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*'Exactly Where I Was I Could not Tell':  
Panopticism, Imageability and the  
Gothic City*



*Urban Gothic and panopticism*

At the beginning of Richard Marsh's 1897 bestseller *The Beetle: A Mystery*, the novel's first narrator Robert Holt seeks a night's shelter at the casual ward of Hammersmith Workhouse in suburban west London. Unemployed and starving, Holt turns to the last resort of the Victorian destitute, an institution reviled by many nineteenth-century social commentators as dehumanising in its prison-like routine. Yet, as Holt soon finds out, even the workhouse will not accommodate him: the door is slammed in his face, he flees an ensuing altercation, takes the first turning and soon loses himself in the suburban wilderness sprouting up around Hammersmith until, stumbling through a mist that represents a mixture of rain and fog, he finally feels that he has left the civilised world behind him. Somewhere in the environs of Walham Green, an expanding lower-middle-class suburb south of Hammersmith, Holt pauses for a moment's rest, spies the inviting open window of a detached villa and enters burglariously, falling into the clutches of the novel's eponymous foreign monster under whose watchful eyes he will soon tramp around London at astounding speed, never losing his way, until finally expiring in a squalid East End lodging house.

*The Beetle* is the best known of Marsh's series of urban Gothic novels, all produced at the very turn of the century. Like *The Goddess*:

*A Demon* (1900) and *The Joss: A Reversion* (1901), it is a reverse-colonisation or 'invasion Gothic' narrative in which a monstrous foreign presence invades contemporary London, a city increasingly unknowable due to its size and diversity, and attacks or entraps vulnerable and economically marginal British characters representative of urban modernity.<sup>1</sup> In *The Beetle*, Holt's narrative is followed by an attack on the politician Paul Lessingham, who has in his youth offended the forces of Isis in Cairo. An avenger from the cult, whose appearance shifts between an old man, a young woman and a monstrous beetle, abducts Lessingham's fiancée, the outspoken New Woman Marjorie Lindon, who is destined for human sacrifice. Lessingham, the gentleman-inventor Sydney Atherton and the aristocratic private detective Augustus Champnell chase the monster through London until a fatal train crash, discussed in the next chapter, apparently destroys it. In *The Goddess*, the narrator John Ferguson dreams that his friend Edwin Lawrence is attacked by a laughing female fiend, only to wake up to find a beautiful, mysterious and amnesiac woman covered in blood stepping into his room through the window. The following morning, a torn and mutilated corpse is discovered in Lawrence's rooms. The mentally unstable Lawrence has fallen under the influence of the 'Goddess', an Indian sacrificial idol, who has cajoled him into committing a series of crimes, including the murder of his moralising brother, Philip. The novel concludes with Lawrence's suicide at the hands of the Goddess and Ferguson's marriage to his nocturnal visitor. *The Joss*, finally, recounts how the impecunious shopgirls Pollie Blyth and Emily Purvis are unfairly dismissed by their employer and only saved from homelessness by the unexpected news that Pollie has inherited a house and an annuity from her long-lost uncle, Benjamin Batters. The strongly fortified but rat-infested house contains its secrets, however, and is besieged by bloodthirsty Chinese characters. Batters is in fact in hiding inside the house, attempting to escape a Chinese tribe who have mutilated him into a joss, an Oriental idol, and showered him with riches, also concealed within the house. The novel concludes with the death of the monstrous Joss. While Batters's mutilated body appears grotesque and hardly human, the 'reversion' of the novel's title ironically comments on the Joss's 'backsliding' from a god to a mere Englishman.

All three novels are set in a contemporary London that could be seen as a central character in itself. A number of critics agree that the modern city was perhaps the most typical locus of fin-de-siècle Gothic, replacing, as Fred Botting notes, the medieval, Mediterranean settings of earlier Gothic by bringing together 'the natural and architectural components of Gothic grandeur and wildness, its dark, labyrinthine streets suggesting the violence and menace of Gothic castle and forest'.<sup>2</sup> Glennis Byron similarly observes that London 'was the key site of 1890s Gothic monstrosity', 'exud[ing] a sinister sense of . . . desolation and menace', and for Kelly Hurley, 'London – both the labyrinthine city itself and its anonymous-seeming suburbs – is envisioned as a dark, threatening mystery' in modernist Gothic.<sup>3</sup> Notably, the city streets take on the function of the Gothic labyrinth, 'a site of darkness, horror and desire' that is 'associated with fear, confusion and alienation'.<sup>4</sup>

Fin-de-siècle Gothic shares a discursive context with a national debate over the perception of London as a divided city. This debate centred on 'Outcast London' – London's poor, alienated and often criminal slums, particularly the East End – and addressed questions related to abject poverty, slum housing, sexual health and morality, mass immigration into already overcrowded quarters, and the perceived linkage between urban poverty, crime and social disorder in the aftermath of the 1887 Trafalgar Square riots and the 1888 Jack the Ripper murders. At the same time, as Judith Walkowitz notes, the cityscape of the wealthy West End of London was undergoing 'considerable renovation' as 'a modern landscape . . . of office buildings, shops, department stores, museums, opera, concert halls, music halls, restaurants, and hotels' was created to serve the changing needs of emergent figures such as female white-collar workers and consumers increasingly visible within this 'new commercial landscape'.<sup>5</sup> Surrounding London on all sides, suburbia was rapidly devouring the countryside and altering the topography of the city.

