

## **‘Two kinds of romance’: generic hybridity and epistemological uncertainty in contemporary paranormal romance**

Horace Walpole inaugurates the Gothic novel with, as he says in the Preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, an intention ‘to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern’—or what we now call the Romance proper and the novel—so that ‘imagination and improbability’ are rendered with verisimilitude.<sup>1</sup>

But contemporary Gothic has not only been further novelised, sometimes through a greater attention to characterisation, and with the marvellous appearing amidst quotidian settings, it has also been ‘romanced’ in new ways. Walpole aimed to blend the Romance and the novel; it might be more accurate to talk of one genre modulating the other, after Alastair Fowler.<sup>2</sup> Latter-day Gothic involves further novelisation with its contemporary settings and more successfully achieved formal realism, in Ian Watt’s terms, as the ‘full and authentic report of human experience’, including fuller characterisation.<sup>3</sup> Very recently, an additional modulation has taken place: of Gothic by ‘romance’ in its present-day sense of fictions centred on romantic love. A new subgenre has emerged, one adumbrated by Fred Botting’s notion of ‘Gothic Romanced’.<sup>4</sup>

This form has many of the trappings of Gothic, but the plot is subordinated to the movement towards amatory consummation of romantic fiction; the setting tends to be contemporary; it seems to assume a female readership; and, crucially, it centres on love affairs between humans and supernatural creatures. It’s been given various

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<sup>1</sup> Horace Walpole, Preface to the second edition, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. and intr. by W.S. Lewis (1764; 2nd edn 1765; Oxford: Oxford University Press, World’s Classics, 1982), pp. 7-12 (p. 7). For the Romance genre, see Gillian Beer, *The Romance*, *The Critical Idiom*, 10 (London and New York: Methuen, 1970); Barbara Fuchs, *Romance*, *The New Critical Idiom* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990); Fredric Jameson, ‘Magical Narratives: On the Dialectical Use of Genre Criticism’, in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 103-50. For the emergence of the novel and its relationship to Romance, see J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1990), though the literature is vast. For Romance, romantic fiction, and women readers, see Rosalind Coward, *female Desire: Women’s Sexuality Today* (London: Paladin, 1984); Jean Radford, ed., *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); Terry Lovell, *Consuming Fiction*, *Questions for Feminism* (London: Verso, 1987); Laurie Langbauer, *Women and Romance: The Consolations of Gender in the English Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (London: Blackwell, 1994); again, there is a huge body of work in this area.

<sup>2</sup> See *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). In looking at the transformations of genre, I have also found the following of use: Tzvetan Todorov, ‘The Origin of Genres’, in *Genres in Discourse*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Hans Robert Jauss, ‘Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature’, in *Toward an Aesthetic Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti, intr. by Paul de Man, *Theory and History of Literature*, 2 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 76-109; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, *Marxist Introductions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 173-91; Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*, *Literature, Culture, Theory*, 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic Romanced: Consumption, Gender and Technology in Contemporary Fictions* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).

generic labels—dark romance, dark fantasy, paranormal romance. I have settled on the use of ‘gothic romance’ as being the most general and the one that most clearly indicates its generic hybridity.<sup>5</sup> I’ll also be showing that this genre, too, is subject to further transformations by and admixtures of other genres.

Because the categories I’m using have been created by marketing departments and so on, the question is raised how much, as theorists, we can take them for granted. In some ways, since genre works by fulfilling and revising expectations, it might actually be valid to accept them, provisionally at least; the labelling and associated packaging do themselves arouse generic expectations.<sup>6</sup>

Gothic romances fulfil Walpole’s manifesto rather well. They take the folkloric or mythic structures that constitute romance and flesh them out with the stuff of the novel—a depth of characterisation and particularity unimaginable in the originals; circumstantial detail (notably that of the modern world in all its familiarity); and a splash of ‘romance’, as in the sharp psychological delineation of a love affair—again, absent from Arthurian romance, for instance, but perfected in, say, the novels of Austen or the Brontës. But this latter is also, of course, the domain of romantic fiction.

