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CHAPTER 15

The Colonial Idol, the Animalistic, and the New Woman in the Imperial Gothic of Richard Marsh

Shuhita Bhattacharjee

> From the immediate neighbourhood of the figure on the throne snakes' heads began to peep … The evil-looking brutes began to slither over the sides … Whipping up a couple of revolvers … I headed the muzzles straight for them. (Marsh 1901, *The Joss*, p. 249)

> On the idol's brow was poised a beetle … Wherever the eye turned it rested on a scarab … It was as though one saw things through the distorted glamour of a nightmare. (Marsh 1897, *The Beetle*, p. 242)

In the first description of a snake-ridden Chinese idol by the English ship-captain Max Lander, or in the second reportage of the beetles' presence on/around the Egyptian goddess by the English politician Paul Lessingham, there is no denying the idol's menacing association with animality, the Englishman's vindictive resolve to annihilate, and the westerner's confounding bafflement in the face of this animalistic unknown. With these tensions in mind, I examine Richard Marsh's treatment of the animalistic in his Imperial Gothic works, *The Beetle: A Mystery* (1897),

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The Goddess: A Demon (1900), and *The Joss: A Reversion* (1901). In this chapter, I show how the figure of a colonial idol in each of these novels sets up a nexus of the colonial and the animalistic and how this blending then connects the idol to the figure of the gender-subversive Victorian New Woman, thus threading together the socially marginalised figures of the racial- and gender- other in a transgressive space and linking it to the animalistic—a strategic intermeshing that allows for an implicit questioning of the sociopolitical hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality.

On one level, as I will briefly indicate, the conceptual linking of the animalistic and the colonial, connected by their shared experience of disempowerment at the hands of the Western 'human', allows these novels to stage a reversal of these politico-cultural hierarchies when the colonial animals attack and overpower the Western heartland (British women and men).

Thus, as will be implicit in examples that I will study from the texts, the animals associated with or embodied by the colonial idols symbolically vanquish the imperial heartland, at the very least by flooding it with sheer numbers to terrify the English. In this way, the colonial animalistic figures, embodied by the idols in these novels, summarily dismantle the (western)human/(colonial)less-than-human hierarchy through their untameable excess. This disrupts Western peace, security, and prosperity in the body of the novel and displaces the West from normative definitions of the 'human'—definitions that the Gothic use of non-human and abhuman figures (such as vampires, ghosts, monsters) is designed to challenge in the first place and that the idols effectively challenge in these novels (Smith and Hughes 2003, p. 2).[1]

Yet on another level, and this forms the heart of my chapter, I suggest that it is in the overlap of the fears of the colonial animal and the fears surrounding the woman, more specifically the iconically rebellious New Woman, that the threat of the animal acquires its most intense pitch, viscerally threatening the hierarchies of white middle-class patriarchy. I outline how the collaborative transgressive space generated between the marginalised figures of the animal and the woman—both victims of the exclusionary mechanism—functions pivotally in this overthrow.

All three of these Imperial Gothic novels portray an encounter between British culture and animalistic idols (or humans-turned-idols in the case of Benjamin Batters in *The Joss*) imported from the colonial realm stretching over Egypt, China, and India, and significant parts of the action are staged in the colonies (except in the case of *The Goddess*

which only recounts India through narration). Looking at the genre of the Gothic of which these three novels serve as exemplars, Minna Vuohelainen notes that Marsh was 'a significant agent, not simply an imitator, within the fin-de-siècle Gothic revival' (2015, p. 4). His 'peak Gothic period … lasting from 1890 to 1902', during which he composed these novels, coincided with the 'golden age' of this genre (p. 7). These three novels epitomise the late Victorian and Edwardian Imperial Gothic—a genre that stages the central dramatic encounter between the West and the colonial occult where, according to Patrick Brantlinger, the 'destructive magic of the Orient takes its revenge' (2013, p. 230). This genre, as Rebecca Stott explains, was 'peculiar to the late nineteenth century', and derives from a failure of confidence in the 'perceived security of empire, [and] the weakening of Britain's imperial hegemony' (1992, p. 5). Thus, one of its main themes is the 'fear of the invasion of civilisation by the forces of barbarism or demonism' (Stott, p. 5).

