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STUDIES IN GOTHIC FICTION

**Gothic Landscapes and Seascapes:
Dark Regions in Wilkie Collins's
*The Dead Secret.***

by Joan Passey

Articles

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ABSTRACT

Wilkie Collins's *The Dead Secret*, arguably one of his most critically neglected novels, exercises the same concerns with ancestry, inheritance, and history as developed in Collins's later works, projected upon a Cornish landscape. In exploring the way Collins uses Cornwall (a location he had already toyed with in *Basil and Rambles Beyond Railways*), representations of the Cornish, and specifically Cornish seascapes, I propose that Collins is employing Cornwall as an ideal playground in which to experiment with his reworkings of Gothic tropes and motifs. Indeed, Collins's Cornwall provides a means of understanding debates surrounding regional identities and a lens through which to comprehend the Cornish quest to reclaim a notion of Celtic identity in the late nineteenth century. Collins's use of seascapes, ruins, transgression, and deadly secrets not only reimagines Gothic tropes in a Victorian context, but also uses them to express anxieties regarding disintegration of self, society, and borders in the period.

KEYWORDS:

Cornwall, Gothic, Victorian, seascapes, landscapes, ancestry, regionality, spectres.

> *"Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?*
> *Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,*
> *In that grey vault. The sea. The sea*
> *Has locked them up. The sea is History."*
> - Derek Walcott

> *"Civilization, we expect, will end on the beach."*
> - Felipe Fernandex-Armesto

   The Dead Secret, one of Collins's earlier novels, was serialised initially in Charles Dickens's *Household Words* in 1856. The text is a relatively underexplored one, perhaps as a consequence of the overwhelming popularity of Collins's next novel, the celebrated *The Woman in White* (1859). As a result, the text is referred to more generally as the last of Collins's "apprentice novels" and serves to present many embryonic ideas Collins went on to develop in his later career (Nadel, xxiii). These include a preoccupation with the slippery slope of insanity; complicated gender roles; a concern with legality, legislation, and the failure of documents; and, predominantly, an overarching exploration of ancestry, inheritance, and challenging the value these impart to social status. More pertinently to the focus of this paper, the novel features Cornwall as its backdrop, the locale being a favourite playground of Collins's since his 1850

walking tour of the county, which is documented in the 1851 travel narrative *Rambles Beyond Railways; or, Notes on Cornwall Taken Afoot*. The novel follows the Treverton family, opening with the death of Mrs Treverton and the consequent move of Captain Treverton and his daughter, Rosamund, from the county. Rosamund marries the blind Leonard Frankland, and, through a series of complicated economic exchanges, Frankland becomes the owner of Rosamund's childhood home, Porthgenna Tower. Upon becoming pregnant, Rosamund seeks to return to Cornwall. Yet the narrative is, throughout, haunted by the figure of Sarah Leeson, maid of Mrs Treverton, who, bestowed with the care of a terrifying secret on her mistress's deathbed, spends her life seeking to preserve it. Despite her best efforts, and hiding the written confession in an abandoned part of the property, the burden of the secret slowly drives Sarah out of her wits. The conclusion is Rosamund's discovery that Sarah is her mother and that, as an infant, she was taken in by Mrs Treverton to protect the honour of her servant after the death of Rosamund's biological father in a mining accident.

   This paper serves to ask why Collins carried the subject of Cornwall from 1851 to the 1856 publication of *The Dead Secret*, what elements of the Cornish landscape and people contribute to Collins's narrative, and how the various descriptions

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of Cornwall lend themselves to Collins's aforementioned reworking of Gothic conventions. In other words, what is Gothic about Cornwall, and what is Cornish about Collins's particular reimagining of the Gothic?

Bernard Deacon states that the nineteenth century saw a revival of interest in Cornwall and Cornishness, manifested in a proliferation of antiquarian quests to revive Cornwall's past, traditions, myths, and folklore. Jane Korey argues that this cultural intrigue was generated by the decline of Cornwall's mining industry in the 1850s and 1860s, opening up a "semantic space," a "vacuum promptly colonised by the romantic representations of outsiders who viewed Cornwall as a primitive and liminal place, an opposite and an antidote to urban civilisation" (148). This notion of both opposite and antidote is vital to an understanding of the representation of Cornwall in the nineteenth century imagination. The gradual replacement of a technologically advanced mining industry with the rapid development of a booming tourist industry lead to conflict between understandings of the Cornish as both an advanced people, and a primitive and "newly discovered" people. Increased transportation lead to the increased accessibility of Cornwall, and a sense of emergence, or archaeological rediscovery, of a place in England, but not English (Deacon 5). This uniquely locates Cornwall as a space fraught with contradiction, contrast, challenge, and confusion. Jarlath Killeen states that