Genres can be associated with epistemological perspectives, with ways of knowing, or questioning, the world. So what happens to these perspectives when contrasting genres interact? In a letter to Mme du Defand, Walpole sets ‘imagination; visions and passions’ against ‘rules, critics, and philosophers’ and the ‘*cold reason*’ of the age (p. x). Thus, from its inception, Gothic appears as a reaction to Enlightenment rationalism (reclaiming contemporaneous senses of ‘Gothic’ as barbarous). Yet in the Preface to the first edition, he writes from the perspective of one who sees such fictions as tools of an ‘artful priest’ who wants to subvert the ‘reformers’ and ‘innovators’ of Enlightenment and restore ‘the empire of superstition’ (3). Many eighteenth-century thinkers made similar claims: in the sober ethnographical accounts of the phenomena of vampire infestations in Eastern Europe early in the eighteenth century, priests were accused of manipulating the common people through superstition. These accounts later become incorporated into the Gothic novels that Walpole had spawned, and seeded the vampire narratives form which Gothic Romance eventually emerged. For Walpole, the Gothic manuscript he claims to have uncovered is an instrument of oppression by the priesthood which can now be recuperated, once taken out of its historical context, for non-utilitarian, aesthetic purposes.<sup>7</sup> Thus Walpole performs a subtle kind of historicism here. Rather than simply affiliating to a barbarous past, he simultaneously exposes Romance as an ideological instrument in its day, but allows

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<sup>5</sup> John Cawalti has used the term in a slightly different, though relevant, sense; John G. Cawalti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Victoria Nelson is one of the few who have recognised this subgenre of ‘paranormal romance’ as such, but she makes very sweeping claims, predominantly that they represent a craving for a new religiosity in place of that suppressed by the Enlightenment. There’s something in this, but we need, first, to be far more particularised, and recognise precisely what counter-Enlightenment values are being embraced—it’s not always religiosity—and, second, be far more dialectical and observe how different texts complicate this by introducing contesting positions. In all, Nelson misses the *variety* of responses explored in Gothic Romance; I want to demonstrate at least some of these. (Victoria Nelson, *Gothicka: vampire Heroes, Human Gods, and the New Supernatural* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2012); paranormal romance, pp. 100, 106-10, 127; romance subgenres p. 107 n.34, n.37; sympathetic vampire, pp. 124-47.

<sup>7</sup> See Barbara Fuchs, *Romance, The New Critical Idiom* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), pp. 120-1.

its aesthetic properties to be appropriated by the reader of the present day.<sup>8</sup> So the Gothic novel's resistance to Enlightenment is qualified right at its inception. The initial generic hybridity which Walpole signals is directly related to ambivalence over Enlightenment, and this instability characterises the Gothic's successors to this day.

In Walpole's commentaries, then, we already see the conjunction both of diverse genres and of conflicting world-views. I want to observe this in contemporary texts with contemporary perspectives and, following one of this conference's themes, see how these perspectives may be countercultural or otherwise. I will look at two examples of the genre to show how, in each, the interaction of other genres within them play out different epistemological concerns.

Alyxandra Harvey, *My Love Lies Bleeding*

My first example is Alyxandra Harvey's clever and sophisticated Young Adult novel, *My Love Lies Bleeding* (2010).<sup>9</sup> One of her heroines, Solange, lives in near isolation with her vampire family, but has a close friend, Lucy, who is attracted to one of Solange's seven brothers, Nicholas. Like many Young Adult paranormal romances (inspired, I think, by *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), this is touched by the coming-of-age genre: when the story begins, Solange will be transformed into a vampire on her sixteenth birthday in three days time.

Solange is unique; the only girl in a family of hereditary vampirism for nine hundred years. Her coming-of-age story has an explicitly folkloric aspect, announced here, but becoming blatant as the plot unfolds: 'And the closer I get to my sixteenth birthday, the more I attract the others to me. It's all very Snow White, except I don't call bluebirds and deer out of the woods—only bloodthirsty vampires who want to kidnap or kill me' (9-10).

So fairy tales are another genre that becomes involved and colours our expectations accordingly. The commingling of genres in these texts is not unconscious; many contemporary dark romances display a very self-aware intertextuality. Often, the same reference points recur—particularly Jane Austen and the Brontës. And here, Romantic poetry; Solange describes the process of transformation to a human vampire hunter who will (inevitably, according to the expectations raised by this genre) become her lover:

'We have the same symptoms as tuberculosis, especially in the eyes of the Romantic poets. Pale, tired, coughing up blood.'

'That's romantic?'

I had to smile. 'Romantic with a capital "R." You know, like Byron and Coleridge [. . .] One of my aunts took Byron as a lover.'