With respect to Marsh's novels, it is the threat of barbaric *animalism* that I will examine, discussing how these works stage the encounter with the eastern occult by installing at the very heart of their narratives a colonial idol—an idol that is then frightfully associated with the animalistic to build an atmosphere of sociopolitical mayhem. This feeds off the larger cultural anxiety of the post-Darwinian era, the fears of scientific/biological degeneration, and the sociopolitical translation of these fears that identified the racial-, gender-, or class-other with the animalistic. Later in my essay, I show the ways in which the animalistic is discursively associated, in the late nineteenth-century cultural narratives and in the novels under study, with women and with colonial native peoples. By presenting this nexus of the colonial and the animalistic in these Imperial Gothic works, Marsh displaces the West from its own normative definitions of the 'human' (that are constructed in opposition to the 'animal')—displaying, as Vuohelainen observes, 'a significant degree of ideological ambivalence towards hegemonic culture and dominant modes of identity construction' (p. 12). Departing from and developing these analyses, I will discuss how what is even more interesting and significant is that the novels portray the New Woman in relation to the colonial animalistic and show this woman culling her most radical energies as a direct result of her near-intimate encounter with these animalistic beings—an encounter that then becomes the kernel for the dismantling of social conservatism.

Encounter and Complicity: The Animal and the New Woman

The New Woman was, as Sally Ledger explains, 'very much a fin-de-siècle phenomenon', being as she was a 'part of that concatenation of cultural novelties [like] … new socialism, the new imperialism, the new fiction and the new journalism [which] manifested itself in the 1880s and 1890s' (1997, p. 1). According to Ledger, this figure had a multiple identity, 'a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet', but she was 'also often a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth-century women's movement' (p. 1). Likewise, Margaret Beetham and Ann Heilmann claim that New Women were both 'subjects as well as the objects of debate in the press' which ultimately made it possible for the figure to be the centre of a challenge to 'traditional discourses on femininity, masculinity, sex, marriage and the family' (2016, p. 4). Significantly, this figure 'challenge[d] … accepted views of femininity and female sexuality' (Beetham and Heilmann 2016, p. 1), was associated with '[c]ultural anxieties about the threat of feminism and the impending masculinization of women' (p. 4), and across different countries essentially emphasised 'the demand that women control their own sexuality and their own bodies' (p. 2).

In the nineteenth-century western imagination, a supposed natural affinity was seen to exist between the woman, in particular the 'deviant' New Woman, and the animal/animalistic. Bram Dijkstra demonstrates how late nineteenth-century paintings portrayed the naturalised connection between degeneration and women, by painting them as animal-like and frequently in their naked form (1986, p. 275). Similarly, Jazmina Cininas writes that the fin-de-siècle 'saw a flourishing of fair-haired, light-eyed and exotically-accented lady lycanthropes' or female werewolves who embodied the paranoia surrounding the Suffrage movement and the subversive New Woman (2017, p. 37). Stott also suggests this topical connection between the British New Woman and the animal when she studies the close relationship between the *femme fatale* and the animalistic. The New Woman and the *femme fatale*, as Scott explains, are 'related', both being perceived as 'threatening' to the social fabric, and the New Woman being 'sometimes [seen even as] sexually threatening in her challenging of sexual norms' just like the *femme fatale* (Stott 1992, p. viii).[2] As such, it is significant that Stott understands the *femme fatale*

to represent an atavistic throwback. She notes that one of the preoccupations of late nineteenth-century science, 'particularly craniology and criminology', was to 'find evidence to support the woman-as-savage or woman-as-evolutionary-throwback hypothesis' in order to show that the missing atavistic link between 'Man' and his 'savage ancestors' was to be found in the animalism/barbarism 'of certain types of women', notably the *femme fatale* (Stott, p. 108).[3]