> Gothic writers have always held the colonial fringes to be particularly potent sources of horror for the English imagination, particularly those areas deemed part of the Celtic world. A view of England as surrounded, and concomitantly threatened, by the Celtic "peripheries" transformed these regions into zones of radical indeterminacy and fertile sources for fears of ethnic infection and moral pollution. (91)

While Killeen is referring more specifically to the more readily identified fields of Irish and Scottish Gothicism, their analysis is equally applicable to Cornwall as a Celtic fringe. It is this illusiveness of Cornwall and Cornishness that I propose initially lends itself to Collins's nineteenth century construction of the Gothic and caters to Collins's already recognized preoccupation with liminal space and tendency to use liminal space (and travel through liminal space) as a site for expressing national anxieties (Alan 251, Russell 17-31).

Jenny Bourne Taylor describes the distinctive features of Collins's work as revolving around "his fascination with the unstable boundary between the normal and the deviant," the "slippery and unstable," and the "double and fractured subjectivities" (2, 3). While John Bowen suggests these recurrent concerns lend themselves to the massive proliferation of psychoanalytic approaches to Collins's work, I alternatively propose considering Collins's historically documented familiarity and fascination with Cornwall to establish a more historiographical approach to Collins's depictions of Cornishness. While admittedly Collins's work overflows with theories of consciousness, nervousness, and anxiety, there is, too, a concern with histories, ancestries, and landscapes as hubs of regional identity that set the stage for these psychological concerns. In applying a framework of theory pertaining to regional identities to *The Dead Secret*, I hope to locate existing psychoanalytic research into Collins within a context of mid-to-late-nineteenth-century concerns with location and borders.

The first part of this essay will discuss the way in which contemporary regional theorists have negotiated the "Cornish problem" – namely, the difficulty in locating the county within current models as a result of its various internal contradictions. This will serve as more of an introduction than an exhaustive overview of the interactions between geographical, historiographical, and literary regional theory. The second part of the essay will use these ideas of regionality as a framework through which to dissect Collins's reworking of a Gothic tradition, in an attempt to answer the questions pertaining to Cornishness and Gothicism posed at the beginning of this essay. The final part of the essay will use Cornish coastal spaces and seascapes within Collins's work as a particular regional example upon which to apply these ideas of Collins's particular reworking of the Gothic.

Bernard Deacon, in his extensive work on Cornish identity, begins with questioning the very idea of regionality. The first model proposed is one outlined by Finberg, suggesting that regions serve as "social entities... so far united in thought and action as to feel a sense of belonging together, in contradistinction from the many outsiders who do not belong" (Finberg 32-35). This model is reliant upon exclusion and separatism; a sense of "us versus the world." Edward Royle moves away from a common other, towards a notion of common interest, as a region can be more closely defined as "a sentimental attachment to a territory shared by like-minded people" (Royle 4). This weaves identity with both location and the history of

a location, the notion of "sentimental attachment" evoking a nostalgia and a deeply emotive relationship that transcends geographical conceptions of borders. Cynthia Applegate refers to this as a process of unwinding regionality from territory, and instead seeing the "social containers" inferred by regions as "a complex and unbound lattice of articulations" (134). The idea of "articulations" moves towards a performed notion of dialect or discourse and lends itself to a more creatively constructed mythos of community communicated verbally, through symbolism and representation of tradition, as opposed to something delineated by historically unstable topographical boundaries. Acknowledging history as unstable is vital to understanding the roles of "historical agents" in the constant process of shaping, re-shaping, imagining, and re-imagining the history of a populace, community, and their shared landscape.

Deacon proposes Cornwall as a prime case study for defining the limitations and adaptability of regionality. He states Cornwall as unique, in as much as it is "both 'of England' and 'not of England'" (5). Philip Payton states that "Cornwall and the Cornish remain an enigma - not falling neatly or happily into the new categories that are appearing, a battleground perhaps for conflicting visions, constructions, imaginings of Cornishness, Celticity, and Britishness" (4). While both Deacon and Payton use this description of Cornwall as both-and-neither, forever edging on a multitude of definitions, shifting throughout history and perception, I propose that this can be extended to a more general sense of the instability of history, identity, and landscape. A conception of the Cornish as they "teeter on the brink of a conceptual and historiographical crevasse, neither county nor nation" allows space to be adaptable rather than concrete; abstract and fluid rather than strictly defined, and this rhetoric can be transferred to a sense of self, and the place of self in physical location and societal position (Deacon 7).

