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THE SAVAGE MAGNET: RACIALIZATION OF THE OCCULT BODY IN LATE VICTORIAN FICTION

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THE SAVAGE MAGNET: RACIALIZATION OF THE OCCULT BODY IN LATE VICTORIAN FICTION

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"The Savage Magnet: Racialization of the Occult Body in Late Victorian Fiction" considers how late Victorian occult fiction written by women employs the racial identities of its characters. The essay analyses Florence Marryat's The Blood of the Vampire *(1897), Cora Linn Daniels'* The Bronze Buddha *(1899) and Marie Corelli's* Romance of Two Worlds *(1886), which all feature non-white characters with occult powers. Aligning dark bodies with dangerous, mysterious, magnetic abilities, this fiction often embodies imperialist and nationalistic assumptions about British subjects in non-English bodies. These dark bodies, in turn, provide allegories about the British Empire and its internal race-based conflicts and power structures. In these novels a quadroon Jamaican heiress, a half-Indian, half-American Brahmin and a Chaldean beauty provide examples of how mixed-race or non-English characters vacillate between heroic and villainous roles, reinforcing Victorian concepts of white racial and cultural ascendancy.*

Recent scholars have paid a fair amount of attention to the confluence of gender and the occult, noting both the prevalence of women mystics and a perceived sensitivity that made women more likely to be attuned to the mystical. Indeed, since interest in women and the occult began in the 1980s, critics have considered such phenomena as spiritualism and theosophy to provide a narrative relevant to and centrally about women. Women, the story goes, are more nervous, more susceptible and, thus, more open to the spiritual. Further, the depiction of the medium as a passive tool is a widely repeated claim in secondary literature. Helen Sword writes:

> Mediumship itself remained very much in the province of women, for it offered one of the few means by which women [. . .] could earn money,

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> pursue high-profile careers, lay claim to otherworldly insight, and subvert male authority, all while conforming to normative ideals of female passivity and receptivity.[1]

Roger Luckhurst addresses the Victorian science that would support such essentializing claims: "Males were active and katabolic, whilst females were passive and anabolic [. . .] The medium conformed to the passivity ascribed to the 'anabolic' female."[2] Variations on just such assumptions have appeared time and time again in the scholarship on this topic.[3] While women and the occult have provided a type of self-evident tandem, other equally prevalent conjunctions have remained less visible.

While the occult also relies on certain stereotypes of race, just as it harnesses certain gender stereotypes, critics have paid less attention to this conjunction.[4] Of course, race is not a transhistorically defined category. Although we are not far removed from the Victorian age, it is important to delineate the landscape of race during that period. Views of race in the nineteenth century were deeply colored by the expansion of empire. As Robert J. C. Young notes:

> In Britain the imperial phase was intrinsically linked to the development of a cultural ideology of race from the 1860s onwards. The idea of imperialism, and the notion of a civilizing mission, presupposed racial superiority, for the fundamental difference between civilization and savagery which justified and required the civilizing mission assumed a basic differentiation between white and non-white races, and this was made in increasingly absolute and derogatory terms.[5]

While the history of racism did not begin with the period of high imperialism of the 1860s, the depictions of racialized bodies, both white and non-white ones, in late Victorian fiction support Young's claim. Yet, within a growing empire, not every power relation functioned identically. In her groundbreaking work on theosophy, Gauri Viswanathan claims that

> [. . .] the otherworldliness of the occult offered alternative possibilities for imagining colonial relations outside a hierarchical framework, without succumbing to [. . .] miscegenation [. . .] In reimagining colonial relationships, occultism performs a function similar to what Robert Young describes as culture's role in imperializing Britain, which allowed for a cross-fertilization of language, history, and literature without the "racial" degeneration caused by sexual contact.[6]

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In other words, even with the backdrop of a hierarchical social structure, based on racial inequality, the pattern of colonial relations may be presented in a number of different ways within occult literature, with its concerns of liminality, play, and upheavals within real and imagined power and order. Daphne Brooks also provides an important caution against essentializing race in occult sources when she considers spirit-rapping. She writes: "Erupting out of a broad transatlantic network of social and cultural performances that depended on corporeal conversion and fluidity, spirit-rapping, like other early-nineteenth-century theatrical genres, rehearsed the convertibility of the body."[7] That is, just as we might want to question the essentialized femininity sometimes evoked in occult sources, we also should question the reliance that genres, including popular sensation novels, can have on fixed notions of white and non-white bodies and their supernatural abilities. In the novels my essay treats, race plays a central role in understanding occult power.

