

Extracts from Victoria Stewart. "A Word in Your Ear: Mediumship and Subjectivity in Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 50.3 (2009): 293-312.

In his influential study of the memorial practices that emerged during and in the aftermath of World War I, Jay Winter notes that the war years saw “the apogee of spiritualism in Europe” (76). The war was a historical catastrophe for which few could have prepared themselves, and the turn to spiritualism identified by Winter is testament to spiritualism’s ability to provide a point of coherence for fractured and traumatized communities. Although spiritualism at its height attracted “prominent adherents” such as Sir Oliver Lodge, by the 1930s, Winter argues, “its appeal had waned,” and it was no longer the subject of public debate that it had once been (76). In her study of interwar spiritualism, Jenny Hazelgrove shows how spiritualism continued as a popular practice out of the public eye; she attributes a further decline of interest after 1945 to increased secularization and the “privatisation, medicalisation and hospitalisation of the sick body” (271). However, spiritualism has recently begun to reassert itself in British culture. Its earlier negative image as “sentimental and domesticated” (Hazelgrove 272) has been challenged and

293

reconfigured, and both mediumship and other quasi-occult practices such as telepathy have again been seized on as ways of making sense of the social changes that seemed to obviate them in the first place.¹

[... 295]

Belief Communities

In her discussion of the decline of spiritualism following World War II, Hazelgrove suggests that mediumship increasingly seemed out of kilter with modern thinking. For many of those interested in the occult, “[c]osmic reality [. . .] deserved more dignity than Spiritualism offered, with its homely setting, mundane messages [. . .] and grossly materialist version of the afterworld” (273). One of the best-known British mediums of the 1960s and ’70s was Doris Stokes, whose grandmotherly demeanor gave her messages the resonance of folk wisdom rather than the gravity of otherworldly truth. However, in a society of individuals who—owing to the breakdown of traditional communities based around industrial production and increased population mobility—feel increasingly deracinated, this domestic aspect of spiritualism has a renewed appeal. The simultaneous widespread acceptance of forms of New Age spirituality has provided a new context and audience for the revisitation of traditional mediumship. This renewed interest, and the continuing importance of mediumship in addressing domestic concerns, is neatly epitomized on the cover of the current British paperback edition of *Beyond Black*. A stylized drawing of a woman in medieval dress, framed to suggest a card in a tarot pack, has a homely twist: she is vacuuming.

In his discussion of how “deviant” scientific or religious ideas come to gain acceptance, R. G. A. Dolby suggests that an appeal to the perceived anxieties of the target audience is important. This appeal can be practical (centering on health concerns, for example) or it can be religious, addressing worries about an uncertain future:

Although many deviant belief systems exploit a number of such appeals, so that categories appear to overlap, very often one kind of appeal is dominant. For example, the Scientology movement founded by L. Ron Hubbard developed out of Hubbard's earlier Dianetics, which offered a route to mental health. Although making therapeutic, scientific and political claims, Scientology is now proclaimed primarily as a religion. In part, this transition has been because of the greater social toleration of deviant religions than of deviant medical therapy. (Dolby 21)

The “norm” against which this category of deviance is measured is constantly shifting, however; Dolby was writing over twenty-five years ago, and what might then have been considered “deviant medical therapies”—such as certain kinds of cosmetic surgery—are probably more widely tolerated today than, to use Dolby's example, Scientology. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many “legitimate” scientists, notably Oliver Lodge, maintained an interest in the analysis of “deviant” phenomena; but these investigations ironically helped to establish the parameters of “legitimate” sciences, including physics and, later, psychology. However, explicit intersections with science or religion are often downplayed in contemporary mediumship in favor of the performative qualities of the practice. As Elizabeth Hallam notes, the “psychic ‘fayre,’” an event “at which a number of clairvoyants and astrologers will provide demonstrations and be available for consultation” (183), may host “traditional” mediums alongside others offering “an eclectic range of services” (185), such as tarot reading, past life regression, and palmistry. In *Beyond Black*, Alison, the medium, is “sneered” at by a potential client during one such gathering when she has to admit that she does only “ordinary,” rather than “Vedic,” palmistry (171), a detail that implies the knowingness of the “consumers” at these events. One of the advantages of the practices on display at the psychic fair is precisely that they do not require the long-term belief or commitment that traditional forms of religion demand. For fair-goers, being convinced by a medium's good performance is as important as religious faith or scientific proof.

[...]

Aside from its adaptability in a changing climate of belief, another factor—although it is sometimes cited as a cause of spiritualism's decline—could also have contributed to its resurgence. Geoffrey K. Nelson suggests that in both the American and British contexts, the initial growth of spiritualism at the end of the nineteenth century took place in communities in which there were extensive opportunities for geographical and social mobility. Spiritualism could provide reassurance to those “confused by the social chaos of the period” (Nelson 69). But if these kinds of communities originally fostered spiritualism and cohered around it, their breakup resulted in its demise, and its resurgence can therefore be seen as an expression, albeit a nostalgic one, of the desire to re-establish such communities. The feeling of confusion identified by Nelson is evoked in the setting of *Beyond Black*. Mantel places a strong emphasis on the negative consequences of postwar suburban developments around London.