This difficulty with this proposed instability is that it calls into question the ensuing validity of using Cornwall as an example with which to understand any other framework. While it may be useful to open up the rhetoric used to interpret Cornish regional identity to apply to identity more generally, the process of generalization runs the risk of stripping all meaning from the framework. Deacon states that, "if regional identities are volatile and if discourses are constantly reshaping both the identity of a region and its consciousness then can any symbols be appropriated and attached to any place?" (7). In other words, can "Cornish" be used as a legitimate framework or valid variant on the Gothic if "Cornish" is ultimately forever

in flux? What significance does regionality have if the regional is forever in motion? It is its instability that enthrals us, that lends itself to the anxiety over instability that serves and fuels the Gothic, yet it is this same instability that may render it an ineffective lens through which to interpret literature. There must be elements of Cornishness that remain stable for its use as a shorthand or symbol within a narrative to function, and its fluid instability must be taken into consideration as a primary marker to be incorporated into an understanding of a particular brand of Cornish Gothicism or Gothic Cornishness.

Anthony Smith's ethno-symbolism serves as an answer to the paradox of the "Cornish problem," focusing less on a poststructuralist disintegration of meaning across time, and more on the "historical myths and memories involved in identity formation" (7). Before nations, nationhood, or national identity, there were "ethnic communities," defined as "named human populations with shared ancestry, myths, histories, and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity." Smith's ethno-symbolism relies less on geographical borders, or blood lineage, than shared memory and, specifically, the development of shared narratives through histories and myths (6-9). While these shared stories can be contained within geographical containers, they can also transcend and spread. This significantly less structured mode lends itself towards a more flexible and adaptable regional identity that develops and alters across time, while acknowledging its shared history. It is this historically and ancestrally-based definition of the populace of a region, alongside the notion of region as continually destabilising, that I propose to read into Wilkie Collins's presentation of Gothic Cornishness in *The Dead Secret*. This is demonstrated by Sarah Leeson's request that her Uncle "remember the history of my life" and "take that as an explanation," as history both provides and justifies narratives (273). Doctor Chennery is the only trusted practitioner within the novel, as a direct result of being "well acquainted with the history of their families" (294). Personal, intimate, communal, and remembered histories are valued and treasured, but documented histories are subverted and mocked, as in the ludicrous title of the book describing the history of Porthgenna Tower:

> The History and Antiquities of PORTHGENNA TOWER. From the period of its first erection to the present time; comprising interesting genealogical particulars relating to the Treverton family; with an inquiry into the Origin of Gothic Architecture, and a few thoughts on the Theory of Fortification after the period of the Norman Conquest. By the Reverend

Job Dark, D.D., Rector of Porthgenna. The whole adorned with Portraits, Views, and Plans, executed in the highest style of art. Not published. Printed by Spaldock and Grimes, Truro, 1734. (307)

Collins is intentionally evoking the origins of the Gothic; the relationship between Gothic literature, history, and architecture; and the Gothic tendency towards excess to describe varying types of history and their preservation. Furthermore, it is an example of both book and building as historical artefacts, being read and interpreted in the present in order to contrast the two time periods.

Collins uses the idea of the Cornish having a shared sense of experience and land outside of Englishness, as demonstrated by his descriptions of their unruliness. Cornwall is presented as primitive early on in the text, as the rector ponders why the Trevertons, that ancient Cornish family, left the county: "'Did he find the air unhealthy? I should think the local produce, in the way of food, must be coarse now in those barbarous regions?'" (57). This illustrates a sense of the backwards, vulgar, and unsophisticated. "Barbarous" is an extreme but common way to refer to the Cornish region and its people, but that each assumption is framed as a question suggests something of the lingering mystery of the Cornish. This conveys that the Cornish landscape itself could be a threat to the health. Cornwall is dangerous not just because its people are ungovernable, but because there is something unsustainable or toxic about the land itself. Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventure of the Devil's Foot* capitalizes on this idea, by ruining Sherlock and Watson's idyllic Cornish retreat with a series of grisly murders caused by toxic substances that poison the air. This is in direct contradiction to the promotion of Cornwall as a "health resort" throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Shelley Trower attributes this recurrent manifestation of Cornwall as a space whose very landmass is laden with fear to the idea that Cornwall is an open wound, "a space where England might be especially susceptible to invasion from elsewhere. The Cornish cliffs operate as an ambiguous space, a permeable border at the edge of England that serves as both a point of destination and infiltration - by poisonous alien air" (201). While I agree with Trower's assertion that it is something of the permeability of Cornwall and its openness to the Atlantic that serves as a threat, I disagree that this is the only threat present, or what all other threats serve to symbolize. For the coast to be an open wound in England, ripe for infection, Cornwall would have to be significantly more English. It is not just the idea that Cornwall can be invaded

by foreigners, but also that the Cornish are already foreigners - and worse, always have been. The threat is not encroaching, it is already very much present (and hitherto ignored) within England itself. This idea of assumed Englishness being false is the true anxiety of empire - that imperial spaces thought to belong to the home front retained their sense of the "alien" all along. In other words, the civilizing mission has failed, as the civilizing force bears marks of internal corruption.