Animal Studies scholarship notes the organic connection that is sometimes shown as existing in literary narratives between animals and marginalised social constituencies, especially women. Harriet Ritvo observes that 'in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England' many human concerns were expressed through 'discourse about animals' because 'emotional and analytic associations tended to blur the distinction between at least some people and the rest of the animate creation' (1987, p. 3), that is to say certain 'weaker'/'barbaric' demographic constituencies were seen as more animalistic/animal-like. Along these same lines, Deborah Denenholz Morse observes how 'oppressed British people (children, women, the lower classes)' are often portrayed in nineteenth-century literary works as 'sympathetic, downtrodden animals' and are 'identified with the Empire's exploited, beleaguered subjects' (2007, p. 181).[4] Colonial novels, such as the ones written by Marsh and his contemporaries, often stage a similar naturalised proximity between the animal and the Englishwoman, and most pointedly between the colonial animal and the New Woman. If we look more closely at the animal-New Woman encounters in Marsh's Imperial Gothic novels, especially the ones undergone by Pollie Blyth in *The Joss* and Marjorie Lindon in *The Beetle*, we understand better the implications of the colonial animal's proximity to the New Woman.

Pollie Blyth and the Animal in *The Joss*: Overlaps of Intimacy and Fear

The Joss stages the disruption wrought by an Englishman, Benjamin Batters, who relocates to London with his (suggestively) mixed-race daughter Susie, along with a huge fortune from the Chinese island where he was mutilated by the colonial native people into a Joss (an oriental idol) and subsequently worshipped. We learn that he was mutilated and immersed in hot oil and his legs were amputated so that he rolled around

on wheels and inhabited the temple where the natives paid tribute to him as their supreme god. On his return to London, Batters, presumed to be dead, leaves his niece Mary Blyth (known as Pollie) his house on peculiar conditions of isolation—a house in which, unbeknownst to her, he is hiding. Mary and her friend, Emily Purvis, move into this house, only to suffer legions of rats (orchestrated by Batters) in the house until the ship's captain, Max Lander, and the lawyer, Frank Paine, ultimately rescue them, finding Batters dead in a room surrounded by hissing snakes.

In *The Joss*, Pollie is presented implicitly as the New Woman who contrasts starkly with Emily, a mere ingenue. Markedly different from the conventionally beautiful Emily, who is the subject of Frank Paine's romantic desire, Pollie is matter-of-fact and unimpressed by the promises of romance or mystery that appeal to Emily. Emily is not robust and Pollie says, 'Emily Purvis was hardly the kind of girl I should myself have chosen to be my sole companion in a tight place' (1901, p. 59). If we look more closely at Pollie in *The Joss*, we note a striking brashness in her character after she comes into contact with the rats. Emily, on the other hand, cannot face the colonial animalistic excess represented by the rats. When inside Batters's house with the teeming animals, Emily screams in the dark, 'stumbl[ing] blindfold among those writhing creatures'. She 'shudder[s]' to see the stocked candles gone and says:

> they had presented us with an object lesson, by way of showing us what they could do if they had a chance … I had heard of their fondness for fat … I thought of them picking the plumpness off my bones as I lay sleeping. (p. 100)

Opposed to this, Pollie's response is striking. Emily notes how changed a person Pollie had become, literally a *new* woman—'a new Pollie' with 'a sort of bravado' and 'callous[ness]'—especially when Pollie responds to the fear of being devoured by rats by saying, 'They'll find us tougher morsels than you think. If a rat once has a taste of me he won't want another' (pp. 99, 100). This machismo emblematises her as the powerful and atypical New Woman of indomitable strength, willing to confront the colonial animal unflinchingly.

Through the characterisation of Pollie, the New Woman is shown to bear a collaborative and intimate relationship with colonial animals, drawing on their forces of subversive alterity. A nearly erotic intimacy of the New Woman and the colonial animal is evident early in *The Joss*.