[...297]

The older towns that Alison and Colette drive through seem to have left their inhabitants better housed but worse off spiritually:

A grandma at a bus stop, stooping to slot a biscuit into a child's open mouth. Dirty pigeons hanging in the trees. [. . .] They tried to avoid the high streets and shopping malls of the denatured towns, because of the bewildered dead clustered among the skips outside the burger bars. (265)

The argument that increased economic stability, as represented by the shopping mall, does not necessarily foster personal happiness is a familiar one, and it can lead to an overly idealistic attitude toward the early twentieth-century urban working class. However, as this essay will show, any nostalgia in *Beyond Black* is tempered by the dismal nature of Alison's own working-class childhood, from which her psychic powers could only partially shield her.

Mantel implies that by communicating with deceased family members, a medium like Alison can assist in the re-establishment of family ties, themselves often weakened by newly increased mobility and the resultant lack of both family support and community bonds in the "denatured" towns of Britain. In this regard, spiritualism expresses desires and anxieties similar to those reflected in the recent upsurge of interest in family history; the latter is now facilitated by the increased availability of online resources, and the medium can function as another research tool. The medium is the archive embodied; he or she can give voice to those forebears who would otherwise only exist as faded photographs and dusty documents. The mundane nature of much of the communicated material allows the receiver to believe that however problematic life in the present might seem, the past is accessible and can be comprehended without difficulty. Yet as Mantel notes, describing some of the research she undertook when writing *Beyond Black*, the lack of local and familial rootedness, which fosters the popularity of mediums, can itself be a barrier to the reception of their messages:

What do [audiences at psychics' performances] want? A sense of connection, I suppose, a reassurance that they figure somewhere in the cosmic plan. [. . .] We have trouble with our memories. We have trouble with connection. I saw psychics struggling to impart "messages" to people who were ignorant of the names of their own grandparents. ("*Guardian Book Club*")

Perhaps a sense of connectedness can be experienced by proxy; to hear other people receiving accurate messages at a medium's performance can itself be satisfying if the hearer believes that next time, the message could be for him or her. This kind of satisfaction entails not only empathy toward the person who has received the message or discovered the family secret, but also the desire to hear a narrative completed, even if this consists merely of hearing answers to other audience members' questions.

Beyond Black alludes to the way in which this generalized empathy can affect an individual's consciousness of history, not merely family history. During her childhood, Colette had trouble during school history lessons when asked, in accordance with then-current pedagogical fashion, "to empathise with the sufferings of cotton mill operatives, plantation slaves and the Scots foot soldiers at Flodden; it left her cold" (52). This point, coupled with the fact that Colette discovers an aptitude for working with computers, draws a contrast between the somewhat unfeeling Colette and Alison, who feels too much of past sufferings. But the choice in this passage of such a range of downtrodden individuals from

history raises the question of how Colette or any other child could generate empathy toward these diverse figures, and, indeed, whether this is a legitimate exercise in the first place. The borderline between empathy and voyeurism is here implicitly under interrogation.

[...301]

Analysis and Detection

Mediumship does not simply provide reassurance about the fate of deceased loved ones; it can also be a means of seeking advice about one's future and thus [302]

can take on a quasi-therapeutic quality. The work of the medium or clairvoyant can imply a fatalistic universe, but rather than being frightening or foreboding, this work can, paradoxically, be reassuring, as it shifts some of the focus away from individual choice. Self-assertion may be one of the benefits of contemporary society, but it can also be perilous and intimidating. Like more familiar forms of analysis or counseling, the encounter with the medium often takes place on a one-on-one basis; however, unlike, for example, psychoanalysis—in which the sitter has to speak even to excess—in the mediumistic encounter, the less the sitter gives away, the easier it is to test the medium's reliability.

In her account of a private sitting with a medium that took place in the north London suburb of Colindale in the late 1960s, Phyllis Raphael seems to support Hazelgrove's suggestion that at this time spiritualism was considered a rather fusty, old-fashioned practice. Despite her skepticism, Raphael admits that the medium, Nora Blackwood, did produce evidence of having contacted deceased members of Raphael's family: "Of course, the nagging question always remained: why should someone take all the trouble to return from the dead, stop off in Colindale and then tell *me* the names of members of the family and a few initials?" (Tabori and Raphael 88). (Coincidentally, Colindale is also the home of the British Library Newspapers Collection, the haunt of many would-be family historians.) By the conclusion of the reading, however, after being given advice about how to deal with the aftermath of a recently ended relationship, Raphael believes that Blackwood has "dispensed with the spiritualism" and given her instead "exactly what [she] needed [. . .] some commonsense morality" (Tabori and Raphael 90).

Describing a visit to a clairvoyant who begins by reading her palm, Hallam also implies that what happens during the interchanges between the reader and sitter is a kind of assisted self-diagnosis: "From [the medium's] perspective [. . .] *she* was not narrating my life, she was helping *me* to see what was already there and, to a certain degree, what she recognised I already knew" (Hallam 187). The medium works with cues provided by the sitter's responses and essentially facilitates the sitter's nascent self-awareness, bringing to light the problems that prompted the sitter to seek advice in the first place but that, paradoxically, should remain concealed until discovered by the clairvoyant.