(161)

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<sup>8</sup> See also Walpole's quote, 'The dead have lost their power of deceiving—one can trust Catherine de Medici now'. And see Hans Robert Jauss...

<sup>9</sup> Alyxandra Harvey, *My Love Lies Bleeding*, The Drake Chronicles, 1 (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

Two different senses of 'romantic' are knowingly conjoined here, with perhaps a nod to Susan Sontag. Strangely, the consumptive Keats is not mentioned here, but the images of pale, death-haunted lovers resonate within the whole subgenre.

The sexual appeal of the male of romantic fiction is supplemented by an additional factor, which entwines romance story conventions with epistemological questions almost from the start. The attraction of Lucy's vampire brothers is not quite the supernatural glamour in other similar fictions:

The pheromones that vampires emit like a dangerous perfume keep humans enticed and befuddled with longing [. . .] They don't have an actual smell that can be described [. . .] It's more subliminal than that, with the power to hypnotize. Kind of like the way wild animals can smell each other in the forest, especially during mating season.<sup>10</sup>  
(9)

The notion of 'glamour' in fictional vampires, which is mysterious and non-naturalistic, does, of course, often facilitate the articulation of instinctual or animalistic passions, but the mention of 'pheromones' signals something distinctive, which I will draw out in my argument.

This new subgenre might be seen as postmodern for its generic hybridity and for a certain opposition to modernity; one aspect of these novels which is firmly *not* postmodern, however, is their concern with agency. They frequently tackle issues of free will and responsibility; this may be a pedagogical imperative in the case of Young Adult fictions, but it introduces extra complexity into the texts. And desire is a crucial area where autonomy comes under question.

Here, the ideas of Enlightenment agency become complicated. Agency here is challenged by a positivist worldview where free will is overridden by desire founded on pheromonal compulsion. The physiological determinism involved in this *is* one strand of the Enlightenment legacy, and contrasts with a postmodern dissolution of the subject. With Nicholas and Lucy, the conventional vampire glamour, made scientific with the apparatus of pheromones, becomes tangled up with the compulsive logic of desire here in a flirtatious stand-off familiar from romantic fiction:

'You're also trying to use your vampire mojo on me.'  
'It doesn't work on you.'  
'Remember that.' My voice was soft, like whipped cream, and at odds with my smug smirk.  
We didn't close our eyes, not even when our lips met. I tingled all the way down to my toes [. . .] I kind of wanted to nip into him like ice cream. When his tongue touched mine, my eyelids finally drifted shut. I gave myself to the moment, all but hurled into it. [. . .]  
It could totally become addictive.  
Just imagine if we actually *liked* each other. (52-53)

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<sup>10</sup> There's sexual ambivalence here as well as intertextual echoes of Anne Rice.

It's tantalisingly ambivalent here how much is willed and how much the lovers are carried away despite themselves, and whether glamour, or pheromones, or whatever are at work. Romantic fiction conventions themselves, by being placed in the supernatural context, can themselves raise these questions of knowing.

Lucy has moments of Sartrean bad faith, refusing to recognise her growing love for Nicholas and attempting to attribute her desire to those pheromones; like the love philtre in the Romance of *Tristan and Iseult*, this device confuses and raises questions about the interaction of responsibility and desire:

He was very close. I could feel the cool length of his body pressing against mine. His eyes were very pale, his teeth very sharp. If I was immune to his pheromones, then why did I find him so annoyingly attractive? (137)

In Solange, too, struggles over different epistemologies of desire are contested. To vampires, she is irresistible; males compulsively lust after her, wanting to breed with her since she is a rare female. Their lust is triggered by her unique smell, consisting of those powerful pheromones. Vampirism itself is explained with a hesitancy between paranormal and biological causality. 'It's not strictly scientific, nor is it strictly supernatural', Solange's uncle Geoffrey, a vampire scientist, tells Lucy (64).