Pollie, trying to figure out what lay inside the scrap of paper a man on the street thrust into her hands (a man among many who follow Benjamin Batters and Susie from the Chinese island), feels certain that 'something was inside, something queer shaped and hard', something that soon moves inside causing the paper to tear open to reveal something that she could not see in the dark (p. 23). This phallic image is then followed by a voyeuristic episode. She notes that the thing inside the scrap of paper was a 'little painted thing, tricked out in ridiculously contrasting shades of green, and pink, and yellow', and further guesses that it was, 'a tiny representation of some preposterous heathen god [the Joss], with beads for eyes' (p. 28). Pollie notices that the object moved but '[w]hat it was [she] … could not even guess' (p. 24). It seemed to have '[t]wo specks of light, which looked like eyes', and appeared to be a 'frog' (pp. 24, 25). The frog-like idol subjects her to 'shivering' with 'twitching spasms' as if she had 'been suddenly smitten with some hideous disease' (p. 27). This arguably erotic frenzy is accompanied by the voyeuristic gaze of the animalistic idol when Pollie feels 'two bright spots of light … watching' her as she undresses, 'slip[ing] off [her] bodice, and the rest of [her] things' (p. 24). Besides the implicit prurience of the frog-like creature's gaze and the sexual surrender of the undressing, there is an erotic build-up soon after between Pollie and Lucy, her dorm-mate. Pollie admits, 'Had I not been afraid, I would have asked Lucy to let me get into bed with her' (p. 24). And soon after, harassed and bullied by Miss Ashton, the dorm in-charge, she feels Lucy close to her:

> It was Lucy. I put out my hand. She was leaning over me.
> 'Kiss me,' I muttered.
> She kissed me. It did me good. I held her, for a moment, to me. It comforted me to feel her face against mine. (p. 27)

The animalistic idol, in its proximity to the New Woman, sets up a general nexus of transgressive sexuality, this time expressed through the suggestive same-sex love between Pollie and Lucy. Thus, Pollie is able to challenge effectively conservative heterosexuality here just as she is also able to debunk stereotypical constructions of the disempowered female by braving the deluge of predatory rats in Batters's house with New Woman-like command, courage, and belligerence. Drawing from proximity either with animals that are regulated by colonial force, such as the

rats commanded by Batters, or with animalistic idols themselves, like the frog-like stone wrapped in paper, the New Woman gathers the strength to overturn stabilising frameworks of normative gender and sexuality.

Marjorie Lindon and the Animal in *The Beetle*: Rebelling Against Normativity

Located in contemporary British-Egyptian imperial politics,[5] *The Beetle* tells the tale of Britain's invasion by a shape-shifting, gender-ambiguous invader, one that Roger Luckhurst calls a 'liminal man-woman-goddess-beetle-Thing'—a priestess of the Egyptian goddess Isis that seeks vengeance from her former captive, Paul Lessingham, a member of the House of Commons and a rising political figure (2000, p. 160). In an episode from the past, we learn that Paul was captured and sexually violated in Egypt in the beetle-emblazoned temple of Isis by her priestess. Paul attempts to kill the woman, but she transforms into a beetle and escapes. He returns to England, and in the present-day narrative, the hybrid colonial priestess-idol-insect figure follows him, seeking revenge. The Beetle hypnotises the homeless and destitute Robert Holt in order to use him as a pawn in its mission of vengeance against Paul. Ultimately, however, the Beetle is (seemingly) overcome by the combined efforts of the British protagonists, including Paul, his fiancée Marjorie Lindon, Marjorie's friend Sydney Atherton, and the private detective, Augustus Champnell.