There are similarities here to the investigator of classic detective fiction. Like the detective, the medium can pick up clues from the sitter's appearance. In an account of "reading" one of the other participants at a "developing circle" for would-be mediums, Picardie admits that most of her conclusions come not from any psychic source but from observation and imagination:

[Bev] is wearing embroidered jeans, so I guess that she must have a teenage daughter, who has encouraged her in such a purchase. I close my eyes, and try to imagine her life. “You’ve got a teenage daughter,” I say. Bev nods. “You’re very close to her.” Bev nods again. [. . .] “You’re very good at this, Justine,” says Yvonne, encouragingly. (140)

This experience does not prevent Picardie from believing that some of the readings she receives could not have been constructed from observation and lucky guesses alone. The procedure described here uses the same observational techniques with which Sherlock Holmes startles Dr. Watson on several occasions, and which themselves seem to be of an uncanny kind. Holmes’s opening gambit on the occasion of their first meeting is a good example: “You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive” (Doyle 11). The astonishing effect of this statement comes from the presentation of Holmes’s conclusion before his sequence of reasoning is detailed; the reasoning itself can, of course, be startling in its complexity or obscurity of reference. The revelation of this chain of reasoning is what guarantees the intelligence of the detective and proves he has not just made a lucky guess; Watson’s bearing and appearance indicate that he has been injured while abroad with the army, and Holmes deduces that Afghanistan is the most likely theater of Watson’s combat. In the case of the medium, there can be, but is no need for, logical deduction. Knowledge comes from elsewhere.

To be able to read minds, then, is the next developmental stage of the *raisonneur*.³ Where the Holmesian investigator pieces together visual clues to form a plausible narrative, the medium can conjure up the scene of the crime.

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The M25, the orbital motorway surrounding Greater London, may not seem a likely site for the Gothic. Begun piecemeal in the 1970s and finally completed in 1986 under the auspices of Thatcher's government, it is a monument to modern urban planning, the supremacy of the motorcar, and the unremitting spread of the suburbs. 117 miles long and spanning twelve lanes at its widest point, it forms an enormous bypass, directing an incessant stream of congested traffic away from the historically layered, labyrinthine urban centre and its more conventionally Gothic geographies.

Yet the M25 also figures, in its own way, as a Gothic landscape. J. G. Ballard's *Crash* (1973) anticipated the existential horrors of the M25 in its exploration of the non-places of the London road-system via its protagonist's pornographic fixation with car crashes. *Crash* has been variously described by Melissa Iocco as deploying 'familiar Gothic tropes and effects' (Iocco 46) and by Jim Byatt as an inverted ghost story in which the living haunt the dead (Byatt). More directly, Iain Sinclair's non-fictional account of his walks around the M25, *London Orbital* (2002), traces the motorway's occluded histories and occulted geographies, including those of Carfax Abbey, where Bram Stoker located Dracula's English residence, and the nineteenth-century asylums for the mentally ill that ring the capital. For Sinclair, the M25 is 'The point where London loses it, gives up its ghosts' (Sinclair 3). Sinclair captures the M25's ambivalence: the point where London stops being London is the point where the city's ghostliness is exhausted, comes to an end; but also the point where ghosts are made visible, are released.

The narrative that draws most overtly on a conventional Gothic vocabulary, however, is Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black* (2005), the tale of a professional spirit medium, Alison Hart, who lives and works in the zone that buffers London from the provincial hinterlands. Mantel's satirical novel presents the outer suburbs as, against the odds, a haunted landscape; a landscape in which the living have become indistinguishable from the dead. Covering much of the same geographical territory as Sinclair, and similar reference points (in *London Orbital*

Sinclair notes a sign for a 'PSYCHIC FAYRE' as he leaves Potter's Bar, and tarot readers in barges along the Grand Union Canal), Mantel ultimately presents a very different vision of the M25; a comic and partially affirmative one that accommodates the domestic, interior and private. As Alison and Collette 'strike out east beyond the Thames barrier', Alison notes:

The world outside the glass is the world of masculine action. Everything she sees is what a man has built. But at each turn-off, each junction, women are waiting to know their fate. They are looking deep inside themselves, into their private hearts, where the foetus forms and buds, where the shape forms inside the crystal, where the fingernails click softly at the backs of cards.

In contrast to Sinclair's exploration of the world outside the glass, his deconstruction of the masculine architecture of the city's hinterlands, Mantel explores the interior spaces that overlie the exterior ones. Her M25 is not, like Sinclair's 'Endless Landscape', a chain of suggestively interchangeable pieces, but rather a series of overlapping worlds (Sinclair 162).

Beyond Black poses the question: what does it mean to be haunted in a culture with no history? If a society has no interest in its personal and collective past, then in what form can that past return? If ghosts, moreover, have traditionally been associated with locations with a dense historical charge – castles, abbeys, stately homes, places that have seen decades or even centuries of human use – then how can they manifest in what Marc Augé (1995) has called the 'non-places' of supermodernity – the motorways, shopping malls, and gated communities symptomatic of contemporary culture? Mantel's novel conjures a specific time and place, 'the conurbations that clustered around the junctions of the M25, and the corridors of the M3 and M4' in the final years of the millennium (*Beyond Black* 10). At the same time, it uses the metaphor of the spirit world, as revealed to Alison, to suggest that the space tracked by the London Orbital is 'beyond geography and history' (*Beyond Black* 44), a dead zone in which community is fragmented and memory lost, swallowed by an affectless consumer culture.