Traveling even a short distance into the literature of spiritualism and mediumship, one cannot help but notice a strong motif of characters whose interactions with the unseen rely on a physical ability provided and circumscribed by a racialized body. Whether one is reading non-fiction accounts in the periodical press, metaphysical treatises, or novels and short stories, race is frequently the leading factor, even above gender, provided as a reason for a character's occult powers. To show how race inflects an occult body, I will focus on late-century works by three popular women novelists: Florence Marryat, Cora Linn Daniels and Marie Corelli.

Florence Marryat was both a noted novelist and spiritualist.[8] Not only did her spiritualist memoirs *The Spirit World* (1894) and *There Is No Death* (1891) treat her views of the occult, often her fiction did as well. Characters with occult powers or communications between the living and the dead are featured, for instance, in *The Dead Man's Message* (1894), *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897) and *A Daughter of the Tropics* (1887). These novels often depict spiritual insight as dependent on a racialized body, as it is, for instance, with the seer Madame Rosita, "an aged negress", in *A Daughter of the Tropics*.[9] In a similar vein, *The Blood of the Vampire* tells the tale of a young, beautiful quadroon from Jamaica, Harriet Brandt, who, because of her race, is destined, without her intention, to suck all the life energy out of those she is closest to emotionally and physically. In this novel, "the curse of heredity" creates her strange and malign occult power.[10] H. L. Malchow claims that Florence Marryat

> [locates] the origins of her gothic threat in the actual region of racial conflict [...] The overt invocation of racial pollution as gothic danger in Marryat's tale reflects the shifting, reifying nature of "race" itself in the course of the century.[11]

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In other words, race becomes such a threatening category precisely because it reflects a changing balance of power between Britain and Jamaica.[12]

Harriet Brandt, the heroine of *The Blood of the Vampire*, is a character akin to the tragic mulatto in nineteenth-century American fiction. Her character and beauty, as it is with most heroines, are constantly at the fore in the novel. In this case, however, the depiction is not wholly flattering. Throughout the novel, she is ill-fated due to her heredity. Before their deaths at the hands of their former slaves, not only was her father a vivisectionist, working with animals and humans, but her mother was a "half-caste" murderous sensualist, the daughter of a slave woman and a white plantation owner.[13] Her mother liked the taste of blood because Harriet's grandmother was bitten by a vampire bat when she was pregnant with her daughter. While Harriet, in this regard, has a problematic parentage, she also holds great charm, especially for the opposite sex. One extensive discussion of these charms involves her eyes:

> "Ah! a drop of Creole blood in her then, I daresay! You never see such eyes in an English face! They're very large and dark you know Elinor," said Mrs. Pullen [. . .] "But it is not everybody who admires dark eyes, or you and I would come off badly!"
> "Well, with all due deference to you, my fair sister-in-law," replied Ralph, with the stupidity of a selfish man who never knows when he is wounding his hearers, "most people give the preference to dark eyes in women. Any way Miss Brandt [. . .] is a beauty and no mistake!"[14]

This is one example of many in the novel where Harriet is described as lovely to male characters and less appealing to female characters. One of her chief charms is her dark eyes, which signpost racial difference and sexual allure. While plenty of English literary heroines have brown eyes, Harriet's eyes in this novel are dark with a difference. Overtly described by Margaret Pullen as a racial marker, the eyes seem uncanny to the English female characters, as if they are an unnatural color.

The typing of Harriet with her dark eyes gestures at the tandem relation between sex and race. Discussing this linkage, Robert Young writes:

> Sander Gilman has demonstrated the ways in which the links between sex and race were developed in the nineteenth century through fantasies derived from cultural stereotypes in which blackness evokes an attractive, but dangerous, sexuality, an apparently abundant, limitless, but threatening, fertility. And what does fantasy suggest if not desire?[15]

Mixed-race desire is indeed dangerous in Marryat's work. Harriet's debilitating sexuality is presented directly when her kisses and touches weaken

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or kill those to whom she is close. Her threat, in the novel's portrayal, is a vampiric magnetism. Perhaps because of her eyes, soft lips or warm touch, Harriet has a magnetically taxing effect on many. Her new friend Margaret, who she meets at Heyst on holiday, has a strong reaction to her:

> [Margaret] had become fainter and fainter, as the girl leaned against her with her head upon her breast. Some sensation which she could not define, nor account for—some feeling which she had never experienced before—had come over her and made her head reel. She felt as if something or someone were drawing all her life away. [Harriet] tried to come after her, like a coiling snake.[16]

The way in which Harriet's proximity saps Margaret's energy could be read allegorically as what Stephen Arata has termed "reverse colonization".[17] At the end of the century, when the British Empire's power is waning, Harriet's magnetic attraction to and depleting force upon Margaret could be read as a wealthy Jamaican colonizing the concept of English womanhood. In fact, though, Margaret tries to account for it by hypothesizing it as a sexual attraction and violation:

