Fear, Phobia and the Victorian Psyche

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In his work *Mental Maladies* (1838), the distinguished French physician, J. E. D. Esquirol noted that all forms of social advancement brought with them new forms of mental disease: "There has been no advancement in the sciences, no invention in the arts, nor any important innovation, which has not served as a cause of monomania, or lent to it, its peculiar character." This was particularly true, he argued, with forms of fear, which followed closely shifts in social and political organisation. Thus the monomaniac "who would formerly have been delirious with respect to magic, sorcery and the infernal regions; is now delirious, thinking himself threatened, pursued, and ready to be incarcerated by the agents of the police."[1] Esquirol's insight, that forms of fear and insanity would take their form and colour from the social and psychological environment within which the individual dwelt, was absorbed into English psychiatry and psychology as it developed in the nineteenth century. Such thinking fused with the belief that the rapid social changes of the industrial age had given rise to an ever increasing range of psychological disorders, and forms of fear, a belief that climaxed in G. Stanley Hall's "Synthetic Genetic Study of Fear" in the *American Journal of Psychology* (1914). In this article, Hall registered no less than 138 different types of pathological fear, all with their own Greek names, from more generalised categories such as agoraphobia, haptophobia (fear of touch), and hypegiaphobia (a very Victorian category of fear of responsibility) to the very specific amakaphobia (fear of carriages) and pteronophobia (fear of feathers).[2]

As David Trotter has observed, the last decades of the nineteenth century "were phobia's *belle epoque*."[3] There has been very little work, however, exploring the social and cultural origins of this rise to prominence of ideas of phobia. The strong association of phobia with the work of Freud has also led in literary scholarship to a particular focus on phobia as primarily a phenomenon associated with Modernism. In this essay, I explore the earlier foundations of this preoccupation with inexplicable states of fear in the cultural, literary and medical discourses of the mid-nineteenth century. In particular, I consider, in the

latter part of the essay, the "rediscovery" of George Borrow's novel *Lavengro* (1851) by medical psychiatry in the 1890s. The novel was hailed not only as a precursor of the medical identifications and constructions of phobia emerging from the 1870s onwards, but also as one of the finest forms of its analysis. Medical and literary discourse were closely intertwined in the nineteenth century, and to understand the emergence of cultural anxieties with regard to states of excessive fear, or medical diagnoses of phobia, we need to understand their intersections, within a broader historical context. Far from originating with Freud, ideas of excessive fear find their roots in mid-nineteenth century culture.

Fear was one of the key topics of the emerging sciences of both psychology and sociology in the 1880s and 1890s. Hall's 1914 essay was based on research he conducted in the 1890s (and published in preliminary form in 1897), into the phenomena of fear, which collated the results of 1701 responses of a set of questions he had devised. In adopting this methodology, he had been motivated by concerns at the limitations of experimental work in laboratories, and also the "introspective" method, in their abilities to capture the complexities of feelings of fear.[4] Whilst he had aimed for responses from all ages, his sample was primarily under the age 23, in large part because returns were from schools (including, he notes, 43 one hour compositions of "unusual merit" from a training school in Cambridge, England).[5] Respondents had been asked to write about their experiences of fears in childhood, either directly or in recollection, according to six fairly broad categories (celestial phenomena; inanimate objects; living things; disease and death; supernatural; sudden experiences), in each case giving their age at the time, and the effects of the fear upon them. The responses make fascinating reading, in part because we are only given snippets, and in part because Hall's own commentary does not address much of the detail or specific causation, leaving the space open to the reader to speculate as to why, for example, a teacher "has for years feared to see someone hanging from a beam or hook whenever she enters a vacant room."[6] For readers familiar with *Great Expectations*, the image recalls Pip's terror, as a child, on his first visit to Miss Havisham when he has a vision of her hanging from a beam: "In the terror of seeing the figure, and in the terror of being certain that it had not been there a moment before, I at first ran from it, and then ran towards it. And my terror was greatest of all, when I found no figure there."[7] Dickens wonderfully captures the enigmatic quality of this terrifying vision, both an external figment, but also a defining note of the inner psyche, which re-emerges in later life (the hallucination recurs when Pip returns to Satis House in adulthood, moments before he sees Miss Havisham consumed in flames). The

parallels prompt the question as to whether this teacher might have read *Great Expectations* and incorporated the image of Miss Havisham hanging from a beam into her own private fears?

Hall's interpretative framework, however, is not concerned with social or cultural influences, but is firmly evolutionary: all manifestations of fear, he argues, can be traced to the "original psychoplasm" of primitive man, still evident in children's souls.[8] In the section on "Fear of Diseases," which touches on sexuality, he creates a differentiation between fears from shock, and other "more archaic fear-neuroses and psychoses [which] slowly became fastened upon the race. More than any other class, perhaps, such fears are the stigmata of degeneration, and for this reason again, as well as for their cryptogamous nature, harder to cure."[9] His arguments here intersect with those of George Beard, instigator of theories of neurasthenia, and also of Charcot, labelled by contemporaries the "step-father" of neurasthenia, who in his celebrated work on hysteria created a link between neurasthenia and cultural theories of degeneration.[10] Despite his intriguing hints as to the sexual nature of these neuroses (cryptogamous, meaning literally hidden marriage, derives from Linnaean plant taxonomy), Hall does not foreground the sexual in his analysis. Returning to the material for his more extended analyses in 1914 (and thus after he had hosted Freud at Clark University for Freud's only visit to the States), Hall alters somewhat his interpretive stance.[11] He acknowledges his debt to Freud and Adler for "the insight that the preformation of about all psychoses and neuroses is found in childhood and infancy" but he strongly resists Freud's theories of a predominant sexual cause: "Freud is wrong in interpreting this most generic form of fear as rooted in sex, worries concerning which are only one of the more specific, if common and most typical, forms of its expression."[12] Anxiety or fear he sees as more fundamental, predating even the emergence of a nervous system, and linked to the instinct for survival. His stance is both celebratory and "fearful" as he constructs an elaborate framework of theory to contain linguistically these anxieties which are both primeval in origin, "these dragons of the prime that slumber within us," and also the accretions of a denatured civilisation.[13] The soul, he argues, is "perhaps never so vital, awake" as in a state of fear, and he suggests that if Bergson's "durée réelle" has any existence "it is in the pure psychic state of fear."[14] Yet, drawing on Freud's pupil Wilhelm Stekel, he also suggests that "what man really most fears is himself, because his inner primal nature is that which he knows least and which might seize and control most completely his body and soul."[15] The declaration seems infused with the spirit of Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886), moving