Mantel's novel can be set against an earlier tradition of supernatural narrative, one in which ghosts are historically rooted in particular communities and locations. According to Michel de Certeau, it is the presence of 'the stories and legends that haunt urban space' that makes a place habitable. As he writes in *The Practice of Everyday Life*: 'It is through the opportunity they offer to store up rich silences and wordless stories, or rather through their capacity to create cellars and garrets everywhere, that local legends . . . permit exits, ways of coming out and going back in, and thus habitable spaces' (de Certeau 106). He is not referring only to ghost stories; indeed if anything the trope of haunting stands, in his text, for a much broader register of narrative traces on a given environment. Nevertheless, his argument is suggestive in relation to Mantel's

[...82]

Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson, writing about English folklore and local legends, suggest that:

On one level, many [stories] grow out of a community's natural curiosity about itself and its surroundings . . . On a second level, they echo and enhance the community's pride in its own identity, highlighting some striking event which its neighbours cannot match. (Westwood and Simpson viii)

Ghosts, in common with other kinds of folklore, are thus both a means of interpreting a place, and a source of identity. The ghost-story writer Vernon Lee insisted that place was crucial in conjuring the presence of fictional ghosts: 'Do not these embodied ghosts owe what little effect they possess to their surroundings, and are not the surroundings the real ghost?' (Lee 311). The conventional expression, 'spirit of place', has an attractive etymological proximity to the ghostly. Ghosts are both defined by place and define places.

While ghosts have always appeared in Gothic fictions, and indeed in other

forms of literature before that, the ghost story as a specific literary form arose in the mid-nineteenth century, coincident with both the rise of spiritualism and the emergence of folklore studies. The ghost story was marked by a tendency to relocate the exotic European settings of earlier Gothic novels to a British landscape characterized as remotely rural, or to historic urban centres such as London, Edinburgh and Dublin. During the same period, folklorists tended to collect their data in what they perceived to be the most remote regions of the UK, so that large cities and their swiftly expanding suburbs are relatively absent from their accounts. Westwood and Simpson, whose book *The Lore of the Land* draws on folklore archives in order to construct a supernatural cartography of England, attribute this in large part to the presumptions of those gathering the data: 'In particular, it was taken for granted . . . that the counties closest to London would have lost much of their traditional lore because of industrialization and the movement of population, whereas remote rural communities would be more rewarding' (Westwood and Simpson viii). Their map of London confirms this thesis; there is a very dense cluster of phenomena in the centre of the city, with a couple of peripheral clusters at Highgate and Hampton Court, but otherwise the vast expanses of the suburbs are mostly devoid of legend, the most striking empty expanse to feature on any of the maps in the book. While their own survey is not conducted according to strict scientific principles and involves a degree of authorial selectivity, if anything this further confirms their argument; they too find the dichotomy of urban centre and rural outposts the

most effective means of structuring ghostly geographies, and the most promising environments for supernatural narrative.

Mantel is not the first writer to place ghosts in this supernatural no-man's-land; in the nineteenth century a number of writers, most prominently Charlotte Riddell, published suburban ghost stories. However, while these earlier suburban ghost stories tend to focus on the uncanniness of domestic space, Mantel's reinvention of ghostly geographies maps the dislocation of an entire society. By relocating the historically rooted urban and rural ghosts of folklore and Gothic narrative into the suggestive non-place of the outer suburbs, Mantel blocks, or reverses, the traditional function of hauntings. In Gothic texts, ghosts are conventionally a manifestation of the past returning: they offer confirmation of history, albeit often a mythical or fantasized one; they allow people to remember, and trauma to be worked through. So, to give a London-based example, in Dickens' tale 'To Be Taken With a Grain of Salt', the ghost of a murdered man appears in order to convict his killer, and only vanishes once justice has been done and the historical record made straight. In Mantel's novel, however, only Alison herself is allowed this means of resolving her past through coming to terms with haunting – for the population at large, hauntings indicate not the presence of history, but its erasure. Moreover the manifestation of ghosts does not deliver a sense of place or enhance communal identity, but rather illustrates its fragmentation. If, according to sociologist Avery Gordon, the ghost is a 'social figure' (Gordon 8) that marks the presence of something missing or lost, then the swarm of ghosts inhabiting the 'marginal land' flanking the M25 seems to indicate an entire culture adrift (*Beyond Black* 1).

[...84]

This spiritual malaise linked to loss of historical narratives is specifically that of the white middle classes; Alison doesn't work the inner cities, partly because the number of spirits becomes too much to bear and partly because the convoluted spirit beliefs of the multicultural populations give her a headache. Alison's own ignominious background is another matter, and the belching, farting spirit guide who disrupts her comfortable, tastefully co-ordinated home plays the role of the inappropriate, unwelcome relative of the *parvenu* – the haunting of the recently middle class by their lower-class upbringing. The territory of Middle England is turned inside-out so that it is no longer middle as in central, or even as in average, but rather as in in-between – a kind of liminal zone or place of passage.