> She had heard of cases, in which young unsophisticated girls had taken unaccountable affections for members of their own sex, and trusted she was not going to form the subject for some such experience on Miss Brandt's part.[18]

While Harriet has been described as having had a sheltered upbringing in a convent, her characterization here as "unsophisticated" is somewhat surprising, given her wealthy colonial background and her independent voyage with a school chum from Jamaica to one of the most popular European resorts. Here it is interesting that the danger of Harriet, unlike later in the novel, is classified as a lesbian threat, and furthermore, that a lesbian danger is described as unsophisticated, practically accidental. All the same, it is still a serious threat: thus potentially categorizing a mixed-race union as threatening in the same way as a same-sex union in terms of white nation building. Furthermore, it also hypothesizes that a wealthy colonial might be able to rule the passions of an English woman.

We quickly learn that Harriet holds the same type of attraction and exhaustion for most people. Margaret's brother, Captain Pullen, is quick to kiss the very pretty Harriet:

> He turned his face to Harriet Brandt's and her full red lips met his own, in a long-drawn kiss, that seemed to sap his vitality. As he raised his head

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> again, he felt faint and sick, but quickly recovering himself, he gave her a second kiss more passionate, if possible, than the first.[19]

Ralph Pullen and Harriet are separated by urgent travel before much more faintness transpires. Throughout the novel, though, many of those who Harriet loves die, including Margaret Pullen's baby daughter, young Bobby Gobelli, and her own husband Anthony Pennell. Harriet recalls that the same pattern was true of her childhood, exclaiming to her fiancé before they marry: "'I cannot forget Olga Brimont, and Mrs. Pullen, and the baby, and poor Bobby! It is true, indeed it is, and I have been accursed from my birth.'"[20]

Her curse, while unintentional, is powerful and through it her race itself is granted a malign supernatural enchantment. Her curse is likened in the novel to unnatural appetites. In addition to her being posited as a love interest to four separate characters in the novel, including Margaret and her brother Ralph, her excessive passion is also seen in her eating habits. Harriet's table manners garner significant notice in the novel. The reader notes that

> Miss Leyton thought she had never seen any young person devour her food with so much avidity and enjoyment [. . .] It was not so much that she ate rapidly and with evident appetite, but that she kept her eyes fixed upon her food, as if she feared someone might deprive her of it.[21]

This voraciousness is then likened to her affections. She often chooses friends to whom she will remain passionately attached, until, that is, they die. As her school friend Olga explains:

> "Harriet is very fond of children, but she has never seen any—there were no children at the convent under ten years of age, so she does not know how to make enough of them when she meets them. She wants to kiss everyone. Sometimes, I tell her I think she would like to eat them."[22]

Harriet is blissfully unaware of the people-eating dimension of her passions and of the suppressed accusation that she is cannibalistic. But after casualty number seven, she seeks the medical advice of Dr Phillips, who knew her father when he lived in Jamaica several years earlier. He tells her that

> "[. . .] there are those [. . .] who *draw* from their neighbours, sometimes making large demands upon their vitality—sapping their physical strength, and feeding upon them, as it were, until they are perfectly exhausted and unable to resist disease. This proclivity has been likened to that of the vampire bat who is said to suck the breath of its victims."[23]

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When she asks if she has this trait, "the doctor looked at her lustrous glowing eyes, at her parted feverish lips, [. . .] the general appearance of excited sensuality, and thought it was his duty to warn her just a little".[24] Finally, he says:

> "You are not likely to make those with whom you intimately associate, stronger either in mind or body [. . .] so that after a while, having sapped their brains, and lowered the tone of their bodies, [. . .] You will have, in fact, *sucked them dry*."[25]

Elsewhere, in case this sucking and the affiliation it draws between a dark body and an evil body were not enough, she is likened to the legendarily poisonous dark-barked upas tree and to a panther. In other words, it is not just that some people draw energy from their colleagues, but rather that some dark creatures, like a panther or Harriet, do. At the end of the novel, Harriet kills herself, having sent her much loved husband to a premature grave by loving him all too well. Whether it is what literally happens to her, or the exotic similes that flank her fatality, she is constantly surrounded by death itself. Through a sensationalist rationale, this clearly presents a non-white body as the opposite of health and vitality. Even while it struck contemporary readers as an absurd plot device, the portrayal of Harriet's mixed-race background is the central plot-motivating device of this sensation novel. Besides the strange vampiric magnetism attributed to her quadroon status, there is absolutely nothing sensationalist about the novel. Racial difference constitutes a shameful open secret in this novel, just as Lady Audley's secret polygamy does in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). Past hidden race, rather than a past hidden action, is the sole origin of drama and tragedy in this odd novel. This device of making race stand in the place of some performed morally suspect action appears in other racialized sensation novels, as well. Bridget Bennett's recent work discusses the seance as a good example of

> Mary Louise Pratt's influential term a "contact zone". Pratt uses the phrase to "refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict".[26]

Similarly, late-century occult novels that make racial conflict and even racial identity the central sensational plot device might be called "contact zone" novels. The colonial encounter, by this analogy, would be represented by the synecdoche of the racially dark body. Harriet might then represent all of Jamaica, including its troubled colonial history and the ghost of slavery.