beyond Hall's sense of an integrated, evolutionary-based psyche, to a construct of a divided self, where the social being could be surprised and overtaken by a threatening, unknown other. There is a subtle shift in his focus of interpretation: for the first time he now argues that one of the primary determinants of neurosis is our "dread of self-betrayal"; anxieties and phobias are given a self-conscious, social dimension.[16]

In this, I would suggest, he is responding to structures in nineteenth-century culture which predate both evolutionary psychology and Freud. Pip, for example, at the opening of *Great Expectations* (1861), is inducted simultaneously into a state of fear and of self-conscious identity. That bleak moment, as he traces the lettering on his family's gravestone, is, he suggests, when he first becomes aware of the "identity of things," and that "the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip." Such perception is immediately followed by the graphic materialisation of the convict, embodiment of all bogymen fears, who himself claims a dual-layered identity, the terrifying external form, and the even more threatening, hidden, "young man." Pip's analysis of his state of fear is revealing: "I was in mortal terror of the young man who wanted my heart and liver; I was in mortal terror of my interlocutor with the ironed leg; I was in mortal terror of myself, from whom an awful promise had been extracted."[17] He ascends from the physical, to the social (with that surprising use of "interlocutor"), and finally to the interiorised realm of the self, with self-terror occupying the dominating position. The hierarchy enacts the transition Foucault famously identified in *Discipline and Punish*, as external, corporeal forms of discipline are supplanted by the internalisation of social controls, so that the inmate of the panopticon "inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection."[18] For Pip, "terror of myself" is the founding note of his identity, as he struggles within the illusions of his great expectations, and the withering contempt of social prejudices, to craft a social and psychological sense of acceptable personhood. Magwitch's subsequent return only confirms those inner fears of self, and the unstable nature of an identity constructed in relation to social proscriptions, internalised but barely understood.

In his 1897 discussion of the various categories of fears, Hall scarcely addresses causation linked to immediate familial or social factors, since his primary focus is on an evolutionary, primeval source. Yet, elements of the immediate cultural environment emerge in the accounts, if only as proximate causes. Thus one seventeen year old girl noted that she "Never feared robbery and murder till old enough to read newspapers, and never feared

diseases till after learning their horrors in quack advertisements; now both haunt her."[19] The Bible clearly offered fertile ground for fearful imaginings: there are reports of terror of the bottomless pit (here linked to that new technological miracle, the elevator), and distress, or ommaphobia (fear of eyes) caused by a Bible illustration: a girl, aged 7, "suffered by spells day and night for fear of the eyes of a Bible picture of a bad angel."[20] Hall tries to be even-handed in relation to religion: he suggests that religion had helped remove fear of death in 9 cases, before then arguing that in many more cases it had actively caused or increased it. He is uncharacteristically outspoken on the impact of the "doctrine of immortality, and its utilization as a moral motive" which has "brought a body of terrors which work havoc with many nervous systems."[21] The section on "Moral and Religious Fears" bears out this conclusion, with numerous individuals experiencing horror of committing sin, but also some determined resistance, such as the English lady who had "been robbed of the joy of childhood by religious fears" and had turned instead to the devil "who she found kinder," until she then acquired a terror of "the unpardonable sin."[22] A boy of 10 was more resourceful: he "decided to go to hell when he died; rubbed brimstone on him to get used to it, etc."[23] A whole world of possibilities is contained in that final, infuriating,"etc": what other acts did the boy commit in his desire to enter the kingdom of hell? And did he turn to brimstone because he had been told that he was a liar? since as Isaac Watts' Divine Song "Against Lying" informed all children, "ev'ry liar/Must have his portion in the lake/That burns with brimstone and with fire."[24]

Hall's work was both born out of, and contributed to, a culture deeply preoccupied with the origins and manifestations of fear, as manifested in its literature and its science, from Darwin's speculations on the evolutionary origins of fear in his *Expression of Emotions* (1872) and "Biographical Sketch of an Infant" (1877), to the increasingly sophisticated work conducted in laboratories on the human nervous system by figures such as Wilhelm Wundt in Germany and Angelo Mosso in Italy.[25] Mosso's popular book, *La Paura* (1883), or *Fear*, (which was translated into English in 1896), brought together scientific and cultural analysis, combining an in-depth explication of the physiology of fear, with psychological and social explorations of the harmful effects of contemporary educational and child rearing methods. Mosso follows Darwin in adopting an evolutionary explanation for the emergence and overall utility of fear, but suggests that beyond a certain degree the phenomena of fear "become morbid and fatal to the organism…for this reason fear must be looked upon as a disease."[26] Mosso opens his book with an engaging account of his own initial terror in the lecture

theatre, but his predominant concern is for the child. Those that bring up a child, he argues, are responsible for its brain: "Every ugly thing told to the child, every shock, every fright given him, will remain like minute splinters in the flesh, to torture him all his life long."[27] Physiological precision and technical invention are combined in the work with a Gothic literary sensibility. *Fear* offers an explanation and illustration of various devices Mosso deployed to measure fear (as in the "human balance" he invented, in anticipation of the modern MRI scan, to measure the flow of blood),[28] together with highly emotional evocations of the workings of fear within mind and memory:

> Anxiety, fear, horror will twine themselves perpetually around the memory, like deadly ivy choking the light of reason. At every step we remember the terrors of childhood: the vaults of a cellar, the dark arch of a bridge, the cross-roads losing themselves in the darkness, the crosses hidden amidst the bushes of a cemetery … breathe out the memory of childish fear. The eye of the child seems to cast one more look on these scenes from out of the very depths of the soul.[29]

Hall's linguistic restraint is balanced by Mosso's powers of imaginative projection as he delineates, well before Freud, the forms in which childhood fears and terrors come to dominate adult emotions and responses.