This is seen in the description of the Cornish in response to the Englishman's quest to appropriate their history:

Why, of course, every one of his plans turned out a complete failure. His Cornish tenantry received him as an interloper. The antiquity of his family made no impression upon them. It might be an old family, but it was not a Cornish family, and, therefore, it was of no importance in their eyes. They would have gone to the world's end for the Trevertons; but not a man would move a step out of his way for the Franklands. (68)

The antiquity of the family means nothing to the Cornish because their history is separate from an English history. It is their shared experience as a populace that delineates their identity, outside of an English experience. Collins uses the Cornish to propose a space that exists outside of the bureaucracy and legality of England that much of his work so fervently criticizes. The Cornish preserve their history as separate, and refuse to be altered by exchanges of property or economy from within the center. The family, despite now owning the property, cannot "buy" rule or identity. Identity is non-transferable as it is historically based within community, lacks a material nature, and resists appropriation. The outsiders are seen as interlopers and lack the power to govern. This sense of the Cornish being an unruly and self-governing populace is extended, "as for the mine, it seemed to be inspired with the same mutinous spirit that possessed the tenantry. The wiseacres from London blasted in all directions on the profoundest scientific principles, and brought about sixpennyworth of ore to the surface for every five pounds spent in getting it up" (68).

This reemphasizes the value of shared spirit, nature, and experience, as well as highlighting the lingering threat of an uncontrollable people, resisting the "civilizing" forces of the outside world. This spirit is specifically associated with mining cultures and practices, emphasizing the idea that Londoners (those of the supposedly civilized metropole) are somewhat

behind in mining technologies. The mines, in belonging to the Cornish, are somehow unreachable to others and will refuse to be productive for the interlopers. Rosamund, the heir to Porthgenna Tower, an emblem of Cornish wildness, is suitably wild herself:

> "How can you doubt what will happen next? Am I not a woman? And have I not been forbidden to enter the Myrtle Room? Lenny! Lenny! Do you know so little of my half of humanity as to doubt what I should do the moment the room was discovered? My darling, as a matter of course, I should walk into it immediately." (175)

As fittingly manifest of the ungovernable Cornish spirit, Rosamund is bestowed with masculine characteristics. This representation of androgynous behaviour is one that is recycled by Collins in his later works and suggests a transgressive sexuality attributed to the primitivism of her people and her character, as "'I seem never to have grown up in my mind since I was a little child'" (198). Rosamund's androgynous behaviour transgresses anticipated social norms, forewarning her transgressive origins, and the transgressive behavior of both her birth mother, and adoptive mother. Diane Long Hoeveler discusses the recurrence of androgyny in Romantic and Gothic fiction as a manifestation of Victorian anxieties surrounding the disintegration of societal and cultural mores. In situating Rosamund outside of societal expectations and frameworks, androgyny and primitivism reinforce her marginalization as a Cornish woman on the periphery and a threat to the proper governance and maintenance of polite society – indicative of her working class, rather than aristocratic, origins. In Gothic terms, Rosamund is the monstrous threat to society, the ambiguous, amorphous, primitive antithesis to progress.

While Rosamund's parentage (and thus identity) is the ultimate "secret" of the text, and the narrative revolves around destabilizing her position in society and her very concept of herself, it is vital to the functioning of the text that she remains Cornish. While her name may be different, she is a product not just of a Cornish community, but specifically a *mining* community. The overarching tragedy of the narrative is rooted in the mining accident that took her father, and prevented Sarah Leeson from entering into a union that would have rendered her child socially acceptable. Collins uses the very collapse of the mine, and larger de-industrializing collapse of the mining community, to represent destabilization of a personal self. Rosamund's father is buried in Porthgenna cemetery, and, as

such, his body forms a part of her landscape. While she has no birth right to the name Treverton, she still has claim to her culture, community, and the landscape of Porthgenna, as her blood is very literally embedded in the earth. Once her parentage is revealed, and her inheritance returned to the next rightful heir, Andrew Treverton, the only reason he, in his misanthropic habits, returns it to her is explicitly because she is *not* the child of the "player-woman" he so loathed. Rosamund retains her right to live in Porthgenna regardless of her altered heritage, as despite the change in name, her blood remains Cornish. This suggests a strong sense of communal identity, in opposition to a more feudal sense of patriarchal economy. Sue Chaplin illustrates the long relationship between the Gothic and the power present in economic structures in their analysis of the Gothic and the law. Chaplin states that the history of the genre is entrenched in discussions of patrilineal inheritance, validating or invalidating lineage, and the division between classes. *The Dead Secret* feeds from this tradition, drawing a feudal economy in opposition to what Chaplin dubs a new "moral economy" (77). This moral economy privileges the community over the bloodline, enforcing Rosamund's Cornishness over her specific parentage.