Marjorie's involvement with the Beetle and the men in the novel has been a subject of increasing interest among Imperial Gothic scholars in recent years. Patricia Murphy examines the portrayal of Marjorie as a potential New Woman in her discussion of *The Beetle* as the most powerful fictional 'late-century assault' on the figure of the New Woman (2016, p. 245). Noting Marjorie's portrayal as a New Woman, Julian Wolfreys explains that Marjorie is not directly portrayed as dangerous, yet both Sydney Atherton and Marjorie's father 'perceive her as wilful, recalcitrant, and therefore … destabilizing' (2004, pp. 30–31). Victoria Margree likewise discusses Marjorie as a New Woman—a late nineteenth-century 'feminist' claiming political and sexual rights for women', an equivalence that is established fairly early in the text (2007, p. 72). Indeed, explicit instances of Marjorie's rebellious stance as the educated and assertive New Woman abound. We learn about her adamant refusal

to concede to her father's choice of husband for her from what Lindon recounts of her response to Sydney. Lindon infuriatedly recalls that when he had tried to forbid Marjorie from seeing Paul, his daughter had responded by saying that 'times have changed', that parents could no longer behave like 'Russian autocrats', and that she did not intend to pay heed to his 'unreasonable prejudices' (Marsh 1897/2004, pp. 160–61). Marjorie openly avows libertarian political opinions in opposition to her father's Tory views and criticises the inability of 'good high dried old Tory' people like her father to 'like a really clever person' like Paul (pp. 163–64). She also disapproves of romantic overtures that are directed towards her despite her declared refusal of the relationship. Thus, in response to Sydney's proposals, Marjorie says in her quietly assertive manner: 'As for his being in love with me; it is ridiculous. He is as much in love with the moon … He makes an excellent brother' (pp. 195–96).

Much like Pollie Blyth in *The Joss*, it is from the constellation of energies infused by her encounter with the colonial animal that Marjorie acquires her boldness and proclivity to rebel. As opposed to the abject surrender of the men in the face of the animalistic form of the beetle, Marjorie triumphs over her deep fears and exhibits a gradual confidence in its presence. Like Robert and Paul, Marjorie is described as being terrified of the beetle on her very first encounter with it. On this occasion she confesses that for her the 'flying beetle' was 'the horror of horrors' (Marsh 1897/2004, p. 205) and that the 'emotion of horror' she feels at this will be 'with [her] to the end of [her] life' (p. 207). However, the New Woman prototype emerges from this episode with redoubled courage and defiance. When Marjorie waits in the house where they suspect the colonial intruder hides, she sees a carpet on which are repeated 'representations of some peculiar kind of beetle … over, and over, and over' that looked like they 'could be alive' (p. 229). She feels that this was 'the most uncomfortable carpet [she] had ever seen' and there comes upon her 'a revulsion of feeling' at the sight of what was for her the 'unspeakable insect' (p. 229). However, she boldly reproves herself and demonstrates her newly acquired courage by saying: 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Marjorie Lindon, to even think such nonsense. Are you all nerves and morbid imaginings, — you who have prided yourself on being so strong-minded!' (pp. 229–30).

Just as in *The Joss*, *The Beetle* is crucial for the way its narrative frames a near-sexual intimacy between the New Woman and the colonial