The writings of Hall and Mosso on fear were part of the late-century interest in the inter-relationship of body and mind, and of the human relation to the animal, in terms of evolutionary and social development. Whilst not endorsing the extremes of degenerationist theory, both were also concerned that the accumulating refinements of civilisation could generate their own disorders. Mosso's work on *Fatigue* (1891), for example, was a study of the pressures of modern life, with references to the work of Westphal on agoraphobia, and Beard on neurasthenia.[30] Hall's imprint can be seen in popular American culture, as illustrated by an 1898 article "What do I fear?" in the magazine, *The Cosmopolitan*, which administered its own questionnaire to celebrities, including queries regarding childhood fears, causation (heredity or environment) and the rather leading question, "As competition becomes greater in the struggle of modern life, do your fears increase?"[31]

In Britain, Hall's work inspired a more high-minded response in the *Westminster Review* from the campaigning feminist and free thinker, Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, and her partner, Ben Elmy.[32] In her article on "Fear as an Ethic Force," Elmy draws on Hall's work, and his conclusion that since no child was now afraid of the devil, parents should use affection and love to ensure their

children's good behaviour, "instead of terrorising them with Satan's wrath." Elmy offers a scathing critique of the ways in which Isaac Watts' 'Divine Songs' had been used to educate children into a regime of fear. Amongst the songs she singles out are XXIII, to those who flout filial duty: "The ravens shall pick out his eyes, and eagles eat the same"; and XV on the threat of hell, and the lake of brimstone and fire, for liars, which probably inspired Hall's rebellious child to cover himself with brimstone. She comments witheringly, 'But while a child's fib is to meet with so ferocious retribution, there is not indicated any condign punishment for reverend doctors who dare to take an equal liberty with the truth'.[33] Unlike Hall, she is less sanguine about the future, suggesting that "Religion that was erewhile compelled to abandon the savage instruments of bodily torture is now being further driven to relinquish – shall we say 'revise'? – her equally inexcusable implements of agony of the mind." The force is all in that "revise": her argument is that religion is merely reformulating ways to deform and debase the minds of the young, creating new forms of internalised agony, and "fear and serfdom in body and mind."[34] Hers is a radical vision of the ways in which cultural formations can act upon, and deform, the inner structures of the mind, furnishing the forms of fear experienced in childhood and beyond.

The focus of her attack on an eighteenth-century 'rhyming divine' might seem misplaced, in a late nineteenth-century work, but Watts' songs continued to be required reading for the young of the nineteenth, inculcated in numerous ways within middle class households (including the embroidering of samplers for girls). Watts' legacy also stretched forward into the twentieth century, influencing one of the keynotes of modernist writing: Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), which draws on his own Victorian upbringing. The evocative opening scene, which attempts to capture the consciousness of early years, is dominated by the cadences of Stephen's creative response to Dante's threat that if he did not apologise, 'the eagles will pull out his eyes':

> Pull out his eyes,
>
> Apologise,
>
> Apologise,
>
> Pull out his eyes.[35]

The haunting, hypnotic, rhyme captures the claustrophobic, controlling world of Watts, in which the child's very existence becomes an apology, with the heavenly Father reinforcing his earthly counterpart, so that fear is inscribed at the heart of consciousness and selfhood:

> Have you not heard what dreadful plagues
>
> Are threaten'd by the Lord

To him that breaks his father's law

Or mocks his mother's word?

How heavily guilt upon him lies!

How cursed is his name!

The ravens shall pick out his eyes,

And eagles eat the same.[36]

Watts had designed his songs so that, in his words, they would be "'a constant furniture for the minds of children, that they may have something to think upon when alone, and sing over to themselves"'.[37] Joyce sings to himself a new rhyme, but one that only tightens the net within which he is caught: his eyes and vision (and, if we take a Freudian reading, his sexual identity), can only be saved through an act of self-negation.[38] Brought up within Catholic Ireland, Joyce is subject to a more brutal theology of hell than was typical of either England or America of that period, but as Elmy argues, religion provided, in Watts' terms, a form of 'furniture for the mind' whose modes and manifestations subtly responded to cultural changes over time, ensuring that fear, in all its refinements, remained at the heart of the child psyche.

Inexplicable Fear

As Esquirol suggested, the causes and forms of fear and mental disease could shift with a transforming social and political landscape. To late nineteenth-century eyes, fears of the devil could be traced straight-forwardly to ill-judged methods of education, and an explicit line of social causation. The era was also troubled, however, by the rise of what were seen to be baffling phobias, or forms of fear that had no obvious line of causation. All three of Westphal's cases of agoraphobia, "mentioned that they absolutely do not know the reasons for this fear. It comes by itself; a sudden occurring, strange thing, that appears when attempting to cross a square, or while even thinking about it just before doing so".[39] Westphal's article opened up a new vein of extreme interest in these inexplicable forms, with diagnoses of claustrophobia, and other related conditions, swiftly following, primarily in French and German psychiatry. Hall in his work on fear was keen to codify all these new phobias, yet for him, they were not inexplicable: evolution, in his eyes, could explain all aspects of fear. His European contemporaries, however, were more likely to seek explanation in the frayed nerves of modern city dwellers.

