished business' (p. 10) - that is, its homicidal

activities - as they happen.

Think Yourself Lucky signals, then, Campbell returning to the theme of

serial murder, inaugurated in his long fictions with *The Face That Must Die*. Here

the theme is updated for a digital era, and, unlike the 1983 novel and the other 'killer' narratives that I have discussed, *The One Safe Place* and *Secret Story*, tenets of the paranormal are deployed .[67] As with *Grin of the Dark*, the text appears, on one level, to adopt a conservative critique of perceived dangers posed by the Internet's sheer availability. Trolling is, again, not least of these negative collaterals. As Botham observes resignedly, '[v]icious comments were often posted online after people died, not infrequently by total strangers lent courage by disguise or anonymity' (p. 83). Yet, in the shift of theme away from abuse by unseen others to web blogging, this text achieves a subtle switch of analytical focus to the subject and to creativity and, tentatively, the responsibilities it entails. Browsing the Internet, as it does in *Grin of the Dark*, exposes the protagonist to predation through the network's potentially addictive, narcotic power. The network is described as 'taking hold' of David's brain:

> one site leading him to another that tempted him to several more, besides which he found himself following random notions that seemed to belong less to his mind but to the electronic medium. No wonder they called it the net or the web; he could have imagined that thoughts he hardly knew he had were being trawled for, if not drawn in by an insubstantial trap. (p. 45—6)

Botham then immediately looks at the 'Better Out Than In' web log, which expresses 'thoughts' in writing. With the blog in mind, Botham explicitly blames the Internet for awarding licence to unleash these proscribed aspects of the psyche,

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[67] It is pre-dated in this respect by *The Seven Days of Cain* (2010). However, owing to what I demonstrate as that earlier novel's wider philosophical significance for author and subject and what it communicates about Campbell's vision, *Cain* is discussed last.

unacknowledged thoughts, incognito. He muses that '[i]f he were a writer perhaps he might have said that the dark matter that had been released was forming a new species of monster' (p. 46). Technology is thus ascribed with a seductive power of inducing psychosis, in which the subject's sense of 'reality' is lost, and understood as an outright breeding ground for anti-social disorder or sociopathy. Both psychiatric conditions are supernaturalised through their being couched in terms of leading astray, entrapment, darkness and monstrosity.

The protagonist's understanding is shown to be simplistic: in Campbell's vision, individual psychology, aberrant or otherwise, is linked inextricably to socio-economic environment. The text deftly refrains the acerbic cultural commentary present in the author's earlier socially conscious but non-supernatural novels like *Face That Must Die* and *One Safe Place* which examine the incidence of sociopathy within a pathologised culture. Despite the instant connectivity brought by digitalisation, societal relations are, again, defined by disconnection: aggression, suspicion and atomisation. As in *Grin of the Dark*, the vicious online troll is an element of this bleak landscape. Unlike the persistent Smilemime though, the troll is an almost ephemeral, background hazard in comparison with the hostilities the protagonist encounters in his quotidian experience. This is encapsulated in the observation from an unfriendly neighbour that '[t]here's a a sight too much familarity these days' (p. 121). In a development in Campbell's treatment of moral relativism that proves to be key, even characters that *should* engender sympathy according to contemporary political strictures, such as a mobility scooter user who asserts 'the right to be alive' (p. 72), are depicted as singularly rude, unsympathetic and uningratiating. Simultaneously, the novel updates ruminations, explored in *Secret Story* and *Needing Ghosts* respectively,

on the artistic anxieties and financial status of authorship. As the writers' group leader speculates concerning the future of literary agents: '[d]o you really want to give away a percentage of yourself? Maybe the electronic age will do away with that and publishers as well' (p. 27). The subject is thus inevitably imbricated in a matrix by external forces on all sides. *Think Yourself Lucky* explores what happens when digital representation attains primacy, challenging the notion of unified selfhood through a dissolution of boundaries and restraints – including that of the material body.

In acknowledging the 'electronic age', *Think Yourself Lucky* adheres to highly recognisable horror genre tradition, relating this awareness to the subject. In one acutely metatextual passage, Botham is described leaving the bookshop:

> As he stepped out of We're Still Left he saw the roofless church across the road, the walls left standing as a monument to the blitz, and it put him in mind of a hollow prayer. He suspected that was how a writer might think, and he expelled the fancy from his mind as he tramped downhill to the station. (p. 31)

The leitmotif of the abandoned building, such as the dilapadated theatre in *Obsession*, is a recurrent one in Campbell's fictions. Here, the 'roofless church' together with its connotations of 'hollow prayer', a ruin which reappears throughout the narrative, seems both a self-conscious acknowledgement of the text's 'Gothic' inheritance and a symbol of postmodernity's rootless spiritual ennui, within which the subject is enmeshed, and with which the subject, as reluctant 'writer', must struggle. Moreover, the novel itself is Campbell's most substantial reimagining of the criminal double or doppelgänger trope, a belated competitor to King's *The*

Dark Half, discussed above.[68] Campbell's choice of language, as I have argued, is always self-conscious and deliberate. His intentions in *Think Yourself Lucky* are signalled immediately, as Gary Fry points out, in the protagonist's apt surname, *both-am*.[69] The ensuing narrative, in which Newless's web log becomes a source of fear *and* a compulsion for the protagonist, lends itself to interpretation according to both postmodern and posthuman paradigms. For Baudrillard, the unacknowledged double is a 'spectre' which 'haunts the subject' as its 'other', 'causing him [sic] to be himself while at the same time never seeming like himself'.[70] In Campbell's novel, Botham, on first reading Lucky's blogposts, feels similarly, 'as if the contents of his skull were drifting loose' (p. 19). Herbrechter, focusing on the complexity of the subject's response to alterity, maintains that fear of such monsters is combined with 'desire to live out forbidden practices in a 'secure' fashion', in the form of 'exotic, escapist and exorcising phantoms'.[71] The confident and assertive Newless, declaring 'I'm no idiot of any kind, I'm the watcher you couldn't be bothered to notice… Mr Lucky on another mission' (p. 41), bears the same relationship to the callow Botham as, for example, Gil-Martin does to Wringham in *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, a brash entity which 'never go[es] but where I have some great purpose to serve' in self-

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[68] With respect to its 'divided' protagonist, Campbell's novel may also of course be compared to Chuck Palahniuk's earlier work, *Fight Club* (1996). Like Newless, Tyler Durden, the unnamed narrator's 'dark half', can similarly 'run off and do something wild, something crazy, something completely out of my mind' (London: Vintage Books, 2006, p. 163). However, Palahniuk's novel, unlike the others discussed here, has not usually been interpreted as a *supernatural* narrative within the parameters of the Gothic mode or horror genre.

[69] Gary Fry, 'A New Place to Hyde: Self and Society in Ramsey Campbell's *Think Yourself Lucky*', in *Thinking Horror: A Journal of Horror Philosophy*, I (2015): 25—35 (p. 30), emphasis in original. Fry's essay appears to be unique thus far in according this novel *any* scholarly attention, so is worth engagement with at some length.

[70] Baudrillard, *Transparency of Evil*, pp. 122, 113.

[71] Herbrechter, *Posthumanism*, p. 86.

advancement 'or in thwarting of my enemies'.[72] In its concern with a divided

subject, *Think Yourself Lucky* even replicates the epistolary structure of Hogg and

Stevenson's seminal works.

Fry's shrewd but incomplete analysis interprets Campbell's novel

specifically as a successor to *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. With a

professional psychologist's authority, Fry correctly distinguishes between the

threat posed by Stevenson's repressed 'monster' to the entire social order of its

time,and the more subtle challenge *within* its society posed by Campbell's

antagonist.[73] Newless indeed draws its energy from what Fry calls the

protagonist's 'conflict avoidance in the micro routines which constitute twenty-first

century life', that is, the codes and strictures of political correctness which,

paradoxically, engender aggression in the form of irritation and annoyance in

response.[74] In the novel's pivotal epiphany, Botham realises that '[i]t isn't what I

wish that makes these things happen, it's what I can't admit I wish' (p. 222).

Although Fry does not elaborate on this point, these protocols relating to disability,

obesity, the rights of pregnant women and other facets denoting issue-based

politics are also themselves obviously contradictory, in the context of a societal

culture that is *itself* pervaded by incipient mutual antagonisms. More significantly,

Botham's vexed self-repression demonstrates the subject's afore-mentioned

inability to abject its 'monstrous' features that Heise-von der Lippe, as cited in the

first section of this chapter, associates with Gothic posthumanism. The entity

Newless is, as Fry notes, a *'disembodied'* descendant of Hyde.[75] It is, he goes on

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[72] James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. by John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990 [1824]), p. 144.
[73] Fry has a doctorate in psychology. 'New Place to Hyde', p. 25.
[74] Ibid, p. 31.
[75] Ibid, p. 30, emphasis in original.

to argue, 'a monster which could only been created by the Internet', an immaterial presence freed from social strictures on the human body 'and *'re-embodied* as a supernatural force capable of causing certain people to die'.[76] Crediting the Internet itself with actually originating a malevolent ethereal alterity is, it is immediately apparent, contentious. Gil-Martin in Hogg's 1824 novel, for example, is variously described as having a 'cameleon [sic] art' and 'flitt[ing] about… like a shadow, or rather like a spirit'.[77] Fritz Leiber's short story, 'Smoke Ghost' (1941), an urban narrative admired by Campbell, also features disembodied spectrality: '[n]o longer a world of material atoms and empty spaces', but one 'in which the bodliless existed and moved according to its own obscure laws and and unpredictable impulses'.[78] Of greater import is that the liminality on display in Campbell's text, between material and immaterial experiential realms, is consistent with what Herbrechter describes as an exploration of 'the increasing extent of the body into virtual spaces', an undertaking symptomatic of posthumanism.[79]