[...85]

Without narrative, without history, (sub)urban spaces become stagnant; ghosts do not walk but cluster, queue, dither, congregate. Moreover in the shadow of the M25, *Beyond Black* presents an environment in which walking has become redundant; both ghosts and living travel exclusively by car. Automobile travel creates a different kind of movement through space, a different means of narrating the environment. As Augé suggests:

'Main roads no longer pass through towns, but lists of their notable features – and indeed, a whole commentary – appear on big signboards nearby. . . . Motorway travel is thus doubly remarkable: it avoids, for functional reasons, all the principal places to which it takes us; and it makes comment on them'. (Augé 97)

History is reduced to the text and symbols on road-signs; packaged as leisure and offered in bite-sized, easily digestible pieces.

Haunting in this novel reflects what Brian McHale has described as the postmodern shift from an epistemological dominant to an ontological one (McHale 10). The ghost is no longer a producer of knowledge – where to find buried treasure, what terrible crime was committed, how revenge can be achieved. Rather, it is an inhabitant of worlds – the insalubrious, intermediate places of exchange where Alison's ghosts fester and gather and which she therefore tries to avoid:

Nowhere near a racecourse, a dog track, an army camp, a dockyard, a lorry park nor a clinic for special diseases. Nowhere near a sidings or a depot, a customs shed or a warehouse; not near an outdoor market nor an indoor market nor a sweatshop nor a body shop nor a bookies. (*Beyond Black* 221)

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[REDACTED] *Beyond Black*, which covers some similar terrain to the earlier pair of novels *Every Day Is Mother's Day* (1985) and *Vacant Possession* (1986), might easily be described as a 'domestic black comedy', particularly because of its scrutiny of suburban domestic settings. However, in this chapter I argue that *Beyond Black*, like these earlier novels, illustrates Mantel's predilection for exploring the 'state of the nation' in and through precisely such domestic settings and through women's experiences in these locations, and, by extension, her insistence on the impossibility of separating the private from the public, the domestic and local from the national and global.

Beyond Black charts the journeys of the medium Alison Hart and her manager Colette as they endlessly circle London's orbital road attending psychic fayres in the surrounding commuter towns, during the period from the late 1990s to the first years after the millennium. The latter half of the novel focuses on Alison and Colette's move to a new-build suburban house in Surrey in a bid to outrun the abusive men from Alison's childhood home in Aldershot, who now continue to haunt the medium from beyond the grave, and who eventually begin to invade her suburban idyll. As well as resuming this focus on suburban England evident in *Every Day Is Mother's Day* and *Vacant Possession*, *Beyond Black* also resumes the 'state of the nation' emphasis on the failures of state care which these earlier novels foreground. In *Beyond Black*, for example, the spirits of the elderly often do not realize that they have died. Instead, they believe that 'they're in a corridor, lying on a trolley, and nobody comes [...] they've actually gone over, but they think it's just the NHS' (2005: 150). However, *Beyond Black* also focuses extensively on the psychic life of the nation – and especially on the 'common repression and anxieties' of Home Counties England (Cooke 2005) – in the millennial period, with a notable emphasis on the death of Princess Diana in 1997, an event described elsewhere by Mantel as 'that dislocating time, when the skin came off the surface of the world', unleashing 'a pagan outpouring, a lawless fiesta of grief' (Mantel 2013). Yet in the same breath in which Colette recalls that 'she got to know Alison properly' in 'the week after Diana's death', she also describes this period as 'another era now, another world: before the millennium, before the Queen's Jubilee, before the Twin Towers burned' (Mantel 2005: 140). And it is the ramifications of this latter event which I suggest play a significant role in Mantel's exploration of the 'state of the nation' in *Beyond Black*.

Published only four years after the events of 9/11, and only a few months

before the 7/7 bombings in London, *Beyond Black* emerges from a period in which the 'language of security' was busy 'colonizing every arena and idiom of daily life and political culture' (Kaplan 2008: 16). In particular, the novel's

emphasis on the psychic's purported ability not only to speak with the dead but also to predict the future – Colette, for example, is 'afraid to act at all' without the intervention of fortune tellers (Mantel 2005: 70–71) – resonates with what Didier Bigo describes as the 'anticipation or "astrological" dimension' of contemporary security practices in Europe (2005: 89). The objective now, Bigo argues, is always 'to monitor the future', to be able 'to designate in advance who and what are the dangers [...] to "ban" some people', to consistently focus on staging 'a preemptive defense' (2005: 89). My focus below will be on Mantel's depiction of haunted suburban houses as the terrain on which to explore contemporary anxieties about 'homeland security' and the defensive attitudes and measures which are established in response to this persistent fear of attack.

Mantel's exploration of global security issues in domestic spaces resonates with Amy Kaplan's argument that the concept of security 'does the seductive work of creating a framework for seeing and experiencing the world in a way that fuses the macro level of global and national politics with the intimate world of home and psyche' (Kaplan 2008: 16). Moreover, this emphasis on security in the context of 'the intimate world of home and psyche' also enables Mantel to explore the related issue of hospitality, which, like security, is concerned with 'questions of territory and border, of private and public spaces, [...] of belonging, membership, citizenship, and exclusion' (Frieze 2004: 74). In *Beyond Black*, Mantel examines the central dilemma – which has become increasingly urgent in the context of global terror threats – of how to balance the obligation to offer hospitality with the defensive apparatus necessary to offer security and protection from violent attack, which she focuses through women's historical and contemporary experiences of bodily vulnerability in the home.