One of the first in-depth explorations in England of these new sciences of obsession and phobia occurs in the Presidential Address delivered by Dr W. Julius Mickle, to the 55th meeting of the Medico-Psychological Association, 1896, and subsequently published in the *Journal of Mental Science*. Mickle takes as his subject mental besetments, or obsessions, which he defines as: "the state in which the mind is affected by some compulsive thought, of a kind, or irrational and often progressive fear; alone, or conjoined with an impulse which is, or tends to become, irresistible."[40] His talk offers an excellent overview of previous work, as well as his own particular synthesis in which he maps out a scale from slight forms of obsession, through mental derangement, to full-blown insanity. The tendency to develop states of obsession and fear, he argues, can have a hereditary component, but can also be acquired, and involves a combination of thought, feeling and will. In its full blown form it brings about "mental perturbation to the self" and results in the "mental subjugation and slavery of the affected person."[41] Mickle characterises the affliction according to "The 3 Ds": besetting Doubts, Dread, and the "besetting impulse to Deeds."[42] He sees the forms of obsession as having close relationships to neurasthenia, paranoia, hypochondria and hysteria, but also as being quite clinically distinct. Outlining the three fundamental forms, he includes under Doubts, "involuntary uncontrollable questionings," as well as morbid impulses of touching; and under the "Dreads," various forms of phobia, up to "nameless horror," whilst Deeds concerns the irresistible impulses so often associated with these obsessions.[43] In evidence he offers seven detailed cases from his own practice, before ending his talk with an extended account of various episodes in George Borrow's semi-autobiographical novel of 1851, *Lavengro: The Scholar, the Gypsy, the Priest*. Borrow's work, which he had read with fascination in his boyhood, offers, he argues, "the best description, and the earliest full one, of some of the forms of obsession."[44] A literary text is here given authoritative medical status, as both the first account, and the best case study.

Borrow himself described his novel as "the history up to a certain period of one of rather a peculiar mind and system of nerves," but it has rarely been read in that light by literary critics, who have tended to focus more on his much-celebrated representations of landscape and his links with the Gypsy community.[45] In introducing himself as a child, the narrator notes that he was "a lover of nooks and retired corners" who had a habit of fleeing from society.[46] He was conscious, from early childhood, of "a peculiar heaviness within me, and at times of a strange sensation of fear, which occasionally amounted to horror, and for which I could assign no real cause whatever" (p.7). This evocation of a sense of causeless

fear sets up a thematic strand which runs through the novel, both in Lavengro's own life, and in the episodic accounts of individuals he meets who frequently manifest particular forms of fear or obsession. At the time of publication, *Lavengro* caused some puzzlement and dissatisfaction for readers of his hugely popular first work, *The Bible in Spain* (1843), particularly as it had initially been advertised by his publisher as an autobiography. Borrow refuted that label, calling it rather a "dream."[47] Discussion of the novel has been mired, ever since, in questions of its authenticity and autobiographical basis. Mickle, however, is quite certain in his verdict in relation to the work's psychological dimension, believing that "under the guise of different personages in the romance, he described his own case." How else, he asks, could he at the time "have obtained so conspicuously accurate and clear a knowledge of the condition?" The novel is "one of the exceedingly few examples of mental abnormality accurately portrayed in works of fiction: it is a cry from the deep waters of affliction; a marvel of self-representation fashioned in the fire of suffering."[48]

Mickle's romanticised vision of authorship, and authenticity, underpins, paradoxically, his ability to co-opt the text for medical science: it is the very subjectivity of the novel which enhances its explanatory power, and status as a case history. Whilst not subscribing to a simplified model of autobiographical self-presentation, Mickle nonetheless suggests that deep personal knowledge has infused the creation of the text's multiple characters. Such a claim raises intriguing questions, however, with regard to the relationship between literature and medical practice. How far did Mickle's own boyhood reading of the work feed into his subsequent theoretical interest in fears and obsessions? And did the novel actively influence his formulation of a model which, unusually for the psychiatry of the time, placed an obsession to touch, and associated forms of fear, at the heart of a model of obsession? In Mickle's analysis, *Lavengro* illustrates all aspects of his own theories of fear and obsession. Reversing Mickle's presentational order, it would seem that the literary text played a formative role in the construction of his medical model.

Lavengro offers almost the reverse of an integrated, forward moving bildungsroman: in keeping with the dark "nooks" and crannies of its narrator's mind, it moves fitfully, and by association, or indeed disassociation. At the point in adolescence when his future is being discussed, and possible professions considered, the narrator goes into a rapid physical and mental decline, emerging in convalescence into a "dark feeling of mysterious dread which comes over the mind, and which the lamp of reason, though burning bright the while, is unable to dispel!" (p. 110). This passage is then followed by an inserted dialogue between a

generic “Boy” and his “Mother” which follows almost the format of a medical consultation, attempting to understand the ground of his fear. In answer to the question what is he afraid of, the Boy replies: “Of nothing that I can express; I know not what I am afraid of, but afraid I am”:

> *Mother.* Your forehead is cool, and your speech collected. Do you know where you are?
>
> *Boy.* I know where I am, and I see things just as they are; you are beside me, and upon the table there is a book written by a Florentine; all this I see, and that there is no ground for being afraid. I am moreover, quite cool, and feel no pain—but, but--- (pp. 111-112).

The boy’s inexplicable fear, which is sharply distinguished from fever and hallucination, is wrapped up by Borrow into a vision of Dante’s *Inferno,* and the destined woe of mankind, but such a conclusion sits oddly with the almost clinical precision of the interview (of which the above is just a section), suggesting a very specific form of psychological suffering, endured by a particular category of child, or patient.

The narrator continues to have bouts of nameless fear and dread, as he launches into his career in London, as a lowly-paid writer and translator for a publishing house (based on Borrow’s own work for the publisher Richard Phillips). There he is also assailed again by “my own peculiar ideas with respect to everything being a lying dream” (p. 217), a refrain which continues throughout the rest of his narrative. The most in-depth exploration of psychological fears occurs, however, in his depiction of an author he meets when he has quit London, and taken to the open road. The narrator comments on the stranger’s odd habit of touching things, which he describes as a “ceremony with the finger to preserve yourself from the evil chance,” before revealing that he too has indulged in the “ceremony” of touching. The startled stranger invites him home, and divulges a life’s story which, in its focus and detail, mirrors the format of a medical case history.