The Cornish used the project of reclaiming their history as a means of not only asserting their non-Englishness, but also their superiority. Charles Barham, President of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, in 1850, the year of Collins's ramble, said that "it was from contact and communication with Phoenician civilisation, then the most advanced in the world, that the ancient inhabitants of Cornwall were raised above the level of other Celtic tribes" (10-11). Deacon points out that, in the 1850s and 60s, "the industrial region [of mining economy] was virtually synonymous with the historic territory. The critical role that Cornwall had played at the forefront of modernity as a testbed for the early development of steam engine technology before the 1840s added to a renewed regional pride" (12). This sense of pride led to a greater sense of superiority over the less-technologically advanced core, as "the thorough Cornishman's respect for his own shrewdness and that of his clan is unbounded, or only equalled by his profound contempt for 'foreigners' from the east" (12). In the same breath as the "English" were describing the Cornish as a primitive and barbaric race, the Cornish held themselves as a more sophisticated and advanced people than the "English." Yet this advancement was in the process of contraction. Mass emigration beginning in the 1840s fatally hit mining communities across Cornwall. Their advanced technology was being exported to and developed in richer geological sites globally. While early representations

of the Cornish illuminated the people as the epitome of the Enlightenment project - examples of the vast potentiality of industrial development - their descent represented a larger anxiety over the potential failing of the Enlightenment project as a whole. In this way, as the Cornish moved further from the economic boom of the mid-eighteenth century, they became more of a manifestation of the threat of regression and decline seen as inevitably following a golden age. Not only was this a general threat, but also a more specific threat to the Celts, Celtic tradition, and Celtic revival. Deacon calls the Cornish a "Celtic warning story," the Cornish decline threatening that the same could happen to the Irish, Scottish, Welsh and Manx if efforts were not taken to preserve their unique cultures dependently of English influence (3).

Smith and Deacon propose that the sudden absence of advanced mining as a cultural marker led to a middle-class Cornish project to unveil, revive, and perform a shared history, deeply embedded in the antiquarian drive of the nineteenth century. This collision of past and present is manifested recurrently in Collins's novel.

The source of Sarah Leeson's manifestation as an uncanny, haunting figure is her simultaneous embodiment of the old and young. Porthgenna Tower is half a celebrated mansion and half in absolute ruin. Cornwall represents Rosamund's past and future. The truly haunting moments of the text arise when characters are forced to confront their histories, as when Sarah Leeson faints before the Myrtle Room, her anxiety over the collision of past and present generating the impression of a ghost or spirit. This is embodied by the tensions between interior and exterior, silence and the sonic, generating a sense of disorientation representative of Sarah's mental state, as "Sarah listened, keeping her face still set toward the hall--listened, and heard a faint sound behind her. Was it outside the door on which her back was turned? Or was it inside--in the Myrtle Room?" (247). The fear leads to irrationality, as "all thought, all sensation left her," and "she became insensible to the lapse of time" (247). Time losing meaning, linearity, and coherence leads to her believing her mistress has returned as a ghost. The scene is protracted over a significant amount of time, employing frequent repetition and delaying the gratification of the reveal in order to generate anticipation. Sarah Leeson wonders whether it is the black dress she made for her mistress that rustles across the floor, hinting to Sarah as creator, and Sarah specifically creates for her mistress, linking the process of creation to the process of birthing a child that inherited her mistress's name. Sarah realizes that it is fallen strips of

wallpaper shuffling across the floor, rather than the dragging dress of her mistress. The ruin, rather than being inhabited with specters, creates the impression of specters in and of itself, as a product of its ruination. Her horror is demarcated as specifically "superstitious," conjuring local, shared belief. The prolonged terror is too much for Sarah's fragile nerves, and she drops the keys and hears a woman's piercing scream, only to faint at the top of the stairs. It becomes apparent that the scream was caused by the sound of the falling keys, as once again terror is generated by terror. This almost ham-fisted emblem of self-fulfilling prophecy, and the past coming back to haunt her, is the death belying the secret and presents history as an active threat to the present self. The overarching fear of both the Gothic ruin and the Gothic specter is the idea of the past remaining in or returning to the future, emblematic of the Cornish revival at the hands of tourism and antiquarian pursuits. The long buried Celts emerged from the ashes of their own economic decline, bringing a foreign history to the doorsteps of the English.