Although deliberately likened to forebears like Gil-Martin as 'a demon' that has been 'called up' or 'invoked' (pp. 51, 195), Newless is, as Fry notes, an 'archetypal entity' for a new electronic or e-culture.[80] 'We're past those', Lucky declares, regarding books, and 'I've never needed one [a telephone]', it later boasts to a victim, as 'I'm electronic enough' (pp. 65, 157). Like *Grin of the Dark*, the text derives inspiration from M. R. James's evocation of fear induced by the half-seen but keenly sensed proximity of 'other'-ness. This time though, emphasis

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[76] Ibid, p. 30, emphasis in original.
[77] Hogg, *Private Memoirs*, pp. 124, 170.
[78] Fritz Leiber, 'Smoke Ghost', repr. in *Meddling with Ghosts: Ghost Stories in the Tradition of M. R. James*, pp. 142—156 (p. 152).
[79] Herbrechter*, Posthumanism*, p. 97.
[80] Fry, New Place to Hyde', p. 30. Lucky is *not* however, as Fry implies, the 'first' (p. 32) such, given the creations of social media in Campbell's earlier novel, *The Seven Days of Cain*, discussed later in this chapter.

is placed on the indefinability of the entity's appearance and movement, as when Botham watches Newless following Kinnear, 'dodg[ing] into view' and appearing to borrow its own visibility 'from gaps in the crowd' (p. 195). Campbell's portrayal of Newless and of the anxiety of surveillance, that is, of being watched, and moreover stalked, by something elusive, intangible and protean, has an affinity with Eric Knudsen's 'Slender Man' Internet meme (2009), another amorphous, wraith-like entity. The commonality is the ability not only to induce fear and terror but to cause *harm*. Botham protests that Newless's victims 'killed themselves' and dismisses the entity as 'just words in the air' (pp. 237—8). This reductionist argument is accepted by Fry, who compares Newless to the 'blag of Internet trolls' – unpleasant, invidious and petty, but fundamentally powerless to cause actual violence or injury because its weaponry is confined to the purely verbal.[81] David's argument is, though, logically contradicted by a value system in which language in the form of thought clearly *is* power, manifested in a being that can physically pull one victim off a ladder or wrest a steering wheel from another, pass through a car door and 'merge with the night beside the road' (p. 206). In its exploratory nature, Newless is a truly liminal entity: a virtual being, but one also capable of physical materialisation into and impacting upon the 'real' world at will.

The materialisation, however, is unfinished. *Think Yourself Lucky* repeats the attribution of what Joshi notes as, with respect to a much earlier Campbell novel, a 'curiously *incomplete* appearance' to representation of spectrality.[82] Newless is described in the final encounter with Botham as being only 'a suggestion of a presence', with 'no face', reminding the protagonist of 'a childish

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[81] Ibid, p. 33.
[82] Joshi, 'Ramsey Campbell: Alone with a Master', p. 121, regarding *The House on Nazareth Hill*, emphasis in original.

sketch of bones' or 'elongated foetus' (pp. 226, 230). These pediatric and prenatal allusions underline a sense of extreme dependence, conveyed in an earlier chapter when Newless sees David at the travel agency and admits, atypically, to doubt and insecurity. As opposed to its normal confident bravado, the entity speculates:

> What would happen if I wait for him to come out of the staff room – if I try to speak to him? The prospect seems to paralyze me, and I feel in danger of growing no more perceptible to myself than I am to the hypocrites lined up behind the counter like targets in a fairground. (p. 154)

The climactic confrontation between protagonist and antagonist on the bridge, an obviously symbolic setting representing a contrast between life and death, the real world and Newless's one, and the choice that Botham must make, confirms the vulnerability of the entity. Experiencing 'a dank chill', Botham has a momentary 'threat of glimpsing somewhere so barren of light and warmth that it consisted purely of a yearning for sensation, for any token of existence' (p. 234). It is a subliminal vision of Newless's private hell, completing a portrait of isolation and loneliness as much as malevolence.

The epilogue of *Think Yourself Lucky*, set close to a year after Botham plunges into the lake, taking Newless with him, thus presents a level of *permitted* monstrousness, a tenderness within evil. It is also an accommodation and acceptance on the part of the protagonist. To prevent further deaths, protect others and 'contain' Newless, Botham has performed a volte face regarding being a writer: 'I had to be honest', he admits to Kinnear with heavy verbal irony, 'it's the only way to live' (p. 244). David's reversal signifies far more than having found 'a

writing job that pays' (p. 244), as a disapproving Kinnear observes, acidly. This denouement correlates with Nayar's argument on an essential compromise within posthumanism, wherein '[o]nly when the human recognises that the Other [sic] is within, that the Other shares life with itself, can the human be more responsive to life itself'.[83] The protagonist's conscious decision to become a writer appears to enact this process of the accommodation of alterity, recognition and co-existence. 'There's nothing easier than being myself', Botham asserts, 'now I know who I am' (p. 242). There is, however, a price. In becoming 'Mr Nasty from the north', a polemicist producing a column entitled 'Bad Thoughts' for a weekly publication, Botham has, deliberately isolated himself by ending his romantic relationship and alienating all former contacts. In Campbell's previous narrative on serial murder, *Secret Story*, Dudley Smith becomes 'a cultural icon' after his death (*Secret Story*, p. 377). *Think Yourself Lucky* develops this theme of media celebrity: through ethical necessity, its protagonist identifies in public with his media creation and therefore *becomes* his own 'new species of monster'. The title hosting Botham's inflammatory columns is, pointedly, non-electronic. Defiantly entitled *Print*, this attests to Campbell's career-long adherence to the medium, evident since 'The Franklyn Paragraphs', and his scepticism regarding its supercedence by new (electronic) forms of communication. Rather, his novel presents an interplay between modes of media, and, especially, their potentially detrimental societal role, as when David is surprised by 'the amount of support he'd attracted in the paper and online', and 'the tone, some of which makes Newless seem restrained'

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[83] Nayar, *Posthumanism*, p. 32. Nayar's choice of capitalisation is stylistic, not a reference to the Lacanian Big Other.

(p. 247). The protagonist as monster may therefore be seen to have 'spawned' its own viral contagion, in the form of trolling, in its wake.

The potential of writers to affect their social environment, positively or negatively, has also been a continuing pre-occupation of Campbell's. His aforementioned short story of precognition from the 1970s, 'The Depths', for example, is a thematic predecessor of *Think Yourself Lucky*. It, too, features a protagonist, Jonathan Miles, who is forced to express negative experiences in writing, in this case the nightmares of what is revealed as the collective unconscious, to prevent their actualisation as real-life murders. 'I think the public is outgrowing fantasy', Miles's publisher remarks breezily, provocatively and ironically in the course of that narrative, 'now we're well and truly in the scientific age'.[84] As a horror novel, *Think Yourself Lucky* seeks to reassert the value of its genre, and expresses its creator's ongoing exploration of the role of authorship. Campbell's later text reflects post-1970s technological developments characterising the 'scientific age', but is more intimate in scope than 'The Depths'. It employs parenthood as emotive and explicit metaphor for a writer's obligation to assume responsibility for their work and for what may result as consequence. Regarding her own son, the protagonist's neighbour remarks sourly that '[y]ou're responsible for what you create whether you like it not', and David's father later implores him to '[n]ever create a life unless you're sure you want it to live' (pp. 120, 181). Like Slender Man and its video logs, Lucky Newless, whether it is Botham's aborted brother or product of his own imagination, exemplifies what Joseph Crawford describes as the propensity of any new form of media technology to generate a new narrative or 'monstrous birth' that threatens to disrupt the cultural

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[84] Campbell, 'The Depths', in *Alone with the Horrors*, pp. 287—304 (p. 293).

landscape hosting it.[85] However, Campbell's vision of posthuman forms of life extends beyond the depiction of monstrosity. The themes of creative responsibility and artificial and vulnerable created lives that are dependent upon their creator are explored most comprehensively in Campbell's earlier meditation on natalism, the cross-generic novel, *The Seven Days of Cain.*

4. The Lives of Others: *The Seven Days of Cain* as Posthuman Tragedy

While *Think Yourself Lucky* may be seen as a successor to Hogg and Stevenson's texts updated for an electronic era, Campbell's 2010 novel serves as a contemporary version of *Frankenstein*, the quintessential Gothic disquisition on the 'overreacher' who dares to assume prerogatives reserved for the divine. Atmospherically set mostly in the coastal town of Crosby, Merseyside, the narrative's protagonist is, again, one of Campbell's compromised artistes whose past dabblings in authorship exact macabre consequences. In this case, catastrophe is precipitated by the use of an 'occult' website as 'a magical way to create life' (pp. 145, 158).[86] Creative responsibility, along with time and the preservation and loss of memory are all, as I discuss, key concerns. The central character, Andy Bentley, is a married photographer and heir to his parents' studio. Bentley's father, a self-denigrating 'old portrait merchant' (p. 20) is, it is inferred through repeated reference to amnesia, in the early stages of dementia. Like Botham in *Think Yourself Lucky*, the protagonist gradually discovers his own connection to a series of deaths. Here the killings are sadistic murders, and are

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[85] Joseph Crawford, 'Gothic Fiction and the Evolution of Modern Technology', in *Technology of the Gothic in Literature and Culture: Technogothics*, ed. by Justin D. Edwards (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 35—47 (p. 36).

[86] Campbell, *The Seven Days of Cain* (Cincinnati, OH: Samhain Publishing, 2010). All subsequent references are to this edition.

not, it transpires, of real people but of fictional characters. Their names are avatars derived from facets of Botham's own personality that he had invented for a website, 'YourSelves'. Andy had found that '[o]nce you set them up they kept writing themselves' (p. 144). However, as he is to learn, they exist not only as web blogs but autonomous beings. In a neat elaboration and satirisation of this metatextuality, Campbell even portrays one victim, Penny Scrivener, as a dramatist, whose last work features a protagonist creating Internet personalities that also attain sentience. Scrivener's play is a musical farce, featuring a climax in which the heroine herself disappears, thus revealing her own fictional status to the audience.