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Harriet is otherwise portrayed quite sympathetically and her curse seems as much to do with her parents as it does with the vampire bat. Her mother is described as a

> [. . .] fat, flabby half caste, who hardly ever moved out of her chair but sat eating all day long [. . .] I can see her now, with her sensual mouth, her greedy eyes, her low forehead and half-formed brains and her lust for blood [. . .] the only thing which made her laugh, was to watch the dying agonies of the poor creatures her brutal protector slaughtered.[27]

Ultimately it is her mixed blood which is given as the best reason for Harriet's strange fatality. As the doctor says of Harriet:

> "She may seem harmless enough at present, so does the tiger cub as it suckles its dam, but that which is bred in her will come out sooner or later, and curse those with whom she may be associated."[28]

Ultimately, *The Blood of the Vampire* places her black blood in the role of perpetrator. Noteworthy, though, is that this choice of Marryat's was met with displeasure by some of her contemporary readers. One review noted that

> [. . .] the book is another contribution to the already over-large list of novels on the subject of heredity. From the fictionalist's point of view it is sensational enough, from any other it is as absurd as most of those that have preceded it.[29]

It is unclear here whether the offense is aesthetic absurdity or the nature of Marryat's depiction of heredity. Another review takes a similar tack:

> We may be willing [. . .] to swallow the vampire, even if it demands a bit of a gulp, but Miss Marryat's pseudo-scientific explanation of her origin, in the mouth of a rambling old doctor, is altogether too indigestible. It is, too, unnecessary and hideous.[30]

Here, too, the absurdity sticks. It also, however, seems that this reviewer repudiates the author's views on heredity when he or she terms them "hideous". As to other readers' responses, much remains unknown.

In any event, the novel aligns race with a mysteriously powerful malignity—Harriet's is a body that is able to attract and then dispel the energies of others. Although this provides a structural challenge to white supremacy, the threat of a dark race is subdued in this novel, giving white hegemony the upper hand. While not nearly so racist, other late-century

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women authors writing about the occult also make race an essential component of a mystically powerful body. A racialized occult body is also found in Cora Linn Daniels' romance, *The Bronze Buddha* (1899).[31] One of the three protagonists, Prince Mihira, is half Indian and half American. Mihira, as well as other male occult characters, shows race as perhaps a more prominent figure than gender in describing occult power. His Indian spirituality enables him to hypnotize his beautiful cousin with the aim of forcing her to marry him:

> A curious sensation of satisfaction, of yielding, of easy, untrammeled dependence had gradually come over Sylvia while he had looked into her eyes with his own set glowing [...] Her mind was confused, broken, agitated [...] She only seemed conscious of him, of his voice, his words, his dark, handsome face, his soft pressure on her hand.[32]

Here, as in *The Blood of the Vampire*, the attractive eyes are literally glowing. While under this influence, Sylvia agrees to meet her cousin at a church the next day at five and to say "yes" to all questions posed to her for ten minutes. While this marriage plot is thwarted, it is not the last we see of Mihira's racialized, embodied powers. Looking back on the episode, Sylvia says: "'I know now why I went to the church and how I was led into that terrible snare. My cousin mesmerized me.'"[33] Mihira instantly repents and is mortified by his folly. He pays penance over a week-long ritual "by his native, symbolical [marriage] union with a [mango] tree".[34] Mihira's crime is interesting because he tries to use special mystical powers to forge a mixed-race marriage with his cousin. An observation by Gauri Viswanathan about theosophy in colonial India is relevant in considering Mihira's dilemma:

> The growing appeal of the astral world lay in its opening up other cosmological views in which the normal distinctions between the colonizer and the colonized is blurred, while at the same time it resisted the physical intimacy that such a loosening of boundaries might unite in day-to-day interactions.[35]

Mihira seeks to use mesmerism to effect physical intimacy between himself and his cousin. In the novel, part of the problem is an attempted crossing of the boundary between the spiritual and the sexual, not just a distinction upheaval between the colonizer and the colonized. Mihira's attempted crime transgresses three cultural boundaries simultaneously. First, by the 1890s the marriage of first cousins, while still legal, was increasingly frowned upon as too incestuous and unlikely to produce a good genetic result in offspring. Conversely, though, not only are Sylvia and Mihira too closely related, they are also too racially and culturally different in the novel's terms to produce

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a happy union. Finally, he is using a spiritual gift for non-consensual sex with an unprotected white maiden. Thus situated, Mihira's penance for his thwarted crime is chosen for a particularly strong symbolic reason. While he cannot marry Sylvia in the novel, it is equally true that he cannot really marry a mango tree, of Eastern origin, either.