Mickle offers the tale almost verbatim, with brief sections of summary. The origins of the author’s malady are firmly located in childhood; a posthumous child, he “was born with excessive sensibility,” with feelings of pleasure always swiftly followed by “distress and gloom” (p. 338).[49] At age 8 he was given a pair of hawks by his uncle, which he loved, but became overwhelmed with anxiety as to where they came from, and whether he had legal title

to them. Even a title going back to Adam, he suggests, would not have satisfied him. The same obsessive doubting and questioning occurred with regard to a pony his uncle also gave him. In addition to these infinitely regressive anxieties over ownership and entitlement, when his beloved mother falls ill he develops an irresistible impulse to touch objects, with a view to "baffling the evil chance." In the middle of the night he also feels impelled to attempt a dangerous climb of a tree; his mother at the same moment reaches a favourable crisis, "yet I was not weak enough, even though a child, to suppose that I had baffled the evil chance by my daring feat." He notes that even whilst "performing these strange feats, I knew them to be highly absurd, yet the impulse to perform them was irresistible – a mysterious dread hanging over me till I had given way to it" (p. 341).[50] Later in life, on the death of his mother, he was "out of my mind" for two years, recovering in part only when he takes up a career as an author. Now, however, the worries about origins and entitlement that had plagued his childhood emerge in a new form. His first book is greeted with great acclaim, but he is assailed by doubts as to "the legality of my claim to the thoughts, expressions and situations contained in the book" (p. 347).[51] The anxieties of authorship, and of requirements for originality, here take on pathological form, and are in turn linked back to the disturbances of his early years, when his unstable centre of selfhood was both manifested and displaced into the touching of objects, and ever regressive queries into origins and ownership. In a form of narrative contagion, the narrator, on hearing this tale, is himself afflicted with a desire to "touch."

The author's awareness of the futility and absurdity of his obsessive actions, even whilst in their grip, is subsequently mirrored by Lavengro, who once more falls under the control of "the inscrutable horror which I had felt in my boyhood." Although he attempts to fight it, "I could only have got rid of it by getting rid of myself: it was a part of myself, or rather it was all myself" (p. 449). Yet he feels unable to go for help since he does not wish to be regarded as insane: "Moreover, I knew that I was not a maniac, for I possessed all my reasoning powers, only the horror was upon me, the screaming horror!" (p. 450).[52] As with the author, Lavengro brings to his own case an extraordinarily vivid depiction of emotions and impulses, coupled with a detached, self-conscious analytic dissection, which itself enacts the divided consciousness of the sufferer.

Although Mickle offers a very lengthy, and scrupulously accurate, account of Borrow's depiction of states of fear and obsession, he does not obtrude commentary or analysis, indeed his article ends with a final instance of Borrow's "fear-fits or horror-seizures

being personified as "the evil one'"(p. 466).[53] In a sense, further analysis would be superfluous, since the earlier categorisation of Doubts, Dread and Deeds, appears to be framed by the Borrow example which is to follow. Mickle's medical delineation of the condition also draws directly on Borrow's language: the '"ceremony with the finger" in *Lavengro* is captured in Mickle's depiction of "the wearisome magic ceremonial of morbid precaution."[54] Mickle notes that the "obsession to touch" has been largely neglected in medical writing, yet he believes it "to be obsession in one of its purest and most simple forms; yet capable of undergoing development through all the grades into definite insanity."[55] This form of obsession was also central to Borrow's conception of his novel. In an angry response to his disappointed critics, appended to *Romany Rye*, he notes that, "The book has the merit of communicating a fact connected with physiology, which in all the pages of the multitude of books was never previously mentioned – the mysterious practice of touching objects to baffle the evil chance." [56] His defiance is oddly placed, since it fails to address the main arguments of his critics (the confusion of fact and fantasy, and lack of dramatic adventure). What it does highlight, however, is his sense of the medical significance of his work: that he is the first to offer both a full depiction, and analytic dissection, of this form of obsessional behaviour.[57] Although Mickle does not mention this Appendix, it is clearly a verdict with which he concurs.

In part, the significance of Borrow's work in this regard lies in its date of composition. It was written not in the 1890s, when phobias and inexplicable fears were part of the cultural ferment, but in the 1840s, thirty years before explicit diagnoses of phobic behaviour. Although there were potential models in psychiatric texts (Esquirol, for example, had a case, under the label "reasoning monomania" of a woman who, in the obverse of Borrow's case, feared to touch things),[58] there is nothing to suggest Borrow was drawing on any medical texts.[59] Instead, Borrow's work appears to anticipate the later medical discussions of the 1870s and beyond, when ideas of morbid fear were given specific definitions and aetiologies, and entered the arena of cultural discussion. Lavengro's insistent questioning of whether anything is real, for example, is paralleled in German psychiatrist Wilhelm Griesinger's "metaphysical mania," in which, in one example, a cultivated man was "precipitated … into an endless metaphysical speculation" by the verb "to be". Another, with parallels to the author's obsession with tracing legal entitlement, was "completely taken up with the idea of knowing the origin, the why and the how of the forced circulation of banknotes."[60] These conditions, with their forms of ceaseless questionings, also came under

the label "folie du doute"' or "Fragesucht." Common to all, was the awareness, as in Borrow's examples, of the "absurdity" of the fears or obsessions, but an inability nonetheless to control them.[61]