Anticipating Lucky Newless, the killer in *Seven Days of Cain* is 'part' of the Internet' (p. 290), another dexterous shapeshifter.[87] It appears for most of the narrative as Max Beyer, a writer and wealthy client of Andy's, and is, explicitly, the protagonist's abjection. Originally named Septimus Battle, Beyer is described by Bentley as 'the worst part of me' and 'the one I tried not to make up' (pp. 296, 145). Like the other novels analysed in this chapter, manifestation of monstrous alterity accords with an apparently technophobic position. As the entity itself asks, ironically, '[i]s there anything that can't be done on a computer?' (p. 49). Again, the Internet is presented as a 'trap' that can lure the unwary 'to ramble to site after site' (p. 37). Similar to Smilemime's victimisation of Lesser in *Grin of the Dark*, the antagonist commences its attack on the protagonist through trolling emails. Sent anonymously from 'Frugomail' accounts, these read 'like a product of the sort of immaturely talented mind that the Internet gave scope to play havoc with other

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[87] I have used the pronoun 'it' in reference to Max Beyer/Tim Battle/Septimus Battle throughout deliberately, in recognition of this entity's monstrosity and protean nature. Bentley's other creations, like Claire Bentley or Regis King, are accorded the pronouns 's/he'.

people's computers, creating viruses or hacking into sites or stealing identities' (p. 63). Bentley finally exorcises Beyer by confronting the entity with its unreality, as '[j]ust words and too many of them' and, thus, its inability to harm 'real people' (pp. 294, 297). However, this is not before it has succeeded in inveigling itself into the life of Claire, Andy's wife, by posing as an old schoolfriend. As Tim Battle, an actor, Beyer ultimately causes Claire to discover that she too is a fictional creation of Andy's from the website, and that her past life is a fabrication assembled from the memories of others.

Seven Days of Cain is a richly intertextual as much as metatextual work. In the linkage of the 'YourSelves' website's origins to Roland Franklyn, described in turn as having been a student of Thackeray Lane's, Campbell refers back to his own created mythos. The title itself invokes the Book of Genesis from the Bible, and with the novel's diegesis echoes Luigi Pirandello's absurdist play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921).[88] Yet Campbell's naming of Beyer's unseen and fictitious publisher as 'Teddy Ballard' also foregrounds a conscious engagement with the science fiction genre, an affinity that remains largely salient in *Grin of the Dark* or *Think Yourself Lucky.* Like Ballard's *Crash* (1973) and that novelist's other dystopias, *Seven Days of Cain* explores the effect of technology on external and internal, psychological landscapes, and how a reality mediated by that technology is entwined with the production of identity. Moreover, the novel's portrayal of the endeavours of normal as opposed to socially-elevated beings, both real and artificial, as they seek to comprehend and assert their own lives, recalls the fictions

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[88] There are also, as John Llewellyn Robert points out, cinematic references in Campbell's naming of the Hotel Balaguero and Plaza Paco in Barcelona after the respective directors of the first two film adaptations of his work. See 'Grinning in the Dark: The Humour of Ramsey Campbell', in *Ramsey Campbell: Critical Essays on the Modern Master of Horror*, pp. 147—154 (p. 149). Moreover, the attention to the order of deaths in *Seven Days of Cain* recalls that accorded in the *Final Destination* film franchise (James Wong et al, 2000ff.).

of Philip K. Dick. Campbell himself has acknowledged the American writer's influence on this novel's 'ordinariness of characters' and its concern with the 'nature of reality and identity'.[89] Dick's narratives have been described accurately by Jason P. Vest as reconciling the concerns of humanism with postmodern scepticism about the possibility of progress in an age where 'grand narratives and institutions' enabling human advancement no longer function.[90] Campbell's fictions, as explicated in my previous chapters, display a similar engagement with such postmodern concerns, and like Dick's, do so largely without the elite stylisation of high postmodernism.[91] Dying in 1982, Dick did not experience the full advent of the Internet and its web-generated 'ghosts'. Nevertheless, his concern with sentient android lives is replicated in Campbell's portrayal of autonomous virtual ones. Campbell, in describing his own field of horror as 'capable of development' and welcoming generic broadening, has described *Seven Days of Cain* as 'a tragedy'.[92] I propose that in engaging with the destructive *and* constructive potency of the digital world, Campbell creates a generic hybrid that is also his most circumspect and probing engagement with posthumanism. Despite preceding *Think Yourself Lucky*, the novel represents the culmination of his experimentation.

In sympathy with the original subtitle of *Frankenstein*, *Seven Days of Cain* can be interpreted as a postmillenial adaptation of the 'Prometheus' myth. Indeed, both artistically and philosophically, Anthony J. Fonseca notes the likeness of this work

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[89] McWilliam, ''Ramsey Campbell interviewed'.
[90] Jason P. Vest, *The Postmodern Humanism of Philip K. Dick* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), p. xii.
[91] See, for example, Christopher Palmer's earlier study, *Philp K. Dick: Exhilaration and Terror of the Postmodern* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003) for discussion of Dick's accessible, and thus non- 'postmodern' style, p. 8. Campbell's *Needing Ghosts* is, as argued, a partial departure from his normal 'realist' approach.
[92] Campbell, 'Dig Us No Grave', p. 32; Nik Glover, 'Ramsey Campbell' [interview], *Bido Lito!,* 9 (March 2011) <https://www.bidolito.co.uk/ramsey-campbell/> [first accessed 3 May 2020].

to that of Aickmann, in that it depicts and evokes the 'mythic rather than horrific'.[93] As with Campbell's ghost stories, the narrative seems to strive, in the author's own words, 'to glimpse the eternal'.[94] There are allusions to Beyer's acts of torture, mutilation and murder, as in the entity's gloating reference to Penny Scrivener – 'as it was, she was gutted' (p. 62) – but these tend to the indirect, veiled by implication or sardonic word play. The acidic social critique as backdrop that denotes texts like *Face That Must Die, Secret Story* or *Think Yourself Lucky*, which confer upon each of those works a highly specific contemporeality, is also largely absent here. Unlike Lucky Newless, for example, the digital entity Beyer seems to derive its energising 'excellent nastiness' (p. 118) from the protagonist's psyche rather than social causality or prevailing mores. Instead, the text utilises two powerful symbols drawn from other, non-literary media – sculpture and photography – to elucidate the malleability of time and human subjectivity. Most obviously, the real-life 'Another Place' sculptures by Anthony Gormley on Crosby's beach, erected in 2005, are a consistent presence. The sea itself is accorded a primal power: 'too much rearing up of water, too much spray and dark uncontaminated violence' (p. 224). Lent an almost spectral status, Gormley's beach figures act as both sentinels and, as in ancient Greek drama, silent chorus within the narrative. Repeatedly likened to 'clones' (pp. 34, 86, 127), their uniformity becomes uncanny and disturbing for Bentley:

> Usually he found the watchers on the beach – their impregnable serenity and
> the suggestion that they were intent on some distant vision – as calming as she

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[93] Anthony J. Fonseca, 'What Develops in the Darkest Room of the Mind: The Photographic Technique in *Nazareth Hill* and *The Seven Days of Cain*', in *Ramsey Campbell: Critical Essays on the Modern Master of Horror*, pp. 159—169 (p. 168).
[94] Campbell, 'Dig Us No Grave', p. 33.

[Claire] did, but now the sense of so many bodies with a single personality, if even that, unnerved him. (pp. 33–4)

Aesthetically, Campbell's use of 'Another Place' serves multiple purposes. It crystallises the relationship between artistic creator and artificial creation, and the potential threat posed by an anonymous, blank-faced and unsympathic crowd to an isolated individual. More profoundly, the figures's 'single personality, if even that' becomes an obsession of other artificial but digital creations seeking to assert their own individuality and reality. The figures become the target of 'mythical and messianic' mockery and vandalism by Beyer (p. 88), a similarly void being. Like Ellis's Patrick Bateman and Campbell's own Dudley Smith, Beyer seeks to deny its own superficiality and assert full selfhood by desecrating and exposing the interior, material bodies of others. In contrast, Claire observes that the statues's hollowness makes her 'feel hollow inside. Not real' (p. 34). Although different reactions, Beyer's attack and Claires's anxiety both literalise what Baudrillard describes as the subject's 'fear of being just a clone', submerged in a plethora of signs, simulacra and data.[95] The uniformity of these pitiless, undifferentiated and empty structures seem to embody his argument that 'we manufacture a profusion of images in which there is nothing to see', where 'the image has taken over, imposed its own ephermeral logic'.[96]

Further, Bentley's profession and his father's amnesia herald a narrative in which photography is presented as pivotal in the capture or construction of memory and self-definition. Posing as a client, Beyer constantly seeks 'more life' (p. 21) from Bentley's services, but the importance of the photographic record

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[95] Baudrillard, *Transparency of Evil*, p. 24.
[96] Ibid, p. 17.

really governs the central relationship between Andy and Claire. As Fonseca

notes, photography '(re)creates the physical world as the psychological landscape,

where memories invariably evoke ghosts, literal and metaphorical'.[97] As she is

herself, like Beyer, a 'ghostly', digital construct, Claire cannot perceive her fellow

entity's face on photographic likenesses. Andy's wife can see only 'a black hole' or

'impossible blank' which insidiously 'lodg[es] inside her' and contributes to her

insecurity about her own reality (pp. 190, 193). Equally, Claire enacts what

Baudrillard describes as 'the fetishization of the lost object' with respect to the

desperate preservation of artificial, borrowed memories. After photographs of her

deceased 'parents', whose faces she is dismayed that she cannot recall,

disappear, Claire pleads to her husband that '[t]hey're part of me. You understand

that surely' (p. 257).[98] Ultimately, for Andy, his wife's own physiognomy on

photographs becomes blurred, 'an absence' at their core that leaves 'an aching

hole in his consciousness' (p. 313), as he realises that he is unable to remember

her face. I return to the specific significance of Claire herself later; here, it is the

medium of interpretation that the couple rely upon for verification and self-

validation that is the focus. In literary form, the text enacts Hutcheon's argument

regarding postmodern photography, that such 'representations' are, like film, one

of the only available 'means of access' to or 'traces' of history, by which that past

can be (re)constructed and known.[99] This is in opposition to Jameson's more

pessimistic conclusion that the 'waning of affect' wrought by late capitalism

terminates the possibility of such expressions of the 'unique and the personal […]

the individual brush stoke'.[100] In contrast to Jameson's vision, with *Seven Days of*

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[97] Fonseca, 'What Develops in the Darkest Room of the Mind', p. 166.
[98] Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, p. 140.
[99] Hutcheon, *Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 109.
[100] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 15.