Solange's desirability is determined by Darwinian concerns:

'And her special pheromone thing is a survival mechanism too, right? How everyone's obsessed with her?'  
 'Yes. It's a mating thing. Everyone is wondering if she'll be able to carry a vampire child to term.'  
 'Gross.'  
 'Study your Darwin, my girl.' (66)

Darwin and the supernatural meet in *Dracula*, of course, where theories of race and degeneration appear alongside folkloric traditions, yet here the collision appears in a distinctly twenty-first-century context. Thus there is a struggle between a positivist appropriation of genetics to ossify women's roles as passive love object and child bearer, and a humanist representation of a woman as autonomous subject, desired for her human individuality, and freely desiring in turn. Solange herself resents being thought of as a 'vampire broodmare, meant to give birth to lots of little royal vampire babies' (128-9). All this recalls accounts of *human* behaviour—particularly sexual attraction—by contemporary evolutionary psychologists and sociobiologists. Yet, alongside these determinist viewpoints, there is a sense of agency asserted too, and the mixture of genres—echoes of science fiction in conjunction with a novelistic depiction of interiority—echoes the perplexity over agency in a supposedly postmodern age.

Intertextual allusions abound and there is, in Gérard Genette's terminology, a hypertextual transformation, where a prior text is being refashioned.<sup>11</sup> It begins to

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<sup>11</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, Stages, 8 (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

dawn on the reader that Solange, sheltered in isolation in the forest with her seven brothers, is re-enacting a fairy tale, and so another genre is knowingly signalled. By the time we get to the wicked vampire Queen, in her hall of mirrors, with the hunter's gift of a deer's heart, supposedly that of Solange, and then Solange herself helpless in a glass coffin, pecked at by ravens (232-33), it's clear that the Grimms' *Snow White* is one of the hypotexts of *My Love Lies Bleeding*.

This knowing intertextuality and abandoned plundering of genres is what has come to be characterised as 'postmodern', a style deeply complicit with anti-Enlightenment underminings of rationalism and human agency. Yet Harvey's novel is less clear-cut. The oscillation between modes and genres allows a scepticism towards the positivist strand of Enlightenment to emerge, but in a way that reasserts subjectivity rather than permitting the poststructuralist dissolution of the subject.

### Julie Kagawa, *The Iron King*

It's fair to say that the Gothic romance began with love affairs between tamed, sympathetic vampires and humans (as in *My Love Lies Bleeding*). Anne Rice, Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, and Joss Whedon's Buffy and Angel are important precursors. But, since then, all kinds of supernatural species have been found in the arms and beds of humankind. The different kinds of paranormal lover—whether, vampire, faery, werewolf, or angel—stand in for different epistemological stances as much as do different modulations of genre, and themselves can be said to identify sub-subgenres, depending on which creature dominates the text. Thus there are fairy dark romances and angel ones, each with their own conventions and expectations, though there is much intermingling and interbreeding here, too. So werewolves are used to explore our instinctual aspects, vampires our concern with isolation or mortality, and so on, though one shouldn't be too schematic about this

Julie Kagawa's darkly attractive, dangerous fairies in her Young Adult novel, *The Iron King* (2010), facilitate some clever play with genre and ways of knowing.<sup>12</sup> It is another coming-of-age story: when it begins, her heroine, Meghan, will be sixteen 'in less than twenty-four hours':

Sweet sixteen. It has a magical ring to it. Sixteen is supposed to be the age when girls become princesses and fall in love and go to dances and proms and such. Countless stories, songs, and poems have been written about this wonderful age, when a girl finds true love and the stars shine for her and the handsome prince carries her off into the sunset. (10)

—and the genres of fairy tale and romance are demystified through novelistic realism and according to mid-twentieth-century feminist critique. Meghan is a lonely outsider, mocked at school, 'the backward hick girl nobody wanted to invite' (16), whose father had mysteriously disappeared and who is almost invisible to her stepfather.

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<sup>12</sup> Julie Kagawa, *The Iron King*, *The Iron Fey*, 1 (Richmond: MIRA Books, 2011).

This is a rural backwater and Meghan's stepfather is suspicious of the technology that Meghan craves: video games 'are the devil's tools, turning kids into delinquents and serial killers' (13); she has to make do without a cell phone and laptop, rely on dial-up access to the Internet. Meghan's urge to leave sounds like many an anguished cry of teen revolt: 'I swear, when I get a license and a car, I am never coming back to this place' (14). But she has a young stepbrother, Ethan, to whom she is devoted. It is his kidnapping and substitution by a malignant changeling that initiates her romance quest to rescue him and discover her true identity.