One aspect of Borrow's text which Mickle, surprisingly, does not address, is Lavengro's encounter with the Methodist preacher, Peter Williams, which also focuses on states of uncontrollable fear. As in the example of the author, it follows a classic case history form, starting with events in childhood in order to try to explain why a successful adult male (in this case renowned for his preaching, and bringing comfort to others) is yet in the grip of uncontrollable fear and agony of mind. Like some of Hall's cases, and particularly the boy who rubbed himself with brimstone, Williams as a seven year old child rebels against social and religious disciplinary structures. Having heard from his father that the sin against the Holy Ghost is the only one that cannot be forgiven, when he is physically beaten at school he determines to commit the sin. There follows a wonderfully sensitive account of how he then feels separated from his school fellows, "a lone, monstrous being," whilst at the same time nurturing some internal pride in his achievement (p. 409). His history is one of a repeated cycle: agonised fear and depression at the enormity of his sin, followed by a partial recovery, only to be dashed down again. The first time occurs at his father's deathbed, when his father reminds him they will meet in heaven. Added to his unutterable grief and shame at this impossible future, he imagines his father "looking down from the clouds upon his wretched son, with a countenance of inexpressible horror" (p.410). The image, of double-layered parental and religious surveillance, in which the "horror" he attributes to his earthly and heavenly father is inscribed within him in a form of perpetual, self-punishing fear, captures the ways in which familial and religious formations work together to create a form of terror of the self.

Mickle perhaps does not feature this episode since the fears, unlike those of the author, are, at a surface level, explicable; an understandable, if extreme, response to a clear religious injunction. The episode caused some uneasiness amongst reviewers. W. E. Aytoun in *Blackwoods* was outraged at its inclusion, suggesting (with good reason) that it was based on the life of Cowper, and that Borrow had no right to "profanely enter on forbidden ground," publishing another's secrets. Borrow had been led, he argues, "through a diseased and vicious taste, to reproduce a picture which no one can contemplate without a shudder."[62] In this reading, Borrow himself becomes the bearer of disease, yet Aytoun's indignation only helps to confirm the disturbing, psychological plausibility of the portrait. For Thomas Hake,

the preacher, like the author, was a genius, "attended with excessive sensibility of mind and body" whose life had been deformed by being "inoculated as a child with the one fearful idea."[63] The critique is of religion's power to deform the mind from childhood. In Borrow's narrative, Lavengro (who had himself been obsessed in childhood with "the power and terrors of God") brings immediate relief to the preacher, by suggesting that all children carry secrets, and that the sin against the Holy Ghost was commonly committed by children (pp. 20, 423). The next morning Peter's wife informs Lavengro that his words, have "altered the current of [Peter's] ideas….Your supposition that that which harrowed his soul is of frequent occurrence amongst children, has tranquillised him; the mist which hung over his mind has cleared away, and he begins to see the groundlessness of his apprehensions" (p. 425). Lavengro has in effect offered a psychiatric consultation, taking his patient back to the very root of his fears, and thence dispelling them. The episodic structure of the novel here acquires new significance, whereby the narrative takes on therapeutic intent. In its repetitions, and variations on a theme, it aims to expose, and to shatter, the mental chains of internal torture, and to reveal the commonness of secret fears and obsessions, whether of committing unforgivable "sin" or warding off the evil eye. At once a series of case histories and a therapeutic tool, the novel offers, through immersion and repetition, healing solace to writer and reader alike.

Borrow's defence of *Lavengro* in response to his critics -- that it offered the first detailed account and dissection of "the mysterious practice of touching objects" – highlights how crucial this aspect was to his conception of the novel. Not just an oddity, bundled in haphazardly with adventures of the road, but utterly central to the structure and intent of the whole, as it sought to explore life on the margins, both physical, as with the gypsies, and mental – the hidden fears and obsessions which trouble the inner spaces of the mind. *Lavengro* was written painfully, over many years, with periods when, as Borrow records in his letters, "the shadow" was upon him; it also changed shape, from the autobiography, which his rather desperate publisher had advertised, to the final "dream" incarnation, enabling Borrow to retreat from self-revelation whilst adopting experimental modes to explore the social and psychological geographies of a liminal life.[64]

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, inexplicable fears and obsessions became the focus of both medical and cultural attention, with the unidentified terrors of selfhood of the earlier period becoming syndromes, with ever-proliferating names. For many, these new phobias were part of a general culture of neurasthenia, provoked by the

increasing stresses and strains of modernity. As Kowalewsky suggested, "neurasthenia forms the background from which we can draw the clinical picture of every nervous degeneracy."[65] Satirists were quick to mock: a *New York Times* article on the "Thousand and One Curious Phobias" recognised by nerve specialists was signed by "Autophobe," a humorous reduction which nonetheless captured the ways in selfhood had been transformed into a bundle of terrors.[66] George Borrow's reputation underwent a massive revival at this time, with biographies and publications of his collected works, and with many modernist writers such as Joyce and Woolf both drawing upon and praising his work.[67] Although this revival is customarily linked with a "pastoral nostalgia," there are grounds for seeing a deeper level of interest.[68] For Virginia Woolf, Borrow was a writer like Charlotte Brontë, "so queerly adjusted to the world that their vision reveals a new aspect of things."[69] In his exploration of the hidden byways of country and of mind, and of the dissolution of self into splinters of fear, Borrow offered a model for modernist visions of social and psychological fragmentation. Far from being a figure associated with a backward-looking, nostalgic vision of a lost rural life, Borrow opened up possibilities for Modernist writers of rethinking models both of selfhood and narrative form.

Fear has always been a significant component of cultural and social life, but in the late nineteenth century it was the excessive, extreme and seemingly inexplicable nature of certain fears that captured cultural and medical attention. Freud, writing in 1920, distinguished between what he termed "realistic" fear, which was both "rational and intelligible," and "neurotic" fear or anxiety, which encompassed the strange "phobias" itemised by Stanley Hall, that appeared to defy comprehension.[70] There were numerous attempts to capture these fears in the science, medicine and social science of the period, from Stanley Hall's questionnaires, to Mosso's physiological balance which measured flows of blood in the fearful, and Freud's own theories of anxiety and sexual displacement. All sought, in their own ways, to codify, explain, and hence control; the seemingly aberrant is absorbed within a normalising paradigm. Mickle, in his Presidential Address appears to follow this structure, offering a careful account of "mental besetments" and the "3 Ds": Doubts, Dreads, and the impulse to Deeds. Yet it is the voice of Borrow that remains dominant, animating the initial framing of medical theory, and, in the final, unmediated extracts, overwhelming the measured articulation of medical explanation. For the reader, and, one suspects for Mickle himself, the literary text, in all its wild energy and emotion, opens up a world of fear that remains resolutely, hauntingly, inexplicable.