animal. Patricia Murphy interprets the insect figure as a double for a New Woman figure that torments Robert, Paul, and even Marjorie. Murphy sees Marjorie as fearfully trying to escape from the possibility of being turned into a New Woman herself through contact with the colonial insect, while also being drawn to this possibility. She explains that Marjorie's tremendous fear of the creature 'can be read as an underlying fear of the monstrous double she could herself become: a New Woman thoroughly steeped in the scandalous practices and outlandish beliefs so virulently denounced by detractors' (Murphy 2016, p. 262). According to Murphy, the episode could suggest 'a quasi-epical struggle to resist a comprehensive indoctrination into and acceptance of a fanatical New Woman's way of life' (p. 262). And yet, as Murphy observes, it could also indicate Marjorie's welcoming of the prospect given that '[u]nlike Robert or Paul, who were involuntarily undressed by the Beetle', Marjorie 'herself proceeds to remove her clothes, as if inherently predisposed to sexualized New Woman tendencies' (p. 262).[6] It is possible, however, that Murphy emphasises the monstrosity of the Beetle without fully considering the woman-insect connection sufficiently for its implications. In view of the intense woman-insect dyad in *The Beetle*, Pandora Syperek discusses in detail how in various 'aspects of [nineteenth-century] popular culture the encroachment of the New Woman was linked to the insect', in a way that 'insects and entomological knowledge' became associated with 'newsreading, politically aware women' and the insects' 'more sinister qualities' were also connected to features of 'contemporary femininity' (2018, pp. 171, 172).[7] Elizabeth Effinger also assigns this relationship political import when she notes that the Beetle emerges as 'the face of political woman' (2017, p. 262). In many ways, she explains, the Beetle 'functions as the political Other, representing the threatening alterity of the insect or woman to the polis' and embodying therefore the vengeance exacted by the politically marginalised (2017, p. 265).

But what emerges as most intriguing in *The Beetle* is the crucial near-sexual connection, not just between the insect and the woman but specifically between the colonial animal and the New Woman. Midway through the novel, Marjorie describes getting into bed with the colonial insect, described as part-Beetle, part-spider.[8] As she relates to Sydney the psychological and physical invasion by the Beetle that she is subjected to, Marjorie confesses that as soon as she had 'undressed' the night before and had gotten into bed she realised that '[s]ome kind of—beetle' was

in the room which soon came 'lower and lower, nearer and nearer' (1897/2004, p. 166). As she hid by covering herself, she 'felt it [the Beetle] bumping against the coverlet' (p. 166). And then in hushed tones she says to Sydney, drawing close to him as if to confide in him about a manifestly horrifying but implicitly titillating detail: 'And Sydney! … It followed me … It got into the bed … I heard it crawl along the sheets, till it found a way between them, and then it crawled towards me. And I felt it—against my face' (pp. 166–67). This physical intimacy between the woman and the insect, rife with suggestions of penetrative sexuality (represented in the phrase 'a way between them'), is in fact indicative of a highly formidable, albeit menacing and monstrous, power that builds up in this domestic copulation of the two rebellious and marginalised entities—the colonial animal and the New Woman (p. 167). This vortex of collaborative power in Marsh's novels, however perilously erotic, sexually subversive, or allegedly 'evil', ultimately serves to destabilise the existing sociopolitical hierarchies of gender and race causing the New Women to emerge in assertive and scary new forms.

During Marjorie's encounter with the Beetle in her boudoir, she tears off her dress which she had tailored for her fiancé's important parliamentary speech that evening as 'a souvenir of a memorable night' (p. 206). Ridding herself of this outfit that symbolised her love for Paul, she acts as 'relentless executioner' of her clothes, shedding her 'dainty garments' till she is stark naked (p. 206). This undressing, both sexual and implicitly rebellious, connects with subsequent actions in which Marjorie overturns conservative social assumptions about women's abilities and roles. Margree explains how 'nineteenth-century culture saw the New Woman as desiring masculinity' (2007, p. 74)[9] and then observes that '[w]hat is primarily destabilising about Marjorie has to do' with her New Woman-like 'contestation of the mid-Victorian "angel of the house" ideology' and the gender delimitations that it prescribed for women (p. 72). This is precisely the light in which Marjorie, the New Woman, is portrayed. When the stereotypically masculine Sydney Atherton sets out to investigate and capture the animalistic colonial invader with the help of Robert Holt, it is Marjorie who insists on joining them in no uncertain terms. She declares to the reader, 'I let him [Sydney] know that this was not a matter in which I intended to be trifled with' (1897/2004, p. 213). She says to Sydney, overturning his masculine protector-instincts, 'My duty is clear, and nothing you can say will turn me from it' (p. 215). Furthermore, while the men engage on a 'wild goose chase' (p. 231), ultimately failing