Meghan, despite her isolation, does have a supportive best male friend (there is always one), Robbie, who calls her 'princess'. Mirroring the suspicions of her stepfather, Robbie's parents don't have a phone or computer: 'Talk about living in the Dark Ages . . . this whole "technology is evil" thing was getting really old" (28-9). So the mediaevalism of Romance is hinted at, but the very modernity of the rejection of the modern is slyly suggested; we are led to believe that Robbie's parents have a countercultural objection to technology, and that this 1960s reaction has itself succumbed to the vagaries of progress. In fact, this is something of a red herring as Robbie's parents don't exist. But this shadow of a critique of technology is the central concern of the book, as I will show, and Kagawa's treatment of it is very nuanced.

Here, the ruling creature is the faery.<sup>13</sup> Faeries in paranormal romance have the viciousness, the unpredictability, and the predatory nature of vampires, together with their sex appeal. But they are associated not with death—rather with intensified life, life out of human control, and thus, in general, nature. In the twenty-first century this inevitably evokes the values and concerns of environmentalism, though the scary nature of faeries means that the incorporation of these values is not uncritical. Kagawa neatly draws on the folkloric motif of faery aversion to iron, which represents a contemporary questioning of modernity in many dark faery books.<sup>14</sup> Kagawa conjures up the Iron Fey, whose monarch is the Iron King of the title, and who threatens not just the traditional power of the Summer and Winter Fey, but the whole land of faery through an ecocatastrophe that is manifested through some intriguing generic modulations.

In *The Iron King* the Romance quest narrative is contiguous with the romantic fiction plot; it follows the episodic quest structure far more closely than does *My Love Lies Bleeding*, for example. That it is a quest, and one that places Meghan's agency at the centre, is made explicit: a dryad woman gives her the Witchwood arrow as the magical weapon (a typical romance motif) to defeat the Iron King, telling her: 'This is your quest. You decide when you want to use it' (234). Meghan, it will appear, is the daughter of Oberon, King of the Summer Fey, by her human mother. The faery half-breed as a central character is a *very* common figure in these books. They embody alienation from the human group, yet the full strangeness of Otherness still retains its power over that character when they encounter the paranormal.

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<sup>13</sup> The archaic spelling, 'faery', is almost universally adopted by the writers concerned, invoking an authenticity and otherness that 'fairy', with its connotations of the unthreatening and the twee, does not have. I have mostly followed this usage in my essay.

<sup>14</sup> See Katharine Briggs, *A Dictionary of Fairies: Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies and Other Supernatural Creatures* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), for this and many other aspects of fairy lore.

As with Harvey's novel, *The Iron King* is heavily, knowingly, allusive. Robbie Goodfell, turns out to be Robin Goodfellow, the ambivalent Puck of folklore. Kagawa both introduces folkloric motifs and blends literary allusions together. C.S. Lewis's Narnia is an intertextual echo, too—the threshold to 'the Nevernever', or the faery lands (itself alluding to *Peter Pan*), is through the closet (71). Further intertextuality is evoked by Puck's line about 'following a white rabbit down a dark hole' (77), and a faery cat guide, the Celtic Cait Sith, is simultaneously Carroll's Cheshire Cat.

One distinctive feature of dark *faery* romance is a plot function which necessarily involves a genre shift too. Faery narratives, unlike most other dark romances, almost always include a moment of entry into the other world. This in itself draws on earlier genres—the two-worlds fantasies of C.S. Lewis, Alan Garner, and Philip Pullman, the descent into the underworld of epic, and, of course, the Tam Lin theme of traditional faery lore itself. Where other supernatural beings dominate, the locale is most often contemporary, and sometimes urban, and the fabulous is intermingled with the mundane.<sup>15</sup> With these new fairy stories, the more traditional fantasy genre (which, in turn, is a particular incarnation, or pastiche, of Romance) irrupts wholesale into the text rather than modulating it. I will look at these transitions into other worlds.

The first, into the lands of the Summer and Winter fey, brings with it a wealth of allusions, and we enter into the Romance world, though fantasy and folklore are drawn on. The different Romance landscapes are employed as a contrasting perspective to modernity and the disenchantment it brings. Meghan is taken to Oberon, 'Lord of the Summer Court' (116), also known as Arcadia, or the Seelie Court. The Court is entered, as in Celtic folklore, through a mound; crossing another threshold into mediaevalism. This passage has the characteristic feel of mediaeval romance:

A massive courtyard stretched before me, a great circular platform of ivory pillars, marble statues, and flowering trees. Fountains hurled geysers of water into the air, multicoloured lights danced over the pools, and flowers in the full spectrum of the rainbow bloomed everywhere. Strains of music reached my ears, a combination of harps and drums, strings and flutes, bells and whistles, somehow lively and melancholy at the same time. (118)