[1] J. E. D. Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity*, trans. E. K. Hunt (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845), 200, 201.
[2] G. Stanley Hall, "A Synthetic Genetic Study of Fear," *American Journal of Psychology* 25 (1914), 149-200; 321-392, pp. 171-2
[3] David Trotter, "The Invention of Agoraphobia" in *The Uses of Phobia: Essays on Literature and Film* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 29-39, p. 29. The essay offers an excellent reading of *Daniel Deronda* in the light of emerging theories of agoraphobia.
[4] Laboratory based work in psychology is usually traced back to Wilhelm Wundt's opening of the Institute for Experimental Psychology in Leipzig in 1879.
[5] G. Stanley Hall, "A Study of Fears," *American Journal of Psychology* 8:2 (1897), 147-249, p. 150.
[6] Hall, "Fears," p. 232.
[7] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. C. Mitchell, intro. David Trotter (1861; London: Penguin, 1996), pp. 64, 401.

[8] Hall, "Fears," p.177.
[9] Hall, "Fears," p. 227.
[10] See Review, "La Neurasthénie, Maladie de Beard," par Dr Fernand Levillain', *Journal of Mental Science* 37 (1891), 587-90, p. 589. George Beard first used the term neurasthenia, to suggest a form of nervous exhaustion, brought on by the pressures of modern life, in 1869. His theories were developed in *Practical Treatise on Nervous exhaustion (Neurasthenia)* (1880) and *American Nervousness* (1881).
[11] Hall, who was at this time President of Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, arranged for Freud and Jung to give a series of lectures at the University in 1909.
[12] Hall, "Synthetic Genetic Study," pp. 367, 167.
[13] Hall, "Synthetic Genetic Study," p. 163.
[14] Hall, "Synthetic Genetic Study," p. 151.
[15] Hall, "Synthetic Genetic Study," p. 164.
[16] Hall, "Synthetic Genetic Study," p. 163.
[17] Dickens, *Great Expectations*, pp. 6, 15.
[18] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1979), pp. 202-3.
[19] Hall, "Fears," p.193.
[20] Hall, "Fears," pp. 155, 211.
[21] Hall, "Fears," p. 224.
[22] Hall, "Fears," p. 228.
[23] Hall, "Fears," p. 223.
[24] The song, which figures in *Jane Eyre*, is discussed in the chapter on "Lies and Imagination" in my book, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science and Medicine, 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). The book also has a chapter on "Fears, Phantasms, and Night Terrors," to which this article is a form of sequel.
[25] Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872), ch. 12; "A Biographical Sketch of an Infant," *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy*, 2 (1877), 285-94. Carl Westphal published his paper "Die Agoraphobie" in the *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten* in 1871. He also published a highly influential paper on obsessive mental states "Ueber Zwangsvorstellungen" in the *Berlin Klinic Wochenschriht* in 1877. See Terry J. Knapp and Michael T. Schumacher,

eds., *Westphal's "Die Agoraphobie"* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988). Wilhelm Wundt founded one of the first psychological laboratories in 1875 (the same year that William James founded on at Harvard). Angelo Mosso was a follower of Darwin, and also one of the leading experimental physiologists in Italy.

[26] Angelo Mosso, *Fear*, trans. from the 5th edn of the Italian by E. Lough and F. Kiesow (London: Longmans, Green and Co), p. 133.

[27] Mosso, *Fear*, p. 226.

[28] A drawing of the balance was included in *Fear*, but a group of Italian scientists have recently rediscovered Mosso's original manuscripts, occasioning renewed interest in his work, with the balance being acclaimed as a forerunner to the MRI scan. See S. Sandrone *et al*, 'Weighing brain activity with the balance: Angelo Mosso's original manuscripts come to light', *Brain* 137: 2 (2014), 621-633.

[29] Mosso, *Fear*, pp. 96, 226-7.

[30] Angelo Mosso, *La Fatica* (1891), *Fatigue*, trans. Margaret Drummond and W. B. Drummond (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1891).

[31] "What do I Fear?" *The Cosmopolitan* 26:2 (Dec. 1898), 217-221.

[32] Elizabeth and Ben wrote under a joint pseudonym, Ellis Ethelmer. There is some dispute as to the attribution of individual articles. The *Wellesley Index* attributes this article solely to Ben, but given its content, which touches on patterns of female upbringing, it seems unlikely that it would have been written without input from Elizabeth. For this reason I have chosen to refer to the author as she.

[33] Ellis Ethlmer, 'Fear as an Ethic Force,' *Westminster Review*, 151:3 (Mar. 1899), 300-309, pp. 301-302. Elmy does not refer to Hall by name, but to a study by 'an observant sociologist' of children's fears. There are direct quotations from Hall's article, but no footnote.

[34] Elmy, 'Ethic Force', pp. 306, 309.

[35] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 8.

[36] Isaac Watts, *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (London: Routledge, 1865). Song XXIII. Although originally published in the eighteenth century, the *Songs* were endlessly reprinted for children in the nineteenth century. This song is a response to *Proverbs* 30: 17: 'The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it' (King James Bible).

[37] Elmy, 'Ethic Force', p. 301.

[38] Joyce published *Portrait* in 1916, and so three years before the publication of Freud's essay on 'The Uncanny' which explores Hoffmann's tale, 'The Sandman', in which the child, Nathaniel, is terrified by the Sandman, or Dr Coppelius, who attempts to thrust red hot coals in his eyes. Freud's commentary focuses on the 'substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ which is seen to exist in dreams and myths and phantasises'. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works. Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* Vol. 17, trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 231.