to find the Beetle, it is Marjorie who uncovers the animalistic colonial creature—'the most awful, hideous, wicked-looking face' from under a 'heap of rugs' while waiting for the men inside the house where Holt had first met this intruder (p. 231). Finally, her earlier undressing, and its implied unsexing, culminates when this colonial invader whom she locates under the rugs takes control of her and kidnaps her, dressing her as a man and cutting her long hair, so that she appears to be 'a young man costumed like a tramp' (p. 319). Margree refers to the conservative narrative surrounding the New Woman phenomena that imagined this type of woman as being desirous of masculinity and therefore dressing subversively 'mannish', creating a cultural prototype of subversive womanhood that was terrifying to the social and the male imaginary (2007, p. 73). Thus, even though Margree sees the redressing as a punitive measure for the woman's subversive desire, in a very significant way, Marjorie's sartorial state that is in its immediate context incapacitating, symbolically crowns her gender emancipation from the state of demure femininity by draping her in masculine garb.

This idea of animalistic energies facilitating a transition into the gender-subversive New Woman—one who is no longer trapped in limiting female docility but characterised by masculine agency and aggression—can also be seen in *The Goddess*. In *The Joss*, Pollie emerges with a frightening yet spectacular force when faced by the threat of the devouring rats, dismantling notions of tame femininity. In *The Goddess*, this surfaces most pronouncedly in the way the animalistic goddess-idol engages not just in aggressive but also figuratively *masculine* sexual behaviour while skewering her victims. Thus, towards the end of the novel, Ferguson recounts how, when Edwin surrenders himself to the idol, 'the figure rose to its feet, and in an instant was alive', how '[f]rom every part of its frame gleaming blades had sprung' including 'its eyes, mouth, and nostrils', and how '[i]t kept jerking its head backwards and forwards' till the 'writhing, gibbering puppet held him [Edwin] skewered in a dozen places' (Marsh 1900, pp. 291–92). And it was only after 'its lust for blood was glutted, [that] it rolled over, lethargically, upon its side', and 'became again inanimate' allowing for the mutilated and lacerated body of Edwin to be released (pp. 291–93). Throbbing with phallic imagery, hints of masculine penile sexuality, and penetrative violence, much like the woman-on-man rape of the Englishmen by the New Woman-insect hybrid in *The Beetle*,[10] the brutal carnage enacted by the goddess-idol stages the terrifying excess—an excess overtly villainous but implicitly

empowering—that germinates in the overlap between the colonial animalistic and the New Woman. Thus, frighteningly powerful and productive, the space of the colonial animalistic embodied by the eldritch and uncontainable animal-idol stages a moment of quiet subversion in these Imperial Gothic novels, destabilising the normative triumph of the human over the animal, the man over the submissive woman, and the coloniser over the colonised. Emblematic of the disenfranchised and marginalised, the New Woman and the colonial animal combine to stage a reversal of sociopolitical hierarchies in a world now aglow with such transformative potential that exceeds the limits of western comprehension.

Notes

1. The western desire for peace and stability was only an imaginary ideal for the greater part of the nineteenth century, disrupted as it was with repeated colonial rebellions and insurgencies. As I note elsewhere, the surfacing of the insurgent Indian idols in novels such as these acquires meaning in the context of this long British-Indian colonial trajectory across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the 1857 War of Independence, the spate of devastating Indian famines that followed in the 1860s and 1870s, the Bubonic Plague of Bombay and the Indian Famine (1897–1901), and the rise of Indian political opposition alongside the 1880s–1890s insurgent Fenian bombings in Britain (Bhattacharjee 2018, p. 84).
2. Stott explains that the New Woman, unlike the *femme fatale*, is not mythical, does not depend on a male character for her effect in literature, and does not carry the sexual fatalism of the latter. But both figures were 'familiar type[s] of turn-of-the-century British writing' and were perceived as deeply socially 'threatening', significantly also towards sexual norms (Stott 1992, p. viii).
3. Stott observes that this manifests in the nineteenth-century display of Hottentot women in Britain or in Rider Haggard's portrayal of 'monkey-women' in his novels—Gagool in *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), Hendrika in *Allan's Wife* (1889), and Ayesha in *She* (1886)—that is, figures of women who are portrayed as ape-like. Patricia Murphy also refers to the 'devolutionary' or degenerative transformation of Ayesha in *She* into a 'wizened primate' (p. 9), explaining how the Victorian Gothic combined anxieties surrounding degeneration and the New Woman.
4. Morse explains that in several other mid-Victorian to high-Victorian works, the 'imperialist encounter between English male aggressor and