Kagawa uses this setting to explore utopian desires that appear both in romance proper and in romantic fiction. What Faerie offers is the kind of transformed love of romantic fiction, supernaturally intensified (as Bella Swan experiences), and a transformed world that protests against the disenchantment of modernity. Oberon, as an earlier avatar of the dark lover, has seduced Meghan's mother, but justifies it thus: 'I sensed her longing, her loneliness and isolation. She wanted more from her life than what she was getting. She wanted something extraordinary to happen. [. . .] I gave her that; one night of magic, of the passion she was missing' (138-9). Thus, these landscapes of romance also serve as locale for the modulation into romantic fiction. The encounter with the male love object here is very familiar from that genre. Meghan's first glimpse of the dark stranger who will—inevitably, given the generic expectations aroused here—become her lover, is almost stereotypical; mystery

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<sup>15</sup> In general, adult Gothic romance favours the urban setting (though there are exceptions); often, this is to accommodate the further genres of noirish detective fiction and chick lit.



intrudes into the mundane; a pale rider on dark horse materialises, anachronistic and timeless (46). This will be Ash, a son of the Winter Queen to whom Meghan becomes attracted despite his hostile attentions towards her.

The exotic beauty of the other is central to paranormal romance; thus Ash is ‘gorgeous. More than gorgeous, he was beautiful. Regal beautiful, prince-of-a-foreign-nation beautiful.’ But, ‘it was a cold, hard beauty, like that of a marble statue, inhuman and otherworldly’ (81). In this, of course, he follows Edward Cullen, though in not quite as sparkly a manner. The dark lover’s dual nature is revealed:

He was devastatingly gorgeous, dressed all in black, his pale face seeming to float over the ground. I remember the way he smiled, the look in his silver eyes as we danced. He wasn’t smiling now and his eyes were cold. This wasn’t the prince I’d danced with Elysium night; this wasn’t anything but a predator. (212)

(Remember, even sparkly Edward Cullen has a touch of this dangerous duality). The demon lover has a separate heritage: ballads and folklore distantly, but primarily Richardson’s *Lovelace*, filtered and ameliorated variously through the likes of Austen, the Brontës, and Du Maurier.

Further on, the two genres intersect in order to explore desire and autonomy. Faery music and dance is a frequent method for dramatising romance otherness (160-1), and is metonymous with romance (and romantic love) itself—irresistible, beyond reason (thus exploring free will again). This is also an awakening, for Meghan, to the possibilities of sexuality:

Music played, haunting and feral, and faeries danced, leaped, and cavorted in wild abandon. A satyr knelt behind an unresisting girl with red skin, running his hands up her ribs and kissing her neck. Two women with fox ears circled a dazed-looking brownie, their eyes bright with hunger. A group of fey nobles danced in hypnotic patterns, their movements erotic, sensual, lost in music and passion.

I felt the wild urge to join them, to throw back my head and spin into the music, not caring where it took me. I closed my eyes for a moment, feeling the lilting strands lift my soul and make it soar toward the heavens. My throat tightened, and my body began to sway in tune with the music. I opened my eyes with a start. Without meaning to, I’d begun walking toward the circle of dancers. (160)

The allure of Faerie—its passion, unreason, and sexuality—is frequently symbolised by and associated with music and dance in all these novels. This is faithful to the source material, of course, but in these books it is novelised, rendered vivid and particular, and the danger, attraction, and resistance is *felt* by the characters.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See also Maggie Stiefvater’s *Lament* (2008) and *Ballad* (2009).

The return over the threshold to the mundane world takes on an altered aspect, as the Romance vision performs an estrangement effect on familiar reality, employing the genres of burlesque and satire, or highlighting the novelistic. As Meghan and her allies re-enter the human world, she inserts a segment of naturalistic description:

We emerged from the drainage pipe to the sounds of car engines and street traffic, a shock after being in the wilderness for so long. We were in a downtown area, with buildings looming over us on either side. A sidewalk extended over the drainage pipe; beyond that, rush-hour traffic clogged the roads, and people shuffled down the walkway, absorbed in their own small worlds (184).