[39] Westphal, *Die Agoraphobie*, p. 73.

[40] W. Julius Mickle, "Presidential Address delivered at the Fifty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Medico-Psychological Association, held in London, 23rd and 24th July, 1896," *Journal of Mental Science* 42 (Oct. 1896), 691-744, p. 692.

[41] Mickle, "Presidential Address," p. 693.

[42] Mickle, "Presidential Address," p. 700.

[43] Mickle, "Presidential Address," p. 700.

[44] Mickle, p. 732. Mickle devotes 11 pages to Borrow's novel. W. Julius Mickle was originally brought up in Canada, but moved to England in the 1860s after his initial medical training. He became medical superintendent at the Grove Hall Asylum, Bow, and lectured on mental physiology and mental disease at the Middlesex and University College Hospitals (Munk's Roll of Physicians; http://munksroll.rcplondon.ac.uk/Biography/Details/3083). He notes in his article that members of his family knew Borrow, and 'In my youth a projected interview with him on a subject of mutual interest was not carried out' (p. 733). The hint is tantalising, particularly since there is a marked similarity between his own description of Borrow as a 'solitary recluse' and the Munk's Roll depiction of Mickle as 'a reserved and solitary figure'. Given the precision with which he signs himself, W. Julius Mickle, it is probable that he was a descendant of the Scottish poet William Julius Mickle (1734/5-1788), a factor which could have reinforced his interest in, and identification with, Borrow.

[45] George Borrow, *The Romany Rye*: *A Sequel to Lavengro* ed. W. I. Knapp (1857: London: John Murray, 1914), Appendix Ch. 1. p. 302). Clive Wilkins-Jones, in his reading of one of the episodes in the novel, has suggested that Burrow suffered from obsessive compulsive disorder. He has not, however, placed the text in the context of nineteenth-century medicine and psychology. '"Is it possible that I am under the roof of an author?" – Borrow's treatment of the Creative Sensibility n *Lavengro*', *George Borrow Bulletin* 34 (2007), 62-71. Deborah Epstein Nord has recently offered an excellent reading of *Lavengro* in *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), but does not address the psychological dimensions of the novel.

[46] George Borrow, *Lavengro: The Scholar, the Gypsy, the Priest* , ed. W. I. Knapp (1851: London: John Murray, 1908), p. 7. Further references will be given in the text. The narrator is never directly named; the title of the book comes rather from a title bestowed on him by the gypsies, "Lavengro" meaning "word master" in Romany.

[47] Borrow, *Romany Rye,* Appendix

[48] Mickle, 'Presidential Address', p. 733.

[49] For clarity, I give the novel page reference in the text, and the Mickle reference in the note. Mickle, p. 736.

[50] Mickle, p. 738.

[51] Mickle, p. 740.

[52] Mickle, p. 743.

[53] Mickle, p. 744.

[54] Mickle, p. 697.

[55] Mickle, p. 697.

[56] Borrow, *Romany Rye,* Appendix; Ch. 9, p. 370.

[57] According to Borrow's friend, Theodore Watts-Dunton, Borrow himself suffered from the impulse to touch objects, see *Old Familiar Friends* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1916), pp. 61-62.

[58] Esquirol, *Mental Maladies,* pp. 348-351.

[59] Borrow was close friends at this period with the physician poet, Thomas Gordon Hake, who wrote a review of *Lavengro*, which, whilst referring to the representation of the habit of touching, did not suggest Borrow was drawing on explicit medical knowledge.Thomas Gordon Hake, "Borrow and *Lavengro*," *New Monthly Magazine* 91 (April 1851), 455-461.

[60] See Theodule Ribot who discusses the theories of Wilhelm Griesinger in, "The Morbid States of Attention," *The Open Court* 3 (1889), 1944-48, p. 1946, and *The Diseases of the Will*, trans. Merwin-Marie Snell (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1896), p. 46.

[61] P. J. Kowalewsky, "Folie du Doute," *Journal of Mental Science* 33 (1887), 209-218, p. 213. His name appears in various spellings, but I have adopted this one for consistency.

[62] W. E Aytoun, "*Lavengro*," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 69 (March 1851), 322-37, p. 335.
[63] Hake, 'Borrow and *Lavengro*', pp. 456-57.
[64] See W. I. Knapp, *Life, Writings and Correspondence of George Borrow* 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1899), II, p. 14.
[65] Kowalewsky, "Folie du Doute," p. 210.
[66] "Autophobe," "Fear in Many Forms: Nerve Specialists Recognize a Thousand and One Curious "Phobias," *New York Times* (Aug. 29 1910), p.6.
[67] In addition to Knapp's *Life* and editions, Clement Shorter produced *George Borrow and his Circle* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913). Leslie Stephen was a champion of Borrow's work, and 1924 saw the publication of *Borrow: Selections with Essays by Leslie Stephen and George Saintsbury* (Oxford: Clarendon Press). For the influence of Borrow on Joyce see Angus Fraser, "Borrow as a source for James Joyce, and for Vita Sackville West and Violet Trefusis," *George Borrow Bulletin* 14 (1997), 50-54.
[68] Helen Southworth, "'Virginia Woolf's 'Wild England': George Borrow, Autoethnography and *Between the Acts*," *Studies in the Novel* 39 (2007), 196-217, p. 197.
[69] Virginia Woolf, *Essays* III (1988), 13-20, cited in Gillian Fraser, "An Annotated Checklist of References to Borrow in Virginia Woolf's Writings," *George Borrow Bulletin* 4 (1992), 13-17, p. 15.
[70] Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysi*, trans and ed. James Strachey, Standard Edition v. 15 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), Part III, Ch. 25, "Anxiety", pp. 393, 398-99. Freud had first written on phobias in his 1895 paper, "Obsessions and Phobias" in which he had distinguished sharply between obsessions and phobias. His first major study of a case of phobia was that of the child, Little Hans (1909).

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