Homeland insecurity

According to Amy Kaplan, although the practice of 'referring to the nation as a home, as a domestic space through familial metaphors' is 'probably as

old as the nation form itself', the use of the term 'homeland' to refer to the United States after the 9/11 attacks – particularly in the collocation 'homeland security' – signalled a significant shift in contemporary political and cultural attitudes to national security (2003: 84–85). The term homeland, she argues,

draws on and amplifies the fact that 'the notion of the nation as a home, as a domestic space, relies structurally on its intimate opposition to the notion of the foreign', such that the term 'domestic' can be understood to have 'a double meaning that links the space of the familial household to that of the nation, by imagining both in opposition to everything outside the geographic and conceptual border of the home' (86). The term 'homeland' therefore has the capacity to provoke 'a profound sense of insecurity', not only concerning the immediate and contemporary 'threat of terrorism' carried out by 'foreign' agents, but also because the home or 'homeland' is always already 'a fundamentally uncanny place [...] haunted by all the unfamiliar yet strangely familiar foreign specters that threaten to turn it into its opposite' (89). Home, Kaplan concludes, proves itself to be a particularly apt conceptual 'battleground' for the so-called War on Terror (90).

This conception of the home as the fundamentally unstable terrain on which contemporary security anxieties are played out forms the background for Mantel's exploration of what we might call 'homeland *insecurity*' in *Beyond Black*. Of course, unlike the United States, the United Kingdom has no department of 'homeland security', and this is not a phrase which has gained the same purchase in the British political imagination. However, as Kaplan points out, the concept of home does play a significant role in British political discourse, not least in such terms as the 'Home Office' and 'Home Secretary', which derive their meaning 'in the context of the British Empire that demarcated the space of England as home as distinct from its colonial possessions' (Kaplan 2003: 89). Indeed, there is a similar precedent for the use of the noun phrase 'the homeland' in a British context, which the *OED* states is used to designate 'Britain, as opposed to (former) British colonies and territories'. In this sense, then, the term 'homeland' in a British context also carries intimations of the authentically national as opposed to the foreign, that which by definition comes from outside the home.

This is also what makes Mantel's focus on suburban homes in *Beyond Black* so striking, in that suburbia embodies and even amplifies anxieties about the security of both home and nation, and indeed of the home-as-nation. As Ged Pope points out, since the 1930s in particular, suburbia has been strongly related 'to national identity, to notions of Englishness', not least because 'suburbia is often seen as incorporating key national stereotypes (the predilection for the pastoral, for privacy, for the house and domesticity)' (2015: 209). Similarly, Dominic Head suggests that in 'the popular imagination [...] suburbia is Middle England' (2002: 213). Yet Middle England's residence in

such territories might nevertheless be understood as an uneasy experience, in terms of ideas of both Englishness and social class: according to Todd Kutcha, suburbia 'is both the epitome and the antithesis of the nation's home – on the one hand quintessentially English, on the other hand bristling anxiously over its perceived inferiority' (2010: 5). For Kutcha, part of this 'ambivalence'

towards suburbs stems from their ability – particularly in the post-war period – to ‘represent a national reversal of fortune, their reputation for petty lives and mortgaged futures belying an era when Britannia ruled the waves’ (5).

Moreover, as Pope observes, suburbia was not always a haven for the middle classes. Instead the ‘proto-suburban sites’ of the sixteenth century contained all the ‘unwanted and inassimilable elements’ that had been ‘banished’ from the city. It was only later in the eighteenth century that a different kind of suburban space began to develop, and suburbia became not ‘a negative, debased space containing deviant elements unhappily expelled from a broadly assimilative core’, but instead a ‘potential welcome space for expansive elements actively escaping a threatening core urban milieu’ (2015: 23). However, these affluent suburban spaces are never quite secure. Indeed Pope paints a rather Gothic portrait of affluent suburban spaces, arguing that they are troubled by a ‘permeable’ temporal boundary between slum and suburb, through which ‘a horrible slum past of indiscriminate co-mingling threatens to return to the desired suburban present’ (25, 22).

[...138]

‘Homes are very unsafe places to linger’

Suburbia can therefore be understood as a highly defensive territory, whose homeliness turns on its uneasy relationship with the foreign, and whose affluence depends on a careful maintenance of temporal and spatial boundaries which simultaneously recall and deny suburbia’s past as a subordinate site. But there is yet another form of border security at work in suburbia which makes this territory an ideal location for Mantel’s exploration of contemporary security anxieties: the separation of the public world of politics and commerce from the ostensibly private world of the home. Scott MacKenzie draws attention to the ideal of the home as that which is situated ‘beyond the threshold of the world as the definitive interior that orients all exteriority’; as its most basic condition, the home is supposed to be ‘untroubled by commerce, history, politics’, and is emphatically ‘where the state is not’ (2013: 215–216). In its affluent form, suburbia is modelled on precisely this idealized separation of the ‘the public world of work and politics’ and ‘the private world of the home’, something Janet Wolff argues was ‘marked, as well as constructed, by both geography and architecture’ in the affluent suburban spaces which developed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1988: 118–119).