Cain there remains a comprehending consciousness, 'a self present to do the feeling'.[101] That 'self' is in fact multiple, and both human and posthuman.

Central to the reinterpretation of the Prometheus myth posited by *Frankenstein* and its literary heirs is, naturally, its potential for horror: the generation of life that evades its creator's control and is potentially monstrous. In its portrayal of the website's founder as a paranoid schizophrenic who uses the lexicographically loaded pseudonym 'Adam Caboodle', *Seven Days of Cain* revises the anxiety about the act of creative writing expressed in *Needing Ghosts*.[102] In the earlier text, the compulsion to write stories 'won't leave you alone even when you're with people, even where you're desperate to sleep' (p. 34). In the latter novel, Internet characters are now the proliferating narratives and described in similar persecutory terms. Caboodle complains to Andy that:

> You'd understand if you had any of your selves in you. You don't know what it's like. Try waking up every morning for a week and finding another's come in while you're aleep. And then try getting any of them to leave you alone for a second. It's like being shut in a room for the rest of your life with them and there's no door where they came in and they'll never shut up, not even when you want to sleep or when you manage. (p. 176)

This state of flux, representing what Rosi Braidotti would deem as an 'ontologically polyvocal subject', is the antithesis of the 'stable human essence' championed by other, more conservative theorists like Francis Fukuyama.[103] Through their

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[101] Ibid, p. 15.
[102] That is, the name is laden with meaning in having both Biblical and collectivist connotations. It is another instance of Campbell's highly deliberate use of language.
[103] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 93; Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future*, p. 9.

independence, Bentley's self-writing characters, or narratives, are similar to Ellis's 'book' in *Lunar Park*, the American author's overtly postmodernist and metatextual sequel to *American Psycho*: that is, an enterprise which 'wrote itself', oblivious to its author's misgivings.[104] While *Grin of the Dark* addresses the potential of the Internet to accommodate and distribute a lurking and transmuted alterity, *Seven Days of Cain* focuses on the generation, multiplicity and empowerment of this 'other'-ness. Like Ellis's psychopath Patrick Bateman, Beyer is a 'monster' that has 'escaped' from a fictional 'novel', in this case its creator's imagination.[105] The final confession of the antagonist and unreliable narrator of *American Psycho*, that Bateman 'simply was not there', is repeated in Beyer's ultimate defeat and banishment through its emasculating exposure as unreal.[106] Described at the beginning as 'just an absence where a person ought to be', the entity is vanquished, far from the 'real man, coming closer' (pp. 19, 247) it vaunts itself as being. Like Bateman, Beyer's murderous, obsessive but ultimately empty quest literalises 'the struggle for self-knowledge, definition and access to the real' that Beville describes as 'essentially the engine propelling postmodern narratives'.[107] However, Andy's prevailing argument in this confrontation asserts a more liberal and humanist credo than Ellis's nihilistic fiction: '[s]how some humanity for once. That's how to be human. That's how you can be real' (p. 298).

   This positioning is central to explicating the novel's meaning and contribution to Campbell's overall vision, for *Seven Days of Cain* is more complex in its analysis of the 'human' than its obvious reproduction of horror motifs would suggest. Whilst

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[104] Brett Easton Ellis, *Lunar Park* (London: Picador, 2005), p. 19. Indeed, as Beville notes, the novel 'takes on a life of its own beyond the control of its professed author' (*Gothic-postmodernism*, p. 175).
[105] Ellis, *Lunar Park*, p. 219.
[106] Ellis, *American Psycho*, p. 376.
[107] Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism*, p. 54,

Beyer, unlike Frankenstein's monster, is presented as wholly destructive from the outset, it is a single entity amongst the many that the protagonist creates. The text both expands upon Shelley's novel, in that there are now a plethora of artificial 'humans' rather than just one, and emulates it, in its treatment of the themes of responsibility, abandonment, guilt and selfhood as well as innocence. The complaint of Frankenstein's creature against its creator for rejecting it, '[h]ow dare you sport thus with life?', and call for Victor to '[d]o your duty towards me', is refrained in Beyer's criticism of an absent 'guardian' that 'thought he was responsible for me till I turned into somebody he didn't like', and who 'gave up by the seventh day' (pp. 52, 118).[108] Bentley's titular association, not only with the role of God but with the Biblical Cain, the first murderer, implicates him in primal sin. More directly, the protagonist is also admonished by other creations whose existence he has denied, such as Louisa Carmichael, who sardonically remarks, '[d]on't say you've started caring about us now…' (p. 113). Both married and a step-parent since Bentley created her as Louisa Ruse, Louisa has forged an independent existence. Her self-determination and desire for life is shared by Andy's other characters, for whom another, Regis King, the surname a homage to Campbell's most well-known contemporary as a horror writer, acts as spokesperson. King asserts that '[w]e're individuals, the whole lot of us', and that he and Bentley's other digital beings 'can do without a past' (p. 153), on the grounds that their belief in their present reality is sufficient. The pursuit of 'reality' and 'more life' thus animate *all* Bentley's created characters. Beyer and his other new 'humans' incarnate what Hayles defines as 'embodied virtualities'.[109] The

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[108] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*, in *Three Gothic Novels*, ed. by Peter Fairclough (London: Penguin Books, 1986 [1818, rev. ed., 1831]), pp. 257—497 (p. 363).
[109] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 48.

world depicted in *Seven Days of Cain* is one in which the boundary between the real and these fictional 'virtualities' has been occluded at quotidian level. For the theorist, these born-digital beings' relationships with each other, and their interactions with Bentley and other 'real' people, would demonstrate the process of independent thought being undertaken 'by both human and non-human actors', an occurence denoting posthumanism.[110] Further, with respect to all except perhaps the explicitly *anti*social Beyer, the physicality and assertiveness that they show have affinity with a process described by Nayar as a 'de- and re-terrorialisation of the body within conduits of information exchange and datasets', a development which, for him, defines 'the rise of a new biological citizenship that is [also] posthuman'.[111]

With its cast of artificial beings clinging to their individuality and life, *Seven Days of Cain* interrogates such notions of 'citizenship'. It does so, above all, in the presentation of Claire Bentley, an example of the 'poor binarised ghost' at its most poignant. Employed, significantly, by 'Home from Home', an assisted charity for the homeless, and thus displaced and marginalised, Claire is also haunted by her infertility. The narrative traces her personal odyssey, from self-assertiveness over Andy opening her letters to sensory dissipation, final withdrawal and literal disappearance through shame at 'not being real' (p. 303). Throughout, Claire increasingly senses her involvement in an artificial performance, as if she were 'enacting a domestic tableau that she hoped would become more real' (p. 192). Hayles cautions that, despite the phenomenon of posthuman independent thought, 'we can no longer assume that consciousness guarantees existence of the self'.[112]

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[110] Ibid, p. 290. This has affinity with Lyotard's earlier, but anti-humanist, argument that the subject, in a blow to its human 'narcissism', in fact 'does not have the monopoly of mind' (*Inhuman*, p. 45).
[111] Nayar, *Posthumanism*, p. 72.
[112] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 280.

Claire's (re)discovery of her own fictionality, that her history is a construct from another narrative, the autobiographical *Clare's Tale* by one Michaela Pocus, typifies not only the novel's acute metatextuality but its deconstruction of subjectivity.[113] As with, for example, the lives of the clones in Kazuo Ishiguro's science fiction novel, *Never Let Me Go* (2005), there may be, as Nayar maintains, 'inclusivity' of posthuman lives alongside human ones, but there are still implicit 'power relations', or more accurately power hierarchies: this new life's existence is owed to, and has its parameters defined by, the lives of others.[114] Bentley creates, covets and eventually mourns Claire as his intended Eve, 'the most important thing in my life', 'the best part of me' or, as Beyer mockingly observes, '[e]verything you wanted in a single package' (pp. 196, 314, 89). Comparison with the Biblical character is made explicit in Claire finally gazing into a pool and perceiving only 'an abyss' of 'utter emptiness […] the void that was herself' (p. 306). The scene directly evokes, and parodies, two famous precedents: Eve seeing her reflection in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and, in *Frankenstein,* itself Shelley's revisitation of Milton's text, the creature's repulsion upon beholding its own visage.[115] Appropriately, Beyer, the murderous dissecter, is the primary agent of Claire's deconstruction. By asking 'Tim' to 'imagine' something for her, Claire unwittingly invites her anatomisation and exposure as artificial. In an acute

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[113] The author's name is another obvious example of Campbell's humorous but deliberate word play, in this case the evocation of magicians and 'hocus pocus'.