Bringing horror home was a hallmark of Collins's work. In 1865, Henry James wrote that sensation novels of the like written by Collins dealt with "those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors... the terrors of the cheerful country-house and the busy London lodgings... [which were] infinitely more terrible" (qtd Bowen 54). This conjures Jarlath Killeen's proposition that the primary motivator of the Victorian Gothic was its movement away from the European monasteries and castles of eighteenth-century Gothic, swiftly towards the familiar (18). Collins, in using the familiar-unfamiliar, English-not-English, county-not-county of Cornwall manipulates this confusion between the foreign and the known to bring an unknown horror too close to the English bone. Bowen's assertion that Collins's horror is reliant on the uncanny is based upon his primary tendency to combine the real with the unreal; to inject the flat, realist narrative with echoes of the supernatural. In conjuring a place that was becoming increasingly known through tourist practices to an English populace, and reinforcing it as a space of barbarism and superstition, Collins is manipulating the uncanny to bring a haunting chill to an otherwise straightforward story of unknown birth and confused inheritance.

This sense of home is emphasised by the primary importance bestowed on Porthgenna Tower. The novel starts and finishes at Rosamund's childhood home, and events transpire to continually draw her there against the odds. She is kept away by the death of her father and the birth of her son,

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forewarning the idea that her inheritance of Porthgenna (and her ultimate homecoming) will be denied to her by death (the death of her biological father, forcing Sarah Leeson into giving her up) and birth (her own, false birth).

Collins frequently and explicitly contrasts the outside with the inside, destabilizing the boundaries between. "Inside the room the one audible sound was the slow, toilsome breathing of the dying woman, raising itself in its mortal frailness, awfully and distinctly, even through the far thunder-breathing from the bosom of the everlasting sea" (8). The permanence of the sea is contrasted with the mortality of Mrs. Treverton's body. The sea accompanies her in her death, breathing in harmony with her, demonstrative of the relationship between her and her surroundings. The description is given a sonic dimension, generating a multi-sensory experience of landscape.

Half of Porthgenna is inhabited, beloved, cared for, and grand. The other half is in disrepair. Despite its proximity to the civilized section of the house, it is filthy, broken, and covered in rubbish. This tension between the cultivated and the seriously neglected is manifest of the social and class tensions present between the duchy and the metropole. The space is "forsaken" (28). It is described as "lonely, deserted," in ironic juxtaposition with Mr. Munder's insistence that the mansion is featured as a tourist site in "The Guide to West Cornwall," which apparently Uncle Joseph would have done well to have made himself acquainted with (29, 234). Here, Collins juxtaposes Cornwall's burgeoning success as a picturesque tourist destination with the desolation of its landscape in the wake of de-industrialization. It "showed plainly enough that many years had passed since any human creature had inhabited" the north rooms, implicitly suggesting that perhaps something nonhuman had inhabited the rooms instead (29). In garnering an edge of inhumanity, the rooms show the necessary and mutually beneficial relationship between space and its (ideally living) human inhabitants. The rooms are "gloomy," "festooned about fantastically with cobwebs," and infused with a "mouldy coldness" (32). It conforms to all the demands of a Gothic ruin, replete with clouds of dust and family pictures "bulging" from their frames – a physical and aesthetic representation of the importance of inheritance and title projecting or protruding from the past into the future. Collins sets the past in the very same walls as the present; the progressive and homely with the ancient and the uncanny. The north rooms are the dark twin to the Porthgenna of Rosamund's childhood, forever warning the potential for ruin and disintegration that could potentially befall the rest of the Tower. In this way, Porthgenna

does not just contain Sarah Leeson's imagined specter, but it is constructed as a specter within itself.

This recurrent collision of past and present is referred to by Robert Mighall as "the Gothic cusp"; that Gothic texts frequently pitch past settings versus modern manners and morals to contrast the two (11). Collins instead uses this past-present dichotomy not to contrast modern and historic manners and morals, but Cornish and English manners and morals, in order to question notions of English civilization and advancement against Cornish advancement and decline. Mighall illustrates the importance of place in relation to history to the Gothic genre, a relationship that can be applied to this discussion of shared experience in regional spaces (xi-xvii).