But urban life does have its own magic; Meghan crosses back into this world once more: ‘New Orleans pulsed with life and activity [. . .] Strains of jazz music drifted into the street, and the spicy smell of Cajun food made my stomach growl’ (256)—the novelistic can be equally marvellous.<sup>17</sup> Voodoo inevitably gets referenced (257) and, almost predictably, a mob of mind-controlled humans appears. ‘Every zombie movie I’d ever seen sprung to mind’ (263), says Meghan, acknowledging the cliché. But the generic mutation here is into science fiction, with the creature known as Virus, and the anxieties over mind control from that genre area are a manifestation of a positivist world-view, where human agency can be mechanistically circumvented, and Virus can ‘get inside a brain and rewrite its programming’ (264). But our society’s reliance on technology has made us surrender our autonomy: ‘So devoted to their computers and technology, they were slaves to it long before I came along’, says Virus (265). Thus both the magic of desire and technology pose threats to free will; two world-views, of antirationalism and the instrumental reason of positivism complement each other here.

This intrusion of monstrous technology into realism foreshadows the next genre shift, into the drastically modified romance of the third faerie Court, that of the Iron Fey. Here, Romance is modulated by science fiction, particularly as the subgenres of post-apocalyptic narrative and steampunk.<sup>18</sup> The embedded science fiction vignettes are generically signalled as ‘something from a science-fiction movie, somehow ancient and modern at the same time’ (308)—which, of course, applies to the novel and its peers as a whole.

The faerie world is opposed to technological modernity and disenchantment; Grimalkin tells Meghan, with a somewhat commonplace antirationalism:

You will never find a faery at a science fair. Why? Because science is all about proving theories and understanding the universe. Science folds everything into neat, logical, well-explained packages. The fey are magical, capricious, illogical, and unexplainable. Science cannot prove the existence of faeries, so naturally, we do not exist. That type of nonbelief is fatal to faeries. (187)

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<sup>17</sup> New Orleans often figures in paranormal romance, itself a site of Romance and Otherness within the modern world (as Anne Rice and Poppy Z Brite attest).

<sup>18</sup> Science fiction was once known as ‘scientific romance’, signalling perhaps an earlier generic modulation.

This slightly Berkeleian foundation of fairies' existence, stems, I believe from *Peter Pan's* Tinkerbelle.

The fey 'are born from the dreams of mortals'; now, a new Iron Fey have emerged, and Meghan speculates whether they are born from

Dreams of technology and progress? Dreams of science? What if the pursuit of ideas that once seemed impossible—flight, steam engines, the Worldwide Web—gave birth to a whole different species of faery? [. . .] And with each success, we've kept dreaming—reaching—for more. (252)

The vision of the third Court is one of technological entropy and science fictional apocalypse:

A twisted landscape stretched out before us, barren and dark, the sky a sickly yellow-gray. Mountains of rubble dominated the land: ancient computers, rusty cars, televisions, dial phones, radios, all piled into huge mounds that loomed over everything. Some of these piles were alight, burning with a thick, choking smog, [. . .] The trees here were sickly things, bent and withered. A few bore lightbulbs and batteries that hung like glittering fruit. (293-4)

and, echoing both Narnia and 'steam-punk anime': 'streetlamps grew out of the ground, lighting the way, and iron behemoths, reminding me of vehicles in a steam-punk anime, crouched along the tracks, hissing smoke' (298).<sup>19</sup>

In this wasteland, Meghan encounters Ferrum, the deposed Iron King, who was

born of the forges, when mankind first began to experiment with iron. I rose [he tells us] from their imagination, from their ambition to conquer the world with a metal that could slice through bronze like paper. [. . .] But mankind is never satisfied—he is always reaching, always trying for something better [. . .] Then, with the invention of computers, the gremlins came, and the bugs. Given life by the fear of monsters lurking in machines, these were more chaotic than the other fey, violent and destructive. (325)

So, in this Adorno-like narrative of escalating human mastery, Machina, the new Iron King, is simultaneously born from reason and from irrational fears, from control and from the complexity of a technology that appears beyond our control.

Machina is a transformed version of the usual fey nobility, yet he could be a typical hipster figure: 'A metal stud glittered in one ear, a Bluetooth phone in the other'

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<sup>19</sup> In steampunk, technology is envisaged as slightly otherworldly, its functionality challenged by baroque ornamentation—and, paradoxically, thus re-encharmed somewhat (in steampunk culture more broadly, the nostalgic turn to Victoriana may be, in part, a rejection of a soulless and mass-produced contemporary culture).