[114] Nayar, *Posthumanism*, p. 34. The point about dependence in Ishiguro's novel is also made in Mads Rosenthal Thomsen's *The New Human in Literature: Posthuman Visions of Change in Body, Mind and Society after 1900* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 209.

[115] The iconic passages are from *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, lines 461 —5: 'A Shape within the watry gleam appear'd / Bending to look at me, I started back / It started back, but pleas'd I soon return'd / Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answering looks / Of sympathie and love…' , in, for example, John Milton, *The Complete Poems*, ed. by B. A. Wright (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1980), p. 226; Shelley, *Frankenstein*: '[H]ow was I terrified when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! […] and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification' (p. 379).

instance of the text's multi-layered self-inflection, Beyer, disguised as an actor and adopting a persona created by the actor to impersonate their mutual creator, tells her, theatrically:

> I'm the voice you're not sure if you're hearing […] I'm the man who tells you what to think and you believe you're thinking it yourself. Anything you do, I've already thought of it. You can't even dream unless I give you dreams. Perhaps you only see what I put into your head. I'm what you have for a soul. (p. 108)

As malicious and as devastating as this diatribe and Beyer's acting as 'whistleblowing' informant regarding *Clare's Tale* prove to be, the reference to 'soul' refrains an earlier pledge, itself repeating an imagined childhood vow, that Claire makes to Andy: 'I'll always be there if you need me. I promise with my soul' (p. 33). Such referencing serves to foreground a metaphysical dimension to the novel, already established by Campbell's use of Gormley's eerie sculptures and the photograph motif. The theme of spiritual connection between human and posthuman is represented in Andy and Claire's marriage, in which her husband tells Claire that he senses 'as if I'd been looking for you all my life', and she had felt similarly that 'we're part of each other (pp. 41, 314). The possibility of the promised renewed union being fulfilled is refrained in the novel's ambiguous ending on the beach, a location previously associated with omen and death as the setting for King and Claire's finished lives. With the tentative question 'Is it you?' (p. 315), Andy instead half hopes for and half senses the latter's returned presence. Through this finale, *Seven Days of Cain* may conclude, however obliquely, an overall accord with a positive interpretation of posthumanism, as 'affording new opportunities for social bonding and empowerment', proposed by

theorists like Hayles, Nayar and Braidotti.[116] If the novel's final scene seems to support Lyotard's statement that '[t]he union of soul and body remains an intractable enigma', the text as a whole certainly enacts his argument that the subject, acting as a 'transformer', ensures, through 'techno-science' and other cultural developments, and the 'new memorization they involve', the introduction of 'a supplement of complexity' to the universe.[117] *Seven Days of Cain* remains Campbell's most thorough examination, to date, of the complex implications, for both good and ill, of digital technology.

What emerges in Campbell's evocation and updating of familiar generic tropes of clowns, doubles and Frankenstein monsters in these three techno-fictions is an iconoclastic treatment of subject, authorship, and even, as examined, assumptions about the linearity and immutability of history itself. As Lester speculates resignedly in *Grin of the Dark*, '[t]he past has finally caught up with me, or is it the future, or both?' (p. 338). In a manner not available to him when writing, say, *The Nameless* or *Needing Ghosts*, Campbell uses postmillennial advances in technology in the form of new, interactive media to probe the contested nature of reality and what Heise-von der Lippe describes, regarding the posthuman Gothic, as 'our treacherously safe human subject positions'.[118] Central to this new media are the computer and the Internet as extensions of human consciousness and tools in the establishment of selfhood. In Campbell's vision they serve as further mediators for creativity, and thus as a constitutive element of the postmodern and posthuman digital subject. Consciousness is, it is speculated, physically metamorphosised and absorbed into virtual reality in *Grin of the Dark*. This journey

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[116] Braidotti, *Posthuman*, p. 2.
[117] Lyotard, *Inhuman*, pp. 38, 45.
[118] Heise-von der Lippe, 'Introduction: Post/human/Gothic', p. 13.

is reversed with the physical realisation of virtual beings into material reality: in part in *Think Yourself Lucky*, and completely in *Seven Days of Cain*. However, for Campbell, creativity and subjectivity take on a fragmented, schizoid hue, symbolised in Internet chatroom allusions to Franklyn and Lane's belief in 'lots of selves … not all of them on earth' and serving as 'masks of chaos', and, of course, the image of a broken, paranoid schizophrenic website manager (*Seven Days of Cain*, p. 115). Far from a means of self-completion, the plethora of 'selves' or others unleashed threaten to overwhelm the original subject. It is also, therefore, a paranoid subject, paranoia being the defensive default and the sole means for Campbell's variously baffled, isolated or struggling characters – real or unreal - to comprehend the contemporary world and their place within it.

CONCLUSION: 'SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN': REPOSITIONING CAMPBELL

In his seminal treatise, 'Supernatural Horror in Literature', Campbell's great forebear and influence Lovecraft nominates and praises twentieth-century 'modern masters' for, amongst other qualities, their 'artistic smoothness', advanced '[t]echnique' and 'craftmanship'.[1] In attempting to assess Ramsey Campbell's place within Gothic studies, both in terms of canonicity and scholarly appraisal, and the writer's status beyond the Gothic, Lovecraft's aesthetic criteria seem apposite as a starting point. Therefore, I return in the first instance to Campbell's distinctive style. This combines a subtle, highly personal fusion of precisely observed accumulation of detail and an imputation of a disturbing, ominous and uncanny quality to the incongruously mundane, the quotidian and even inanimate.

A passage from Campbell's late novel, *The Seven Days of Cain*, the final text analysed in the last chapter, echoes the image of rubble-strewn desolation in the early short story 'Concussion', which I covered in the introduction. Importantly, it encapsulates the unique quality of Campbell's prose. On his way to meet the doomed Louisa Carmichael, Bentley encounters the statue of the film comedian Charlie Chaplin in Leicester Square. It is described thus:

> The blank eyes without pupils reminded him of the figures on the beach at home. The eyes were as unrelievedly black as the rest of the effigy – the bowler hat and baggy trousers, the stick bent into a curve like an initial letter. The shiny surface reminded Andy of the carapace of a beetle, so that he could have fancied that a giant insect was looming beside him on its

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[1] H. P. Lovecraft, 'Supernatural Horror in Literature' (1927, rev. 1933—5), in *The H. P. Lovecraft Omnibus 2: Dagon and Other Macabre Tales* (London: Grafton Books, 1985), pp. 423—512 (p. 493).

stone plinth, keeping still so that its prey would wander within reach. (p. 115)

This is a prime example of Campbell's evocation of the urban sublime, born from his desire 'to produce awe and terror' in an audience.[2] On Campbell's twentieth-century fictions, Hantke rightly notes that the author is 'a keen and devoted chronicler of the urban blight afflicting his native Liverpool and the industrial north'.[3] However, an obvious wider geographic setting aside (Bentley is visiting London), it is clear at such moments that Campbell has also developed into something more. The writer himself has always espoused 'precise selection of language', and his facility with diverse art forms, noted by Joshi, is on full display with the deployment of highly contrasting sculptures and photography in *Seven Days of Cain*.[4] Although tangential and irrelevant to the novel's diegesis, the Chaplin vignette encapsulates Campbell's knowledge of media and especially film history, and, in its connotations of paranoia and suggestion of the sinister in representation of the iconic figure of the little tramp, the generic fluidity of his work. Campbell has described horror as being 'an enormously capacious field'.[5] Here, as in *The Grin of the Dark* and the earlier tragicomic novel *The Count of Eleven*, he is blending and exploring the liminal boundary between horror and comedy. Yet the Chaplin episode also symbolises Campbell's distinctively British sensibility and terms of reference. As such, the passage is indicative of the peculiar dichotomy of the author's own position. Subtle, literate, widely read and highly allusive,

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[2] Campbell, 'To the Next Generation', p. 49.

[3] Steffen Hantke, 'The Rise of Popular Horror, 1971—2000', in *Horror: A Literary History*, pp. 159—88 (p. 174). Hantke is referring particularly to the 1980s.

[4] Luke Walker, 'Meet Ramsey Campbell: 'Britain's Most Respected Living Horror Writer' [interview, 14 August 2018], <https://www.lounge-books.com/award-winners-we-lov/ramsey-campbell-horror-author-interview> [first accessed 1 June 2020]; Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 88.

[5] Klaehn, 'Reaching for the Awesome and Numinous', p. 313.

Campbell acknowledges the influence of Graham Greene and Vladimir Nabokov as well as and as much as that of Lovecraft, Aickman and M. R. James.[6] Conversely, with few exceptions, the author's vast output has remained consistently British in setting, arguably, from the point of view of detractors, to the point of parochialism.[7] Despite recognition from the likes of King and the plethora of awards conferred upon him by the British Fantasy Society and others, I have suggested that this had obvious ramifications for his profile internationally, both commercially and scholastically, in terms of its marginalisation. Further, in so 'proud[ly]' identifying himself as a horror writer and 'a great believer' in the field's 'tradition', Campbell, conscientious historian and student of the genre, has also implicated himself in that genre's traditional critical disparagement.[8] 'Horror fiction', writes Campbell in an excoriation of the American critic Leslie Fiedler, 'is beset with ignorance masquerading as informed criticism'.[9] It is from this exasperated predicament that this thesis has attempted a rehabilitation.

My project germinated from an intention to accord overdue attention to a prolific writer's work. In contrast to Campbell's short stories, which have received the majority of critical notice and praise from Joshi, Royle and others, I have deliberately focussed on Campbell's neglected longer fictions. For I contend that it is with his novels and novellas that the writer's fertile imagination is awarded a wider canvass, more breadth to explore in depth issues around the position of the subject in the contemporary world. A wider aim of the thesis was to elucidate the contribution that the academic study of Campbell makes to Gothic studies. I

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[6] 'Ramsey Campbell Talks to the *Horror Zine*'.