In particular, this idealized separation of public and private has implications for Mantel’s exploration of contemporary security anxieties through the lens of women’s domestic experiences in suburbia. For example, Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling argue that suburbia’s ‘socio-spatial separation of spheres of home and work’ enables the production and maintenance of boundaries between ‘public and private, masculine and feminine spaces’ (2006: 101). Pope also identifies suburban development with a ‘reorganisation and

compartmentalising of spatial function' around the association of men with 'public roles and the spaces of work' and women with 'domestic ideology' (2015: 25). Even now, the repeated failure to recognize the problematic nature

HAUNTINGS, HOSPITALITY AND HOMELAND INSECURITY

139

of this gendered separation of public and private spheres remains a source of deep frustration for feminist scholars – despite the fact that, as Geraldine Pratt notes, a wealth of feminist theory has long drawn attention to the ways in which 'women's issues are often depoliticized by being enclaved within the private sphere', something which is evidently still the case, given that the act of 'recasting private domestic issues such as childcare and domestic assault as public ones remains an area of intense political contest' (2005: 1056–1057).

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, Mantel is similarly frustrated by such attempts to relegate 'domestic' concerns to the margins of the political sphere, not least in reviews of contemporary literature. She states that one still hears

from female critics as well as male, a regular complaint, a bleat [...] that even today women writers play safe with small, domestic novels. They have forgotten that grand truth we learned, or relearned, at the close of the 20th century: the personal is political. The domestic novel need not be small, or tame. (Mantel 2008)

Indeed, Mantel insists that 'homes are very unsafe places to linger. The crime statistics will tell you the streets are safer. Everything, even warfare, happens first in the kitchen, in the nursery, in the cradle' (2008). These ideas are certainly foregrounded in *Beyond Black*, a 'domestic novel' which is neither 'small' nor 'tame': in fact, Mantel's novel places military violence and aggression directly inside the home. Alison grows up in the 'British Army town' of Aldershot, in which her prostitute mother's main customers are soldiers, including many of the 'fiends' who torment Alison when they are alive and who return to haunt her after their deaths, 'reassembling themselves' with a 'military rattle, as bone clicked into joint' (2005: 207). They perform 'some sort of military exercise' in her garden in the affluent suburb of Admiral Drive (406) whose name again hints at this military connection. But Mantel also suggests that this sort of violence is always already at work in domestic spaces through figuring young children playing in a suburban garden as 'scavenging and savaging, leaving scorched earth behind them, like child soldiers in an African war', while their mother is inside the house 'training up another one' (274).

Moreover, Mantel's depiction of Admiral Drive as haunted also emphasizes the porousness of the boundaries between the public and private realms. For MacKenzie, the 'domestic uncanny' is always symptomatic of the failure of attempts to separate the home from the public realm. Because such boundaries 'are never other than provisional or contingent structures of fantasy and effects of ideology', no real home can ever 'genuinely embody

the immaculate, unrepresentable asylum that the full conditions of home's hegemony dictate' (2013: 217). Hence, instances of hauntings and the

140

'domestic uncanny' are 'not the symptom of an intrusion into the home by some external power or agency but rather a fissure [...] through which home's hidden apparatus of coercion, historical determination, and power distribution casts its tenebrous glow'. Again, like Kaplan in her study of 'homeland security', MacKenzie turns to Freud's uncanny, stating that homes are represented in literature as 'endlessly hospitable to the intrusion of the monstrous, unnatural, and incommensurable', such that we constantly anticipate the 'perversion or disruption' of the home wherever it is represented (2013: 217). This is true not only of the ghost story but also of the Gothic genre more broadly, in which supernatural events emphasize the insecurity of the boundary between the home and the world outside. This is certainly the case where domestic violence is concerned. In her influential study of the relationship between the Gothic genre and 'domestic ideology', Kate Ferguson Ellis draws attention to the rise of the ideology of separate spheres – which rests on an image of the home as 'a refuge from violence' – and the simultaneous emergence of the Gothic as a 'popular genre [...] that assumes some violation of this cultural ideal' (1989: 3). It is therefore the 'failed home' which takes centre stage in Gothic novels as a site of potential and actual violence, manifesting itself in supernatural events largely directed at women (Ellis 1989: 3).

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In recent times the construct of white femininity, as it functions in social relations, has emerged as an important line of inquiry (Patricia Hill Collins 1999; Kate Davy 1997; Ruth Frankenberg 1993, 1996; Jacqueline Dowd Hall 1983; Aida Hurtado 1996; Vicente Rafael 2000), one that is still in need of further attention and exploration. White femininity, because of its discursive, relational, and spatial proximity to the structures of white patriarchy, and its role in their reproduction, functions as a site through which racialized patriarchal relations are organized—through mothers, wives, daughters, sisters. As Rey Chow (1990a: 84) has noted, "the white woman is what the white man produces ... If her body is, in filmic language, the place of suture, what it sews together—what it coheres—are the white man's production."