Mihira's role as a mixed offspring moving between Eastern and Western cultures places him in an ambivalent cultural position, since this novel does not allow for new racial mixture. It also seems to schematize a cultural ambivalence about India: in the novel's depiction of it, it is, in many ways, westernized and yet different. This seems to allude to Britain's long colonial presence there, both informal and formal, which had a strong effect on Indian culture. While Daniels' novel defeats the cousins' marriage and sense of marriageability, Mihira, even when his Indian side is emphasized, is shown in a colonized light. After his week-long mango-marriage penance is complete, Mihira tells his father he will "'go home'" to India and give up his search for a mystical and powerful bronze Buddha, stolen from his home region decades before.[36] He says he will "'go home to my own place. I shall go back with empty hands and empty heart. The conquering Prince, the Rule of the Earth, shall hide him in his cell and await the end.'"[37] His father replies: "'No! [. . .] Arise and be a man. Be my son, my American son [. . .] Stand like a hero and take your just punishment, whatever it may be.'"[38] At first Mihira "trembled like a leaf" and

> [. . .] then each drop of blood in his body suddenly thrilled with racial traits. Like a new birth, a revolution, a springing to life of strong dormant qualities never before aroused, out of his utter weakness,—the yielding almost to death of his other self,—grew into full being the profounder, the deeper racial attributes of a patriotic, honest, frank, and generous ancestry.[39]

Just as his penance offered solace to his native (Indian) heart, his father exhorts him to give up renunciation and instead embrace his scrappy American ancestry. It seems that the progression of plot events is no accident. First miscegenation with his cousin is thwarted, then he retreats into his Indian self before adopting his American heritage instead. After his mango-tree penance, Mihira's American father watches over his sleeping son, filled, it would seem, with a melancholy about racial difference:

> During the night vigil the tender heart of the American father of this Indian son pondered many things. As he watched the faint color come back to the lips and cheeks, the sad, hopeless expression change into some happier prefigurement of health, his being throbbed with the pain of

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> melancholy helplessness—the feeling that never could he enter into or comprehend the inherited, blood-wrought religious and poetic interpretation of life, which to the young man was the natural, the only truth.[40]

Ironically, even his own father feels racially separate and incommensurate with Mihira's religious sensibilities. It is his mother's blood, then, that forms Mihira's beliefs and powers.

While with Harriet Brandt her dark blood and quadroon status are presented as an unconscious taint on her character, here Mihira's character is presented as being composed of two opposite blood lines.[41] The rising up of the white, patriotic American side is shown as a "yielding almost to death" of his Indian self.[42] His American self is dominant when it provides "the deeper racial attributes". It also serves to sever him from his past misdeed which in its opposition to his new self is, in turn, unpatriotic, dishonest, disingenuous and selfish. It revitalizes his character, while it prevents a mixed-race union with his cousin, thus answering the temptation of sexual misalliance with sublimated patriotism and a mission for making India a more Western place, as he intends to do at the end of the novel.

Although they treat their protagonists quite distinctly from one another, Marryat's and Daniels' works both make a dark body magical and potentially sinister. Mihira does not become truly heroic in Daniels' work until his Indian side becomes dormant. This pattern of a magical dark body is also seen in works by several other late Victorian authors such as Laurence Oliphant's *Massolam* (1886), S. A. Hillam's *Sheykh Hassan: The Spiritualist* (1888), Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895) and Emeric Hulme-Beaman's *Ozmar the Mystic* (1896). If a female form often contains occult powers, a non-English body is also a frequent marker of these powers. Both of these traits are found not only in Marryat's overtly racist *The Blood of the Vampire* and Daniels' *The Bronze Buddha*, but also in Marie Corelli's celebratory first novel, *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886).