(337). He is a new variant of the dark lover: ‘His face was beautiful and arrogant, all sharp planes and angles; I felt I could cut myself on his cheek if I got too close’ (337). He has the rectilinearity of modernism; the vegetation of the Iron Fey lands is similarly sharp-edged and Meghan has cut herself on it previously.

Machina wants Meghan for his bride and offers her eternal life in another manifestation of the simultaneous menace and the temptation that the dark lover offers. He appeals, too, to her desire for autonomy, offering her power, ruling over a technological quasi-fascist state, where Social Darwinism is the dominant ethos: ‘Is it really so terrible to rule, my love? [. . .] Throughout millennia, both humans and fey have [. . .] Weeded out the weak to make room for the strong’ (342). (It has to be said that the other Courts are hardly democratic; Gothic romance favours feudal monarchies.) But Meghan resists and defeats Machina with the powers of nature she has inherited from her father, bringing the dormant vegetation to life and, in an Ovidian metamorphosis and a battle of genres, ‘Roots and iron cables turned around one another like maddened snakes, swirling in a hypnotic dance of fury’ (344), and

Branches grew from his chest, his cables turning into vines that bloomed into tiny white flowers. As we watched, he split apart, as the trunk of a brand-new oak tree burst from his flesh, rising into the air. The Bluetooth phone dropped from the branches and lay, winking, at the roots of the tree. (346)

This recalls the similar destruction of modernity, taken by Lewis from Ovid, in the Bacchanalian destruction by vines of the functionalist instruments of colonialism in *Prince Caspian*.

Meghan overcomes Machina with the dryad’s gift, ‘A living wood containing the spirit of nature and the power of the natural earth—a bane to the faeries of progress and technology’ (277). This seems conventionally and unambiguously counter-Enlightenment. But the text doesn’t preach a submission to nature; it negotiates in a pragmatic manner the human-centred and the counter-Enlightenment. And Meghan’s dual nature is clearly important as she is still attached to the values of her home world—and perhaps its artefacts, devices, and comforts. Meghan’s iPod fails to work in the Nevernever: ‘So much for listening to Aerosmith in Faeryland’ (114), demonstrating collisions of worldviews and Meghan’s attachment to the goods of modernity.

The older fey are, of course, representations of ‘the natural’, with fundamental principles of Winter and Summer opposed but in an uneasy truce—an ideology of ‘balance’ at work here—that truce threatened by incursion from the human world.<sup>20</sup> But Faery is uncongenial to the human world, and that adds to the ambivalence; it’s not simply that human progress has threatened that balance: Faery has always been inimical to human interests, and Kagawa focuses on the primacy of human existence.

Conclusion:

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<sup>20</sup> A common theme in dark faery—see Melissa Marr’s *Wicked Lovely* series etc.

With the theme of the countercultural in mind, the protagonists of this genre—particularly in Young Adult examples—are very often themselves outsiders: Goths, or those pierced or tattooed; the impoverished or street kids; shy introverts. This connects with the rise of identity politics and the use of the sympathetic monster as representing an Other who is to be engaged in dialogue with rather than expelled.

However, to be countercultural today is often to embrace, resurrect, and continue the Enlightenment project, recognising with Jürgen Habermas that the problem is that the project was incomplete. Paranormal romance, despite its commercial success, is often countercultural in this way, though ambivalently. Its critical force lies in the questioning of a dominant counter-Enlightenment, a qualified defence of modernity, and the rehabilitation of humanist ideas of agency. Walpole and his immediate successors were, I think, more on the side of Enlightenment than against it, though Gothic texts gain their power from exploiting the resources of Romance. Today, not just two, but many kinds of romance, jostle together to parade contemporary epistemological uncertainties and ambivalence towards Enlightenment.

But these new hybrids are certainly not counter-Enlightenment narratives; postmodern in their generic hybridity and knowing intertextuality, perhaps, but not entirely opposed to grand narratives, or to faith in reason and progress or their fruits. They seek to re-enchant the world, so there is a critical and countercultural element in that; they also seek to restore meaning and agency. The subject may be precarious and prone to the glamour of irrational forces, yet autonomy is nevertheless central to these texts. The dialectic between Enlightenment and postmodernism is predominantly argued in two arenas—that of nature and human artifice, and that of autonomy versus archaic impulse. The flickering between kinds of Romance, and the dazzling shifts in style and perspective refract this dialectic perfectly and are part of the pleasures of these texts.