This essay focuses on the relationship between white femininity and national identity.¹ The term *white femininity*, as I use it in this essay, is not meant to suggest a physical body or a property with some ontological origin. Rather, I use it to mean an ideological construction through which meanings about white women and their place in the social order are naturalized. As symbols of motherhood, as markers of feminine beauty (a marker denied to other women), as translators (and hence preservers) of bloodlines, as signifiers of national domesticity, as sites for the reproduction of heterosexuality, as causes in the name of which narratives of national defense and protection are launched, as symbols of national unity, and as sites through which "otherness"—racial, sexual, classed, gendered, and nationalized—is negotiated, white femininity constitutes the locus through which borders of race, gender, sexuality, and nationality are guarded and secured. This consequently marks it as a threat, since it is a site through which the nation can spill into otherness.

To suggest all this, of course, is not to claim that women of color have no relation to the nation.² Women of color, being doubly displaced from the national imaginary, are not even considered a part of the national family, which makes their position that much more wrought with violence. Possessing a relation with the nation that is one of negation, dis-identification, and erasure, their bodies offer no hope for recuperation into the national family as does the white female body. It is precisely this visibility, yet invisibility—this inside/

324 Shome

outside position of white femininity—that reveals a complex fusion of various social relations through which this category remains produced.

[...]

To read the Diana phenomenon without theorizing the politics of whiteness through which she was mediated is to render invisible, once again, the logic of whiteness that underwrites all (hetero)gendered narratives of national belonging. Indeed, no other mass spectacle of our times provides such overwhelming evidence of how the production of Anglo nations is visualized through white femininity. No other mass event of our times offers such a gallery of easily available images of white femininity through which a globalized national spectacle was performed. This essay, therefore, argues that the national performance of Diana's death normalized certain locations of white femininity. It was less about how Diana was mediated to symbolize "others" and more about how that mediation functioned to naturalize white femininity's place in the national imagination. In particular, I posit that media narratives about Diana's death revealed a *re-membering* of white femininity that underscored its constitutive role in the symbolic reproduction of national patriarchy.

These issues become salient when we remember that Diana, in her last years, had significantly disturbed the racial and patriarchal bounds of "Englishness." Her critique of monarchy—the ultimate establishment of British national patriarchy—was most evident in the in/famous and secretly conducted 1995 BBC *Panorama* interview where she bared all about the royals to interviewer Martin Bashir, a hitherto unknown black British male. This critique seriously ruptured the relations through which her normalized location in the nation was secured. This transgression, however, became more threatening in her later years when she performed a racialized transnationalism with the Egyptian playboy of the western world, Dodi Al Fayed, a man whose family, despite years of residency

Feminist Media Studies, Vol. 1, No. 3 325

in England, had been repeatedly denied citizenship. Pictures of Diana and Dodi's famous kiss on their summer yacht splashed across newspaper pages. In addition, as was discovered later, there was Diana's last love—the Muslim Pakistani doctor Hasnat Khan—whom Diana apparently wanted to marry. The "loose cannon" Diana—a label often used by the media to describe her fall from grace in her later years—became so loose that she resorted to foreign-ness, and specifically to foreign brown masculinity, for the fulfillment and expression of her spiritual and bodily desires. Here was an instance of the white female body constituting an excess, spilling out beyond the racialized boundaries of the nation, threatening to contaminate its essence, in ways for which there was no room in the imagined community of the nation, especially in the body of the future Royal Mother. Clearly, then, this white female body so close to dis-membering, quite literally, the national family has to be re-membered in ways in which white femininity's place as the mechanism that holds the national family together can be reformed, rewritten, and re-articulated.

[...]

326 *Shome*

tives, offering visions of stable and less complicated times, become a way in which anxieties generated by such time-space confusion are negotiated. While Huyssen's specific focus is different from mine, I find his larger points useful for further contextualizing the Diana phenomenon. Following Huyssen, the public response to Diana's death, and the hyperbolic mediation of subsequent weeks, can be read as a symptom of anxieties of an Anglo world whose raced, gendered, and nationalized borders are rapidly changing and where there is a growing insecurity about an Anglo future. (It is indeed noteworthy that the responses to Diana's death reached a fervor primarily in the transatlantic Anglo world.) The mediation of Diana, signifying one of the last popular vestiges of imperial womanhood, became a way in which these anxious and shifting borders were re-imagined through fixed and familiar locations of white femininity.

This argument acquires further potency when we remember the identity crisis that marked England in the late 1990s following significant events of that decade: home rule for Scotland; the handover of Hong Kong (the last British colony); the defeat of Conservatives after eighteen years; and a monarchy whose public image had been severely tarnished, and its foundation significantly damaged, by a succession of failed marriages and embarrassing public exposés of its young generation. As several commentators have suggested, Diana's death became the public screen onto which this crisis of identity was projected, and through which it was negotiated (see, for example, Valerie Hey 1999; John Taylor 2000). This essay, focusing on one aspect of that negotiation, shows in particular how patriarchal national myths were revived, reworked, rewritten, and normalized on this screen through a careful assemblage of this white woman whose mute, dead, in/visible body offered itself up once again as a vehicle through which a racialized national public could be forged while the whole world was watching.

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