[7] The aforementioned *The Claw,* partly set in Nigeria, and *Thirteen Days at Sunset Beach* (a Greek island) are notable exceptions.

[8] Campbell, 'Dig Us No Grave', p. 50; Walker, 'Meet Ramsey Campbell'.

[9] Campbell, 'Fiedler on the Roof', *Fantasy Review*, 7.8 (September 1984), repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 19—23 (p. 19).

propose that both the literary canon and its scholarship can gain much from the admission of what is a unique voice, ambassadorial but ceaselessly interrogative. What Joshi accurately describes as the blend of 'flamboyant cosmicism and social realism' in Campbell's varied corpus, inspired by Lovecraft and Aickman but transformed by the author's unique history and imagination into something entirely original, can deepen understanding of the possibilities of parameters and expansion of the genre.[10] Simultaneously, a recuperation of Campbell affords various possibilities for sociopolitical, aesthetic and wider philosophical critique. It is impossible not to be struck by a note of self-projection in Campbell's defence of his fellow British writer James Herbert - another, thus far, understudied author. He describes Herbert as something of a scourge to the Establishment, 'challeng[ing] the class bias of English horror fiction', and, more tellingly, as 'an unmistakably English and unmistakably contemporary writer who refuses to conform to what's expected of him or to stop questioning what he sees and feels'.[11] Campbell's own sociopsychological concerns have been wider in scope, but no less passionate or consistent, and they are defined by a persistent iconoclasticism. As a late, 2018 interview attests, his preoccupations remain 'the vulnerability of children, the willingness of people to espouse a belief system that denies them the right to question, the growing tendency to create scapegoats for the ills of the world'.[12] This sceptical, anti-totalitarian stance naturally suggests affinity with Lyotard's critique of 'grand narratives', those various religious, political and other totalising belief systems that had collapsed under postmodernism.[13] Alongside close textual

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[10] Joshi, *Unutterable Horror*, II, p. 561.
[11] Campbell, 'James Herbert: Notes Towards a Reappraisal', repr. in *Ramsey Campbell, Probably*, pp. 256—65 (pp. 256, 264—5).
[12] Walker, 'Meet Ramsey Campbell'.
[13] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 37.

analysis, my study has accordingly deployed what I deem to be an appropriately eclectic theoretical approach, for the most part informed by, but at the same time critically distant from, postmodern paradigms. I have sought to demonstrate Campbell's evolution as a writer, illustrating, in its development and thematic shifts, the potentialities of both his fiction and chosen 'field' for sociopolitical critique and philosophical investigation into the value, place and mutations of subject, writer and writer-as-subject in contemporary, increasingly technological societies. Although Campbell's work aligns explicitly with postmodernism's critique of master narratives, and variously displays the hallmarks of intertextuality, metatextuality, paradox, unreliable narration, authorial angst, paranoia and final irresolution associated with postmodernist fictions, it is also suffused with a paradoxical, but consistent, liberal humanism. The various struggles depicted and the fates of the haunted characters that populate Campbell's landscapes may represent an enactment of distinctly Baudrillardian concepts of a 'murder[ed]' reality being replaced by an endless 'procession of simulacra', and of a hyperreal 'nebula' where 'truth is indecipherable', but his fictions do not abandon this stance of ethical commitment.[14] Campbell assumes a dissident position with respect to the continuing viability of metanarratives. Yet his work also does not concur with Baudrillard and Jameson's implicitly apolitical, disempowering and nihilistic vision of the 'waning of effect' and absent universal truths or 'self'.[15]

According to Baudrillard's self-consumptive cosmology of eternal and circular irony, 'God himself has only ever been his own simulacrum'.[16] On matters of religious belief, Campbell's hostility to the metanarrative of dogmatism is well

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[14] Baudrillard, *Perfect Crime*, p. 2; *Transparency of Evil*, p. 83.
[15] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp. 10, 15.
[16] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 172.

documented. The largest of metaphysical questions, as well as an obvious point of comparison between Campbell and Lovecraft, seemed a fitting point of entry for the thesis. Accordingly, my first chapter explored Campbell's multifaceted deconstruction of religious dogma in the fevered and polarised sociopolitical climate of the 1980s. The urban and female Gothic occult thriller *The Nameless* anatomises the abnegation of free will and self that is entailed in submission to the (oc)cult. I suggested that the anti-natalist cult of the Nameless represent, in Campbell's vision, a neo-Baudrillardian 'seductive chaos'.[17] However, despite the author's admitted 'timid' agnosticism, I argued that the text tentatively posits that such 'chaos' can be resisted via a liberal and humane alternative, an embrace of the maternal.[18] The later ensemble work, *The Hungry Moon*, was shown to expand the critique further, to address shortfalls of established pagan and both orthodox and fundamentalist Christian belief systems. A climactic triumph over destructive evil is finally secured by what is suggested as primeval humanist instinct. However, here alterity is not destroyed, only banished. This, the narrowness of averted catastrophe, and the implication of circularity, all suggest the dormancy of, and continuing threat implied by, resurgent fundamentalism. Lastly, the transitional novel *Obsession* foregrounds the author's hybrid fusion of realism and naturalism with individual psychology. This ostensibly non-supernatural narrative is infused by what I argued was an equally characteristic flirtatious note of transcendence and inference of the sublime. Further, the deliberately named character of 'Peter Priest' articulates insecurities about perception and experience, doubt, notion of selfhood

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[17] Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, p. 202.
[18] Best, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell'.

and the subject's place, both in a secular, pathologised society and in the universe, that was to distinguish and be developed in Campbell's later work.

My second chapter addressed Campbell's representation of the invidious effect of secular metanarratives within contemporary culture, principally orthodox belief systems around neoliberalism, monetarism, consumerism and social class, refracted through mass media. In Campbell's vision these discourses are transformed into generators of psychological horror. The agent of threat is the familiar Gothic trope of the serial killer, a figure to which Campbell returns repeatedly. Explicitly sociopathic in Campbell's non-supernatural works, that is, impacted by experiences of abuse, inequality, deprivation and celebrity culture rather than innate or metaphysically-originated depravity, the serial murderer appears to incarnate the Baudrillardian notion of symbiosis between individual depression and cultural neurosis that is readily convertible to violence.[19] However, in Campbell's hands the archetype is more complex than the familiar symbol of 'alienation' and symptomatic 'bitter comment' on the breakdown of social cohesion described by Punter.[20] *The Face That Must Die*, which first appeared in 1979 before its expansion in 1983, was not only prescient for its anti-homophobia and for establishing the serial killer subgenre before the cultural industry that became Hannibal Lecter.[21] With this novel and its non-supernatural successors, Campbell demythologises the 'bogeyman', first deconstructing the conservative crime-detection narrative within which they are often framed: after all, Horridge, the arch conservative and counter-countercultural antagonist of *Face That Must Die*, imagines himself as a detective. Campbell's murderers are not socially elevated

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[19] Baudrillard, *Consumer Society*, p. 293.
[20] Punter, *Literature of Terror*, II, p. 205.
[21] Campbell states that he believes *The Face That Must Die* to be 'the first anti-homophobic horror novel' in his interview with Simon Best.

and do not represent demonised criminality. Nor, unlike Harris's Lecter or Jeff Lindsay's Dexter Morgan, do they display any particular insight, charm or charisma. In contrast, I argued that Campbell articulates a deliberately uningratiating, anti-romantic and deglamourised tonality. Being that these are also texts denoted by misrecognition, cognitive dissonance, passive-aggression and ambivalent endings, in contrast to the accessible Manichean narratives of more popular writers for whom King may be regarded as template, the net effect is disturbing. In agreeing with Connelly's stricture against aesthetising and therefore euphemising the brutal realities of the act of murder and murderers, it would be easy also to concur that a 'pessimistic culture' that emphasises 'negative' portraiture of society and its members will, inevitably, 'tend to produce misanthropic or life-devaluating narratives'.[22] However, in contrast to texts like Ellis's *American Psycho*, which may be interpreted as affirming that view, I demonstrated that Campbell's early subversion of the detective genre presaged ongoing ambition and inventiveness. His narrative from the next decade on the formation of a killer, *The One Safe Place*, combines urban Gothic settings and social realism. The novel anatomises the causes and 'contagion' of violence in Anglo-American culture, an undertaking that in scale, and of itself, refutes accusations of parochialism or lack of ambition. By doing so, *One Safe Place* develops a sympathetic, minutely observed critique of class, gender and cross-generational conflict. In interrogating media commodification of violence, the text also exposes the contradictions within censorship, a conservative mantra which, signifying the suppression of free speech, Campbell has consistently opposed. Lastly, the metatextual *Secret Story*, whilst refraining portraiture of oppressive

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[22] Connelly, 'Representation of Serial Killers', p. 192. See also Chapter 2, footnote 98.

societal mores through its astute depiction of petty office politics, both

deconstructs and then reconstructs the serial killer as author. Campbell, I

suggested, does this in order to satirise both the perceived excesses of his own

horror fiction industry, which has thrived on the 'serial killer' phenomenon, with all

its associated lurid visceral detail and excesses, and the complex relationship of

the authorial persona to its readership. He thus begins to induce the Gothic and its

audience to behold itself in a mirror. As the novel's heroine-survivor declares,

'[t]his is our story now' (p. 382).

Campbell has possessed the aesthetic dexterity to explore the roles of authors,

texts and audiences further, in two key poioumenonic works that eschew realism.

My third chapter, on his use of the novella form, showcased the writer's willingness

to experiment. In doing so, it demonstrated the astuteness of Campbell's choice,

both in terms of his own artistic achievement and for his contribution to the Gothic,

as the novella proves an ideal vehicle, between short story and novel, for the

concentrated mediation of the experience and journey of a haunted single

consciousness over time. Simultaneously, I proposed that the author's

employment of the novella demonstrates an investigative approach to aesthetic

and broader philosophical questions, an interrogation undertaken in the full

knowledge that answers and a conclusion may not be possible, or even desirable.