A Romance of Two Worlds depicts its central heroine in out-of-body space travel to other planets and to the great central ring of fire in order to cure her depression. She undergoes this spiritual journey with the aid of a Chaldean spiritual electrician named Heliobas, who has learned the electrical secrets of the ancient Babylonians. Not only is his special knowledge de rigueur, it would also seem that his ethnic heritage has predisposed him to it. He is smart, has faith and holds special magnetic powers all because he is Chaldean.[43] Just as gifted is his beautiful dark-eyed Chaldean sister, Zara. Her initial description in the novel is both captivating and orientalized:

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> Never shall I behold again any face or form so divinely beautiful! [...] Her figure was most exquisitely rounded and proportioned, and she came across the room to give me greeting with a sort of gliding graceful movement, like that of a stately swan floating on calm sunlit water. Her complexion was transparently clear—most purely white, most delicately rosy, Her eyes—large, luminous and dark as night, fringed with long silky black lashes—looked like
> "Fairy lakes, where tender thoughts
> Swam softly to and fro."
> Her rich black hair was arranged à la Marguerite, and hung down in one long loose thick braid that nearly reached the end of her dress, and she was attired in a robe of deep old gold Indian silk as soft as cashmere which was gathered in round her waist by an antique belt of curious jewel-work, in which rubies and turquoises seemed to be thickly studded. On her bosom shone a strange gem [...] It glowed with many various hues—now bright crimson, now lightning-blue, sometimes deepening into a rich purple or tawny orange.[44]

Partly accomplished by her grace and her eyes as dark as night, and partly by her Indian gown with the curiously worked belt, she seems like royalty from the East, or rather, from the ancient East, a familiar figure of orientalized fantasy. Throughout the novel, her uncanny powers create a beautiful spectacle for the reader. Like her brother, Zara's power is electrically Chaldean. When a suitor, Prince Ivan, tries to force his desires on her, she repels him as follows:

> Never had she looked so supremely, terribly beautiful. I gazed at her from my corner of the doorway, awed, yet fascinated. The jewel on her breast glowed with an angry red lustre, and shot forth dazzling opaline rays, as though it were a sort of living, breathing star. Prince Ivan paused—entranced no doubt, as I was, by her unearthly loveliness. His face flushed—he gave a low laugh of admiration. Then he made two swift strides forward and caught her fiercely in his embrace. His triumph was brief. Scarcely had his strong arm clasped her waist, when it fell numb and powerless—scarcely had his eager lips stooped towards hers, when he reeled and sank heavily on the ground, senseless![45]

Zara has the power to attract and repel at will, making electricity a sublime accessory like her antique belt or her strangely glowing jewel. This magnetism is similarly described to Harriet Brandt's force-field powers, yet with a more positive outcome. Of interest in *A Romance of Two Worlds* is that although spiritual capabilities are racialized, the portrayal of non-white protagonists is not negative but rather exotic. This exoticism also exists to a lesser degree in

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the depiction of Mihira in *The Bronze Buddha*. The narrator notes of Zara's brother that: "I looked up and met the calm eyes of Heliobas. He appeared to be taller, statelier, more like a Chaldean prophet or king than I had ever seen him before."[46] Here, we see a transmogrified biblical figure, more than anything else. Zara understands her ability to channel electricity to be ancient and ethnically inscribed, as she explains to the novel's narrator:

> "[Electricity] was well known to the ancient Chaldeans. It was known to Moses and his followers; it was practiced in perfection by Christ and his disciples. To modern civilization it may seem a discovery [. . .] The scent of the human savage is extraordinarily keen—keener than that of any animal—he can follow a track unerringly by some odor he is able to detect in the air. Again, he can lay back his ears to the wind and catch a faint, far-off sound with certainty and precision, and tell you what it is. Civilized beings have forgotten all this; they can neither smell nor hear with actual keenness. Just in the same way, they have forgotten the use of electrical organs they all indubitably possess in a large or minute degree."[47]

Zara's logic places modern and ancient on the scene at the same time by likening them to civilized and savage. This also implies that a Chaldean, linked with the ancient, is also linked with the savage, while the English, linked with the modern, are also linked with the civilized. Electricity is ancient, savage and Chaldean by default, and these are the surprises in this chain of analogies. While it might seem, well, uncivilized to be savage, anciently affiliated Zara is actually more advanced than a modern, civilized woman due to her electrical powers.

This formulation of a sophisticated savagery appears in other fiction about magically powerful occult bodies, as well. For instance, even in the early spiritualist novel *Zillah, the Child Medium* of 1857, we see a similar formulation. At a tent revival, one spiritualist is depicted as follows:

> That she was very beautiful, no one would have hesitated to acknowledge, and yet it was a fierce, savage beauty, that made you tremble while you gazed. Her eyes were black, and as piercing in expression as any maniac's, alternately emitting sudden flashes of light that thrilled the beholder with dread, and glittering with the milder, innocent splendor of childhood. She was very large, almost Amazonian in height, but this only added to the pride of her appearance. At a glance, you saw she was one of those women whom men very often admire most—yet never, by any chance, desire to marry.[48]

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Here, not dissimilar to the depiction of Zara, a woman has a dangerous beauty that is distinctly racialized. In addition to her glittering black eyes which emit flashes of light, she has an Amazonian height, makes the observer tremble, and has a beauty that is termed "savage". Amazonian and savage, descriptors of fierceness in this example, rely on racial stereotypes. The body is also racialized in ways that are consistent with the other examples I have discussed in this essay: dark eyes, striking, atypical beauty, magnetic powers of attraction and uncanny energy.