It is not just Cornwall's history, mining, and process of reclaiming its past that lend themselves to Collins's Gothicism. The very make-up of the landscape itself is vital in forming the backdrop to *The Dead Secret*'s unveiling of ghosts and madness. In representing a coastal space, the text is representing a liminal space on the periphery, perfectly situated to manifest the sense of unraveling, uncertain borders and boundaries, and contested identity rooted in geographical location. Not only is Sarah Leeson both youthful and elderly, she is a consciously conflicted character. She is both foreign, and local; of German ancestry, with a strong connection to Cornwall. She acts as both servant, and lady; she is the figure of caring mother and the monstrous mother driven to insanity, horrifying her own child. She is simultaneously Mrs Jazeph and Sarah Leeson. In serving as a vessel of these multifarious conflicts and contradictions, she presents the confusing binaries introduced by Gothicism - a tension between progress and history, between the monstrous and the humane, past and future, as well as disintegrating notions of class distinction and ancestral and patrilineal histories.

These conflicts struggling to be contained within one character are encapsulated through images of seascapes and wrecking. The Cornish sea is a part of the landscape, as recognisable and intrinsic to understanding Cornishness as the mines and moors. The rhetoric of the sea permeates the discourse of the Cornish characters, most prominently in their moments of introspection. Sarah feels that she is "the wreck of something that you might once have liked to see; a wreck that can never be repaired - that must drift on through life unnoticed, unguided, unpitied - drift till the fatal shore is touched, and the waves of Time have swallowed up these broken relics of me forever" (3). Fragmentation and disintegration of bodily

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self and psyche is represented through descriptions of the churning sea, and decline is seen as an inevitable consequence of the passing of time. This emphasizes the notion that the sea is a vital peripheral location for describing disintegration and threat to both self and the self as a larger representation of society. The sea forms part of Sarah's identity. Time is vitally aligned with space, and history is related to location, as discussed extensively by Mighall (xiv-xvi). The images of the sea are images of isolation and dislocation – "unnoticed, unguided, unpitied" - as inspired by the roar of the Cornish sea pouring through the dying woman's window. In this way, the sea air has the ability to bridge the borders between land and sea. Borders become insignificant and liminal, the sea is constantly smelt and heard throughout the narrative, nature pouring into constructed places, the outside pushing in. The shore itself is "fatal" - the space that isn't quite land and isn't quite sea; the space so hard to delineate, measure, know, is demarcated as dangerous, as where the sea and land ends is where life ends, connecting self to this notion of time as space, and space as time.

The sea is specifically and recurrently associated with, present alongside, and the cause of death. The sea continuously roars outside of the room of Mrs Treverton's death bed, bringing still as the breeze blusters through the window. Mr Treverton, too, dies at sea, without ever knowing his wife's secret. "'Is my master alive now?'" asks Sarah, "'Rest, til the drowned rise. Tell him the Secret when the sea gives up her dead'" (152). The sea is continuously personified, given voice and agency, a manifestation of the independence of the Cornish people. The sea, too, becomes a figure in the landscape, given body and its own power.

The sea is again used as shorthand for the most mysterious and unreachable of places, as Andrew Treverton insists, if he received money from his family, he "'would take every farthing of it out in a boat, and bury it forever at the bottom of the sea!'" (302). The sea is, effectively, the end, the ultimate nothingness. Scott McEathron addresses the fact that texts published earlier in the century laid the seeds for this representation of the sea as a space loaded with excessive gothic sentimentality. He references specifically Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and Shelley's "A Vision of the Sea," two poems that significantly developed the complex relationship between Romantic poetry and Gothic imagery. For Shelley, as with Collins, the sea is a graveyard that kills, buries, and hides its victims. McEathron emphasizes the importance of the sea not just as a locus of threat, but also as a locus

possessing the capacity and potentiality for the "pernicious mystification and mythologizing of death" (177). The sea is a space that represents "the disintegration of the psyche" by virtue of it being a non-landscape, a non-land, unstable and unknown, with fathomless depths, yet utterly necessary and intrinsic to the development of empire and trade. John Mack highlights this preoccupation with the interconnected relationship between "inquisitiveness and acquisitiveness" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in regards to seafaring and its textual representations (19). The sea is both mystery and opportunity, key to and representative of imperial development yet bearing the threat of reverse colonization and imperial fall. It offers potential for industrial development, while at the same time conjuring a primitive fear of the unknown. Cornwall's sea fulfills the same functions as Cornwall's land. John Mack's cultural history of the sea labors to remind us that "what happens around or even of the sea is often strongly coloured by what happens on the land" (13). The pervading representation of the sea in *The Dead Secret* supports the idea of the Cornish sea being an extension of the Cornish landscape and that Cornwall is significantly more connected to the seascape than the English landscape beyond the Tamar. In this way the waterways both unify and separate. Jonathan Raban talks at length about the differences in imaginative interpretations of the sea for those who know it and those who do not:

> People on land think of the sea as a void, an emptiness haunted by mythological hazards. The sea marks the end of things. It is where life stops and the unknown begins. It is a necessary, comforting fiction to conceive of the sea as the residence of gods and monsters - Aeolus, the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, the Goodwins, the Bermuda Triangle. In fact the sea is just an alternative known world. Its topography is as intricate as that of land, its place names as particular and evocative, its maps and signposts rather more reliable. (127)

This conjures the mythological dimensions of seascape rendered by Collins's conjuring of Shelley in the complex relationship between sea, death, and Gothic imagery. But beyond that, it suggests a tension between those who imagine the sea and those who live with it; the sea's multifarious differences in the eyes of the tourist and the eyes of the Cornish. John R. Gillis discusses the idea of the sea as extension of land as a process of "continentalization"; that claiming a sea, attaching it to a landmass, is a mode of appropriating, parcelling, and packaging the wild and ungovernable (175). This means of understanding

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the relationship between seascapes and landscapes also suggests a lens through which to understand the imperial motivations behind the simultaneous fear and curiosity of the English towards Cornwall in the late nineteenth century. In the same way the sea was being absorbed like a sponge into the rhetoric of landmasses and regionalities, the Cornish were being packaged into romantic holiday breaks and whimsical travel narratives. This process of claiming, Gillis insists, is one based upon fear of proximity of the unknown and the ungovernable, that "it is at the edge of the sea that we imagine both the birth of new worlds and the death of old ones" (174).

Collins's use of the sea is at its most evocative as Sarah Leeson and Uncle Joseph stare across Porthgenna Tower and its surrounding beaches from a mount. Joseph analyzes the landscape and seascape through the new eyes of a foreigner, whereas Sarah approaches the landscape as one who is a fundamental (if transgressive) part of the heritage and history of this view, in a sense both aristocratic and domestic.

What third person, brought face to face with the old man and his niece, as they now stood together on the moor, would have suspected, to look at them, that the one was contemplating the landscape with nothing more than a stranger's curiosity, and that the other was viewing it through the recollections of half a lifetime? The eyes of both were dry, the tongues of both were silent, the faces of both were set with equal attention toward the prospect. Even between themselves there was no real sympathy, no intelligible appeal from one spirit to the other. The old man's quiet admiration of the view was not more briefly and readily expressed, when they moved forward and spoke to each other, than the customary phrases of assent by which his niece replied to the little that he said. How many moments there are in this mortal life, when, with all our boasted powers of speech, the words of our vocabulary treacherously fade out, and the page presents nothing to us but the sight of a perfect blank! (166)

Collins here expresses the failure of communication (physical and verbal) to articulate the depth of feeling associated between personal history, landscape, seascape, and regional identity. While on a superficial level the experiences of tourist and local seem largely similar, the depth of Sarah's history with Porthgenna is manifest in the prospect. Collins is, essentially, imagining Andrew Smith's significantly later construction of the cultural and regional ethnography. Sarah's deeply internal

and imaginative relationship with the conflicted simultaneous representation of present and history demarcated by Porthgenna and its surrounding Cornish waters situates her as having a more nuanced relationship with landscape-history that leads to consequent identity formation and, arguably, psychological disintegration. It is this constant process of making, breaking, and remaking that signifies the rhetoric of regional identities within a context of Cornish Celtic history and Wilkie Collins's reimagining of conventions and motifs within the framework of these identities. In essence, the Cornish landscape lends itself to Collins for both its flexibility and inflexibility. Its breaking, disintegrating permeability sets the stage for the Gothic horror generated by *The Dead Secret*, while simultaneously offering space for commentary on the dynamic flux of identity formation (in regards to location) in the mid-Victorian period of cultural and societal movement. Indeed, this forward-looking movement allows the novel to close with unanticipated beginnings. Rosamund assumes she has lost her mother and father, and, while she indeed has lost both her adopted and her biological parents, in the revelation of the secret she gains an uncle. Uncle Joseph, too, assumes he has lost all and frequently recalls the list of his deceased family, yet gains a niece and a great-nephew. Andrew Treverton, having utterly given up on humanity, gains hope through the way Leonard and Rosamund cope with the secret of her heritage:

"The only clouds on the sky are clouds of shining white; the only shadows over the moor lie light as down on the heather. Oh, Lenny, it is such a different day from that day of dull oppression and misty heat when we found the letter in the Myrtle Room! Even the dark tower of our old house, yonder, looks its brightest and best, as if it waited to welcome us to the beginning of a new life." (117)

The revival of buried history leads to progression, in the same way the Cornish assumed the revival of their Celtic ancestry would drive their culture forward in a time of economic turmoil. Even the ruinous Tower is given new light and new life when its understanding is enriched with its true history. This mirrors the county's attempt to recover its own secret of origins and ancestry from the rubble, in the hope of casting a new light on Cornish life and regional standing.

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