The oneiric *Needing Ghosts*, a central text in Campbell's oeuvre, is his most

explicitly autobiographical representation of authorship. However, it is also his

most postmodern stylistically and thematically, its protagonist/unreliable narrator

and circular present tense narrative challenging notions of a teleological

interpretation of history. I demonstrated that in comparison with King, who has also

utilised the novella form, Campbell takes a markedly less populist and more

paranoiac stance on creativity in which writing is, consistently, 'a compulsion'.[23]

The trapped author-figure also appears to function as an avatar for the subject, and, by implication, the reader, who must reinterpret the nature and 'meaning' of Motterhead's journey and its ambivalent end with every reading. This multiplicity of representation is explored in Campbell's late novella twenty-six years later, *The Booking*. I established how this text, virtually framed as a claustrophobic two-hand single-set stage drama, portrays the complex response of a fractured consciousness to both debilitating sociopolitical changes and the advent of technology in the much-touted 'information era'. Campbell's ingenious narrative overtly channels paranoia concerning the potential for surveillance and control occasioned by the phenomenon of the Internet and the World Wide Web. Yet I argued that, simultaneously, the protagonist's use of a computer and the ambiguous climax, which seems to strike a note of freedom and independence, can also be read as demonstrating scepticism towards such anxieties, and, by implication, the debilitating simulacrisation underpinning the postmodernist paradigm. The multiplicity of interpretation afforded by both texts suggests enactment of what Hutcheon describes as 'a challenging and exploiting of the commodification of art by our own consumer culture', in which the text is 'an open process' that 'changes with each receiver'.[24] Campbell thus uses ideas from postmodernism, including overt narrative experimentation, *without* commitment to its profoundly apolitical or atheistic conclusions.

As my fourth chapter demonstrates, this iconoclastic nonconformity comes to the fore in Campbell's metaleptic narratives of the early twenty-first century, which

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[23] Best, 'Interview: Ramsey Campbell'.
[24] Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism*, pp. 207, 220.

borrow from and display as much fidelity to then emergent posthumanist concepts as they do to postmodern ones. In three key postmillennial novels, Campbell shifts focus from anatomisation of the splintered, paranoid subject to an exploration, firstly, of the incursion of 'others' conferred with sentience by digital technology upon the subject and the 'reality' it inhabits, and, secondly, the ontological status of these new, posthuman lives. I examined how *Grin of the Dark* hedonistically combines a Lovecraftian cosmic vision, coulrophobia from the Gothic tradition, vaudevillian comedy and a plethora of forms of old and new communication, presented in fetishized terms to almost narcotic effect - on the reader as much as upon the novel's hapless and finally overwhelmed protagonist. The presentation of online trolling and metaphors of virus and infection may imply an anti-technological positioning. However, as with the novellas, the hero-victim's final ambiguous physical and psychic status, simultaneously subsumed but transformed and independent, suggests final abstinence from any definitive moral judgement. Similarly, *Think Yourself Lucky*, which reworks the Gothic doppelgänger motif and revisits both the societal exploration of Campbell's earlier serial killer narratives and concern with authorship, functions, on one level, as another cautionary narrative on the 'dangers' posed by the Internet. However, I expounded on how other ontological and ethical vistas are in fact opened up in the process: exploration of the body in virtual space, the subject's isolation, loneliness, and vulnerability, and – in a return to Campbell's familial concerns – the parental responsibility of author as creator. The classic Gothic template for the latter is, of course, Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which I argued is partly rewritten by Campbell in *Seven Days of Cain*. This novel expands Campbell's earlier meditation on natalism, this time in a posthuman context. Bentley, the text's update of 'Victor

Frankenstein', is seen to have completed self-realisation to excess, creating a multiplicity of 'selves', new posthuman citizens, whose physical and metaphysical dimensions and 'rights' are explored. The mutability of history and the 'reality' that the protagonist and his creations inhabit suggest that paranoia is Campbell's default for comprehending the world and one's place in it. I thus demonstrated that these texts align with the developing concept of the 'posthuman Gothic' in their portrayal of anxiety and liminality. They also provide more evidence of Campbell's propensity for generic hybridity, here with science fiction. Further, as with, for example, Philip K. Dick's narratives, they reflect some complex theoretical concepts, here both postmodern and posthuman paradigms, without the elite stylisation of what Jameson deems the 'high literary novel'.[25]

In choosing to trace Campbell's mediation of metanarratives and treatment of authorship and subjectivity, I have been conscious of a fundamental and inescapable characteristic of his fiction. As well as being substantial, his output is tremendously protean and heterogeneous: alternately supernatural and non-supernatural in theme; by turns realistic, even naturalistic, and experimental in form, and varying in length from short stories to the novellas and novels focused upon here. Campbell observes that Lovecraft was engaged on a continuous quest 'for the perfect form'.[26] Emulating the restlessness of the American writer, Campbell has declared of his chosen genre that 'I don't think I've exhausted its boundaries by any means' and that the 'field' is broad enough to allow me to deal fully with any theme I want to deal with'.[27] This sheer breadth also demonstrates an adaptability, as I have indicated, to other modes of interpretation – for instance

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[25] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 298.
[26] Campbell, 'My Roots Exhumed', p. 4.
[27] Campbell, 'Why I Write Horror Fiction', p. 304; Walker, 'Meet Ramsey Campbell'.

psychoanalytic, feminist or queer – that I have had space to allude to only briefly.

For example, the author has admitted that the intensity of Horridge's paranoid

schizophrenia in *Face That Must Die* draws upon his own mother's mental

illness.[28] Conversant with knowledge of Campbell's copious paratexts, it is equally

impossible to ignore a splintered autobiographical, indeed confessional, element in

the portrayals of Robyn Laurel and Priest in *Obsession*. Both characters

experience and suffer guilt at the hands of elderly relatives transformed into,

respectively, living and undead 'revenant' figures. Similarly, *The Nameless* and a

range of other texts, such as *The Parasite*, *The Influence* and *Pact of the Fathers,*

with their female protagonists and haunted and haunti*ng* child figures, address

themes of maternity, domesticity, familial power structures and the vulnerabilities

and terrors of childhood. Meanwhile, Horridge's homophobic fear of emasculation

in *Face That Must Die* could be analysed alongside Lester's terror of the proximity

and contact with, implicitly penetration by, the other in the later novel, *Grin of the*

Dark. Simon, for instance, dreams of Tubby's 'pale luminous face swelling close to

mine', and of it 'widen[ing] its eyes and its grin at me before slithering under the

bed' (pp. 197–8). The representation of a repulsive alien alterity and the response

it evokes recalls the entities of M. R. James's narratives, but with an intensification

of leering insidiousness and arguably even, in the subject's passivity, desire.[29] Any

of these theoretical approaches, and they are by no means the only ones available

(*Grin of the Dark*, for example, equally lends itself to Bakhtinian analysis), could

afford studies of equivalent length and substance to what I have offered in this

thesis using postmodern and posthuman paradigms.

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[28] Klaehn, Reaching for the Awesome and Numinous', p. 312.
[29] Numerous examples in James's homosocial narratives can be deployed to support a Queer studies reading, the animated bedsheet in '"Oh Whistle, And I'll Come To You, My Lad'" perhaps being the most obvious.

This observation on the diversity of interpretations that can be made relating to Campbell's work leads me to make two summarising propositions. The first follows on naturally, and it is, of course, that his vast and varied corpus, and particularly his longer fictional output, deserves further attention for what it brings to Gothic studies, both to the canon of Gothic literature and to its scholarship. It is not just that Campbell is a prominent, conscientious and industrious figure and an assiduous networker in his field - although in the breadth of his acknowledged influences and espousal of his peers' work, from Ligotti to Steve Mosby, José Carlos Somoza Ortega and many others, Campbell not only 'writes horror' but is arguably a living encyclopaedia of the genre.[30] His interpretation of horror is inclusive and amorphous: in one essay Campbell has remarked that '[o]f course many tales of horror don't involve the supernatural, but they surely convey terror, and I maintain that horror is the term that best contains all three fields'.[31] In his exploration, Campbell contributes a unique, finely honed prose style. It is literate, highly personal and evocative of an intense paranoia, a voice far removed from the Manichean narratives of King, and more unsettling. His fictions also mount a distinctive critique of the religious and sociopolitical metanarratives permeating contemporary culture. In a market where writers like Hutson have dominated commercially, Campbell's works afford an incisive and satirical perspective on the status of authors, their works and relationships with their audiences. Further, I

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[30] See, for example, McWilliam, 'Ramsey Campbell Interviewed' for copious lists of authors that Campbell has admired. Campbell's respective praise for Mosby and the Cuban-Spaniard Somoza indicate his interests in both generic boundaries (Mosby writes suspense thrillers; Somoza, historical mysteries) and non-Anglophone literature.

[31] Ramsey Campbell, 'The H-Word: H for Honesty', *Nightmare,* 17 (February 2014) <https://www.nightmare-magazine.com/nonfiction/the-h-word-h-for-honesty/> [first accessed 31 October 2020]

have demonstrated that they interrogate the ontological status of the postmodern, and latterly posthuman, subject itself.