These novels, which show the racially inflected powers of dark bodies, often discuss the racial powers of white bodies as a foil within the plot. For instance, in *A Daughter of the Tropics*, the nemesis of Lola Robertson, the octoroon ill-fated, magic-using villain of the novel, is a playwright's wife, who is extremely pale and delicate, and is named Lily Power. Delicate Lily Power is in opposition to the monstrous Lola's power in the novel. In fact, thinking about "lily power" as the unnamed, yet present, racial descriptor of mediumistic virtue in several late-century novels would prove quite suggestive. For example, in *A Romance of Two Worlds*, the unnamed heroine and first-person narrator is English, fair, musically gifted and initially depressed. Early in the novel, an Italian painter asks her to sit as a model, saying:

> "I am aware that you are not in strong health, and that your face has not that roundness and colour formerly habitual to it. But I am not an admirer of the milkmaid type of beauty. Everywhere I seek for intelligence, for thought, for inward refinement—in short, mademoiselle, you have the face of one whom the inner soul consumes."[49]

Her face is pale and a bit haggard—not dissimilar to a Pre-Raphaelite model. This corresponds to both her ethnicity and to her soul in this novel. She is sensitive and fragile, and yet has the intelligence, curiosity and endurance that set her up for her travels in outer space. The depictions of her virtues also are described in racialized ways. The heroine, initially overtired and too pale, returns from her outer-space exploits "plump and pink as a peach", her pallor replaced by the nice rosy glow so often affiliated with English health and beauty, perhaps what the painter refers to as a "milkmaid type of beauty" in the earlier quotation.[50] Perhaps she glows with health once more because unlike a thwarted late Victorian imperialist, she is able to conquer a new frontier. It is no coincidence that the ethnically English character is the only one to go to the central ring of fire and be touched by Christ in Corelli's novel. This travel, though, not only marks a spiritual journey but also a late Victorian tandem. As Patrick Brantlinger notes, there are

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> [. . .] complex, unconscious interconnections between imperialist ideology and occultism. To the ardent imperialist, "away" can never be "away"; nothing is foreign, not even death; the borderland itself becomes a new frontier to cross, a new realm to conquer [. . .] Just at the moment actual frontiers were vanishing, late Victorian and Edwardian occultist literature is filled with metaphors of exploration, emigration, conquest, colonization.[51]

The form itself, then, is marked by a colonial fantasy of new dominion in new territory enabled by a body as rosy as a peach.

While it is not usually drawn to the fore in secondary scholarship, the virtues and vices of a magnetic or mediumistic woman are often drawn quite distinctly as a corollary enabled by and directly about race. Just as scholars have drawn a connection between gender and mediumistic passivity and activity, there is also a connection between these same traits and race that this scholarship has not yet fully addressed. Just as these novels naturalize a connection between occult powers and womanhood, they also essentialize certain occult powers as racial attributes. This link describes a range of views, from racist or orientalized to ambivalent dark bodies or rosy white ones. Race is integral to novelistic depictions of spiritual power. Whether it is a quadroon suffering from inherited vampirism, a magnetic Brahmin who has to subdue his Indian side to become heroic, or Zara who marshals electricity as only a beautiful, exotically dressed Chaldean can, the pattern of connecting the race of a body to its occult effectiveness is clear and widespread, meriting our increased critical attention. This race essentialism in occult accounts reminds us that even in fictional accounts of special bodies with fantastical attributes, the characters are still subject to the power discrepancies found in so much late-century imperialistic fiction.

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Notes

1 Helen Sword, "Necrobibliography: Books in the Spirit World," *Modern Language Quarterly* 60.1 (1999): 85–113 (90).

2 Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870–1901* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 215, 218.

3 For example, Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 9; Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1990) 233; Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997) 115; Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (New York: Knopf, 1998) 49; Gauri Viswanathan, "The Ordinary Business of Occultism," *Critical Inquiry* 27 (2000): 1–20 (10); Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004) 146; and Marlene Tromp, *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* (Albany: State U of New York P, 2006) 24.

4 A few works recently published address race and the occult in American culture, such as Susan Gillman, *Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the Occult* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003) and Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006), both of whom discuss African American novelist Pauline Hopkins in terms of race and spiritualism. See also Robert Cox, *Body and Soul* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2003) ch. 5, which addresses American spiritualist arguments in favor of slavery. Another substantive treatment of the connection between race and American spiritualism is found in Bridget Bennett, *Transatlantic Spiritualism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2007). In terms of Victorian studies, there is also a discussion of a white medium channeling non-white spirits in Tromp ch. 4, which argues that the medium channeling a dark-bodied spirit provides a critique of imperialism.