colonized people is figured in animal metaphor'. She explains that '[t]he Other'—whether 'a subject people of the Empire in its dominions or at home in England' is represented often 'as a savage brute that needs taming' though many Victorian texts 'ultimately expose the imperialist himself as the unruly beast' (Morse 2007, p. 181).

5. Ailise Bulfin notes that Marsh's *The Beetle* can be 'placed within a popular subgenre of Egyptian-themed fin-de-siècle Gothic fiction' that developed 'partially in response to contentious Anglo-Egyptian political relations' and explains that the novel was closely connected to the contemporary Anglo-Egyptian and Sudanese conflict (2018, p. 127).
6. The priestess-idol-insect hybrid makes Robert undress and watches his 'white skin' voyeuristically (Marsh 1897/2004, p. 55). We learn that Paul's body had undergone a similarly forced undressing followed by sexual violation in Egypt under the machinations of the Isis-priestess (pp. 244–45).
7. Syperek draws on the work of Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz to discuss the cultural construction of the 'women-insects nexus' that connects the abject insect to the monstrous and devouring woman (the *femme fatale*) who is understood to be a castrating force that inspires masculine fear (2018, p. 170).
8. Cannon Schmitt points to what he calls 'beetlemania' in the work of two Victorian natural historians, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, asserting that writing in the late nineteenth century, they were driven by 'an affective epistemology' in their study of beetles—i.e. 'a way of knowing beetles, and by extension the natural world in its entirety, that exceeds the bounds of the positivistic and classificatory' (2007, p. 37). Marsh's novel takes the beetle beyond the classificatory as well and infuses it with affective power that is beyond the reach of epistemological experience. Hence, the paranoid bafflement in the face of the animal.

   Further, the figuration of this animal as part-spider, such as when Holt first encounters the creature and says that it seemed like 'some gigantic spider' (Marsh 1897/2004, p. 51), is also significant because the spider had become a trope for imperial anxieties about control in the late nineteenth century (McKechnie 2012).

   Also significant in this context of vibrant and militant insects is Syperek's recent work on *The Beetle* where she explains the transformation in entomological approaches to insects that was to be witnessed in the late nineteenth century. Parallel to the 'mysterious shapeshifting beetle-human hybrid' of the novel is the display of insects in the Natural History Museum's Insect Gallery in all their 'metamorphic forms'—'preserved eggs, larvae, pupae, and mature insects' as well as 'models, illustrations, and didactic texts'. Remarkably different however is this open display

from 'their static and discrete pinned-down predecessors in entomological drawers'—something that indicates 'the increasing formidability of insects in popular science as in popular literature' (Syperek 2018, p. 163). This manifests in the perilous liveliness of the insect figuration in *The Beetle*.

9. Margree states that '[a]s the New Woman became a figure of cultural recognisability and media currency, both celebrated and despised, detractors of the movement for women's rights repeatedly characterised her as actually desiring masculinity' (2007, p. 72).
10. Syperek notes how *The Beetle* portrays what is very unusual for Late Victorian Gothic, a 'feminine monster' engaging in 'female-on-male rape suggested at several points in the story', such as in the 'implied rape of Holt and Lessingham' when they are forced into a state of undress or in their 'psychic penetration' when they are hypnotised (2018, p. 174).

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