Fundamentally, the majority of Campbell's career coincides with the rise and trajectory of literary postmodernism. Campbell is a challenging, polymorphic and hybrid presence. His fiction utilises attributes associated with the postmodern, but is not exclusively *of* it. As Beville notes, there is a natural sympathy between the Gothic's transgression of the liminal 'borders' between reality and fiction and the postmodern movement's interrogation and denunciation of 'grand narratives'.[32] In this vein, and in his work, Campbell has, as I have shown, clearly critiqued what he perceives as repressive metadiscourses. His fictions are also self-conscious, self-reflexive, experimental and imbued with cultural references. However, Campbell is more complex and chameleonic than the descriptor of 'postmodernist writer' or even 'Gothic-postmodernist writer' would allow for. Justifiably, the writer has been praised by Joshi and other critics for his portrayal of paranoia. Yet Campbell's fictions reflect broader concerns and are more varied structurally than the psychiatrically-informed works of, say, Patrick McGrath, whom Spooner credits with creating 'a calculatedly Gothic aesthetic with a pronounced interest in extreme mental illness'.[33] It is difficult, for example, to envisage works more different in form, scale, style and subject matter than Campbell's *Needing Ghosts* and *One Safe Place*. Far from its failing to offer the aesthetic and wider philosophical 'complexity' of authors such as Ballard, as Punter claims, Campbell's work draws from and reflects contemporary postmodernist and emergent posthumanist

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[32] Beville, *Gothic-postmodernism*, p. 15.
[33] Spooner, 'Gothic 1950 to the Present', p. 299. This is not to disparage McGrath's own creative evolution, from early parody of Gothic tropes to consideration of 'issues of historicity, national and personal identity and the figure of the artist', as described by Sue Zlosnik in *Patrick McGrath* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 12.

paradigms.[34] It does so, though, without total alignment to any one theoretical

school. Campbell's simultaneous adherence to a consciousness of historical

tradition and espousal of the horror genre finds a ready corollary in

postmodernism's elision of the barrier between high literary and popular culture.

Nonetheless, his vision is agnostic and, whilst it is sceptical, also morally and

socially engaged. This contrasts with the atheism, amorality, insularity or

apoliticism often identified with the postmodernist theory of figures such as

Baudrillard. Campbell's voice, as with his ethical priorities, that is, his interests in

the vulnerability of children, freedom of expression against the forces of

dogmatism, and 'the right to question', remains consistent and distinctive.[35] As

Campbell's alternation between supernatural and non-supernatural themes

attests, it has an iconoclastic timbre: playful and sometimes comic, experimental,

sceptical towards shibboleths, and always restlessly interrogative. For audiences

and academics within Gothic studies, the entirety of Campbell's work is worth – in

fact overdue - both revisiting and re-evaluation.

My second proposition arises from Campbell's obvious exclusion, thus far, from

the afore-mentioned canon of 'high' literary culture insofar as it applies to late

twentieth century and early twenty-first century writers. With the possible

exceptions of Ellis and Danielewski (and the latter for one text, the 2000 *House of

Leaves*), it is obvious that few authors associated primarily or significantly with the

Gothic in any of its manifestations have found admission to the Academy

alongside the likes of Ishiguro, McEwan, Rushdie and their peers. The hostile

reception given to King's National Book Award (2003) by the critic Harold Bloom

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[34] Punter, *Literature of Terror*, II, p. 183.
[35] Dziemianowicz, 'Interview with Ramsey Campbell', p. 18.

illustrates how far even the genre's indisputably most prominent and successful writer has been from acceptance and respectability. It is arguable that at least one of Campbell's novels, *One Safe Place*, his hugely ambitious and near mainstream epic tragedy of social realism engaging with two national cultures, may have been included in Hutchinson's study of the social novel, and indeed more widely reviewed in British and other national media, if it had not been perceived and marketed as the work of a 'horror writer'.[36] However, the concurrent elision of postmodernist theories, an essentially atheistic movement denoted by what Terry Eagleton described as 'grave doubts about truth and reality', by *post-*postmodernist trends can offer, I argue, a more sympathetic critical environment for reappraising the sui generis Campbell.[37] Joshi summarises Campbell perceptively, describing him as being 'a humanist who knows how difficult it is to be a fully moral human being, and what courage it takes to be so' against hostile and destructive forces.[38] A sense of haunted agnosticism, and, especially, the assertion of liberal humanist values and a belief in the subject's independence, no matter how vexed or besieged, are consistent features of Campbell's writing, and perhaps above all in his endings. It is there, for example, in Diana's 'cry for healing' in *The Hungry Moon* (p. 416); Patricia's insistence that this is 'our story now' (*Secret Story*, p. 382); Brookes' defiant conclusion that 'It's exactly what I make it' (*The Booking*, p. 83), and most explicitly vocalised in Andy's final challenge to Beyer, in *Seven Days of Cain,* to '[s]how some humanity' as a means

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[36] The same publishing house, Headline Book Publishing, issued Campbell's next, overtly supernatural, novel, *The House on Nazareth Hill*, his major contribution to the 'haunted house' subgenre, the following year (1996), with a strikingly similar cover illustration of a child's face in profile. Campbell, of course, is unapologetic and indeed proud of his recognition and classification as a writer of 'horror'.

[37] Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2004 [2003]), p. 73. For Eagleton, postmodernism had itself been no more than a late phase of modernism.

[38] Joshi, *Ramsey Campbell and Modern Horror Fiction*, p. 159.

of becoming 'human', and therefore demonstrating 'how you can be real' (p. 298).

Rather than what Eagleton scathingly describes as the 'post-tragic realm of

postmodernism', in which there is a 'nihilistic absence of salvation', because 'there

is 'nothing to be saved', Campbell's fictions can be interpreted as being more fully

aligned with emergent paradigms that confer more status upon value systems and

meaning.[39]

For example, I see an affinity with the struggles of the subject, the

representation of which is so prevalent in Campbell's writing, in Huber's concept of

'reconstructive fantasy'. Huber perceives an attempted reassertion of the

pragmatics of fiction 'as a form of communication that actually manages to convey

meaning, however unstable and compromised it may be' and 'a renewed humanist

subtext' in texts like *House of Leaves*.[40] With the partial exception of Danielewski,

her supporting case studies are drawn from what has been considered

contemporary literary fiction - Jonathan Safran Foer, Michael Chabon and David

Mitchell - rather than from the Gothic. Huber's chosen combination-model of

mimesis and an embedded fantasy or 'marvellous' text within the text, an

embedded narrative 'which never entirely revokes its mimetic grounding', may also

be more applicable to some of Campbell's works, such as *Seven Days of Cain* and

Think Yourself Lucky, than others.[41] Nevertheless, Huber's espousal of a post-

ironic and more pragmatic hermeneutical system, one that places a premium on

the 'effect' of texts, the author as 'guarantor for the sincerity of the act of

communication' and the 'communicative bond between author and reader',

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[39] Eagleton, *After Theory*, p. 58. Eagleton is pithily summarising the pessimistic implications of arguments by theorists like Jameson and Baudrillard.
[40] Irmtraud Huber, *Literature after Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 15, 75.
[41] Ibid, p. 51.

suggest a new, more ethical and empathic arena in theory, in which Campbell's

liberal and humane poetics and politics may be more favourably appraised.[42] For,

like the metafictions that Huber draws upon for her exemplar, Campbell's

metahorror texts, as I have demonstrated, focus on methods by and trials through

which, as subjects, 'we draw upon fictions to make sense of ourselves, our past,

our present and our future'.[43] Huber is, it must be acknowledged, by no means the

only theorist working in this emergent school of enquiry.[44] In the spirit of Lyotard, I

have merely intended here to start a debate, not conclude it: to encourage and

foster a consensus that Campbell is worth the attention of scholars, within *and*

outside Gothic studies, as 'a particular state of discussion, not its end'.[45]

It is a perpetual dynamism with which Campbell, it is hoped, would find favour.

The writer has expressed the hope that he 'never find[s]' the limits of his chosen

'enormously capacious' field.[46] Since *The Booking*, Campbell has maintained a

high level of productivity, but his work revisits and reworks the key earlier themes

that I have examined in this thesis. The *Three Births of Daoloth* or 'Brichester

Mythos' trilogy, for example, returns to the writer's early imaginative landscape,

and in particular the Lovecraftian cosmic horror of *The Hungry Moon* and the later

'black magic' narrative, *The Darkest Part of the Woods*.[47] Certain preoccupations,

notably the vulnerability of the family unit, the dangerous seductiveness of cults,

and a besieged but resilient scepticism which must counter the latter to protect the

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[42] Ibid, pp. 12, 27, 40.

[43] Ibid, p. 221.

[44] See, for example, the essays collected in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism*, ed. by Robin van der Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017). In discussion of the works of Nobel laureate Toni Morrison and David Foster Wallace, whose final novel *The Pale King* (2011) was a Pulitzer Prize finalist, there remains a focus on contemporary literature rather than the genre fictions with which Campbell is identified.

[45] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 65.

[46] Klaehn, 'Reaching for the Awesome and Numinous', p. 313.

[47] As does *The Wise Friend* (London: Flame Tree Press, 2020), the last novel Campbell had produced prior to completion of this thesis in October 2020.

former, are refrained in an epic supernatural narrative, told in the first person, that spans three generations. In one scene in the last novel of the three, *The Way of the Worm* (2018), Dominic Sheldrake, the protagonist, testifies in court against the antagonists, the villainous Noble family triad. He is asked:

'Mr Sheldrake, how would you describe your view of religion?'

'Undecided.' This hardly helped, and I fumbled for the truth. 'As I grow older,' I said, 'I'm more anxious to find something to believe in.'

'Does that mean you believe in nothing at the moment?'

'No, it means I'm searching. It means I hope there's something to believe.' (p. 135)

Like his avatar here, Campbell is engaged on a continuous quest, 'for the perfect form'. Yet, more widely, in an age where new but jadedly familiar 'seductions', the totalitarian grand narratives of neoliberalism and illiberal populism, hold disturbing sway, Campbell's continuously interrogative narratives illustrate how the flames of healthy iconoclasticism and a subtle emancipatory politics may still flicker and endure.

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