5 Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) 32–33.

6 Viswanathan 2.

7 Brooks 15.

8 For a discussion of Marryat's spiritualist beliefs, see Sarah Willburn, *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) 84–88.

9 Florence Marryat, *A Daughter of the Tropics* (London: White, 1887) 66.

10 Florence Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1897) 125.

11 H. L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996) 169. In chapter 4, "The Half-Breed as Gothic Unnatural", Malchow provides an interesting discussion of some of the same themes I address here, namely of lesbianism and cannibalism in the novel (esp. 168–72).

12 Jamaica had become a Crown Colony in 1866 and did not then become independent until 1962. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were marked by a number of revolts which disrupted the plantocracy on the

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island. In this novel, Marryat fictionalizes such a revolt, in which Harriet Brandt's parents are killed.

13 Their deaths being at the hands of their former slaves reveals both the plot's fictionality and the power of the slave revolt imaginary. The novel is set in the 1890s and so the uprising that killed Harriet's parents would have occurred in the 1880s. Slavery was outlawed in Jamaica between 1834 and 1838, so if the death of Harriet's parents were committed by former slaves, they would have been quite elderly. Nonetheless, the image invoked by this plot presents the concept of an inherently dangerous power of race in the form of justifiably angry, revolutionary dark bodies.

14 Marryat, *Vampire* 87.

15 Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995) 97. See, in turn, Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 76–128.

16 Marryat, *Vampire* 28.

17 Stephen D. Arata, "The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization," *Victorian Studies* 33.4 (1990): 621–45 (623).

18 Marryat, *Vampire* 37–38.

19 Marryat, *Vampire* 110.

20 Marryat, *Vampire* 305.

21 Marryat, *Vampire* 4.

22 Marryat, *Vampire* 101–02.

23 Marryat, *Vampire* 297.

24 Marryat, *Vampire* 297.

25 Marryat, *Vampire* 298.

26 Bennett 9. In turn, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transcultivation* (London: Routledge, 1992) 6.

27 Marryat, *Vampire* 121–22.

28 Marryat, *Vampire* 123.

29 *Belfast News-Letter* 25679 (12 Nov. 1897). *British Nineteenth-Century Newspapers*, Perkins Lib., Duke U, 29 Feb. 2008 <http: find.galegroup.com/bncn>.

30 "The Bran Pie of Current Literature," *Pall Mall Gazette* 10165 (23 Oct. 1897). *British Nineteenth-Century Newspapers*, Perkins Lib., Duke U, 29 Feb. 2008 <http: find.galegroup.com/bncn>.

31 Cora Linn Daniels was an American author and journalist. Born in 1852 in Massachusetts, she also lived in New York and traveled extensively in the western United States and in the West Indies. In addition to *The Bronze Buddha*, her publications include *Sardia* (1891), as well as an encyclopedia of the occult sciences. Biographical information on her life, especially after the period of her 1890s publications, is scant: I have not been able to find the year of her death. For more information, see Mary Ashton Rice Livermore and Frances Elizabeth Willard, *American Women: Fifteen Hundred Biographies*

with over Fourteen Hundred Portraits (New York: Mast, Crowell and Kirkpatrick, 1897) 226–27.

32 Cora Linn Daniels, *The Bronze Buddha: A Mystery* (London: Gay and Bird, 1899) 160.

33 Daniels 178. The mesmerizing of a pretty heroine plot line was made most famous by George du Maurier's *Trilby* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1894), in which the Jewish character, Svengali, is the one with the evil mesmeric power.

34 Daniels 190.

35 Viswanathan 2–3.

36 Daniels 191.

37 Daniels 191.

38 Daniels 191.

39 Daniels 191.

40 Daniels 189.

41 In terms of Victorian racial science, the depiction of Harriet, who is not white because she is 25% black with "a drop of Creole blood in her", seems to embody the more typical attitude. The depiction of Mihira getting to choose between his Indian and American sides instead presents race as a volitional category, a choice of cultural and racial antecedents.

42 Daniels 191.

43 The term "Chaldean" would be as racially marked as exotic and subordinate in the nineteenth century as "oriental" is today.

44 Marie Corelli, *A Romance of Two Worlds* (Chicago: W.B. Conkey, 1886) 122–23.

45 Corelli 181.

46 Corelli 156.

47 Corelli 190–91.

48 *Zillah*, *The Child Medium: A Tale of Spiritualism* (New York: Dix, Edwards, 1857) 197–98.

49 Corelli 35.

50 Corelli 246.

51 Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 249.

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