As Walkowitz posits, fin-de-siècle London was portrayed in contemporary writings, both fictional and factual, as 'a city of contrasts, a class and geographically divided metropolis' 'whose social boundaries were regularly transgressed by illicit acts of sex and crime'.<sup>6</sup> Raymond Williams notes that the notion of the divided city 'became generally available as an interpretative image' at the fin-de-siècle, when London's

social and geographical faultlines ‘deepened and became more inescapably visible’ and the trope of Darkest London, an “‘unknown” and “unexplored” East End, ‘became quite central in literature and social thought’.<sup>7</sup> Walkowitz importantly reminds us that this ‘imaginary urban landscape’ of ‘the metropolis as a dark, powerful, and seductive labyrinth’ was a literary and cultural construct that was ‘conveyed to many reading publics through high and low literary forms’ and has subsequently informed the literary and historical imagination.<sup>8</sup> In the aftermath of the Ripper murders, the East End district of Whitechapel acquired unprecedented notoriety as ‘an immoral landscape of light and darkness, a nether region of illicit sex and crime, both exciting and dangerous’.<sup>9</sup> As Seth Koven notes, the district became something of a tourist attraction so that ‘[b]y the 1890s, London guidebooks such as Baedeker’s not only directed visitors to shops, theatres, monuments, and churches, but also mapped excursions to . . . notorious slum districts such as Whitechapel and Shoreditch’.<sup>10</sup> A two-way relationship exists between this imaginary landscaping and the Gothic mode: the construct of the East End as a dangerous but seductive labyrinth is essentially Gothic, while the sensational appeal of outcast London seeped through to the cityscapes of the urban Gothic fictions of the period.

Some of this flux was articulated by the late-Victorian social explorers – investigative journalists, early sociologists, socialist reformers and Christian missionaries who followed the established literary tradition of gentlemanly ventures into the slums of the East End for purposes of reportage, reform and the less reputable, voyeuristic practice of ‘slumming’. The work of such writers as George Sims, Arthur Osborne Jay, William Booth and Jack London attempted to locate, describe and categorise London’s pockets of poverty, vice and foreign influences in a strikingly vivid vocabulary. For them, the city was sharply divided into a wealthy but ignorant west, slumbering in its own complacency and unaware of the threat posed by a labyrinthine, unknowable and alien east, best characterised as a hell or an underworld, a whirlpool or a vortex. Yet the most visual of these representations, Charles Booth’s multi-volume study *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889–1902), challenged the sharp geographical division of London into a wealthy west and a poor east by supporting a sociological analysis of London’s class structure

with a set of colour-coded maps that painstakingly measured the perceived relative wealth of each street.<sup>11</sup> Booth's maps provided a strikingly visual account of the geographic positioning of poverty and potential crime in London, but also challenged the focus of many of his contemporaries on the East End by showing an alarming proximity between wealth, represented by sunny golden yellow, and squalor, conveyed in racially charged black, throughout the imperial metropolis.<sup>12</sup> By turning a corner in a wealthy area, one could enter a street of the worst kind.

The social explorers' calls for the mapping of London's unknown spaces bear a close resemblance to Michel Foucault's analysis of the 'disciplinary mechanism' that ensures that 'each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed' in social space in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), his classic study of surveillance and social control in modern society.<sup>13</sup> While Foucault's most powerful example of such a mechanism is Jeremy Bentham's model prison the Panopticon, an 'enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised' by 'an omnipresent and omniscient power', he also gives 'the utopia of the perfectly governed city' as an example of the 'panoptic mechanism', 'visible and unverifiable', in action.<sup>14</sup> Foucault argues that the disciplinary institutions of the nineteenth century – 'the psychiatric asylum, the penitentiary, the reformatory, the approved school and, to some extent, the hospital' – treated social deviants – 'beggars, vagabonds, madmen and the disorderly' – by branding and classifying on the one hand, by spatial exclusion and containment on the other.<sup>15</sup> Perfect visibility is essential to the 'disciplinary society' because 'a state of conscious and permanent visibility . . . assures the automatic functioning of power', the problematically anonymous, sinister social forces that in Foucault's scheme attempt to control the individual through self-regulation.<sup>16</sup> The panoptic mechanism, Foucault argues, is 'an anti-nomadic technique' because 'discipline fixes' and 'arrests or regulates movements'.<sup>17</sup> 'Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance', Foucault concludes.<sup>18</sup>

As Robert T. Tally notes, literary cartography often combines examples of 'the real places of the geographical globe and the imaginary places of [the author's] own fictional universe'.<sup>19</sup> Marsh's

urban Gothic novels are set within a recognisably contemporary, partly mappable London. Yet the novels' cityscapes are also uncannily strange and disorientating so that characters (and readers) soon lose their way and find themselves unable to identify their bearings with confidence. This tension between what Kevin Lynch calls an 'imageable' city – an urban environment easy to navigate – and a Gothic city that resists exact mapping and panoptic control is characteristic not only of Marsh's urban Gothic but also of other contemporary discourses sited in the troubled space of fin-de-siècle London, such as the writings of the urban explorers who attempted to locate London's pockets of poverty and crime.<sup>20</sup> In the three novels, the "'real' material world' of fin-de-siècle London meets Marsh's "'imagined' representations of spatiality', merging into what Edward Soja characterises as a fuzzy, disorientating '*real-and-imagined*' cityscape.<sup>21</sup> The spaces of the city resist the investigative efforts of the novels' protagonists, detective figures and reader-geographers, while suggesting that only the novels' eponymous monsters, inhabiting the liminal '*real-and-imagined*' space, are able to master the city. Marsh's urban Gothic thus functions as a counter-narrative to modernity's attempts to control and police the troubled space of the imperial metropolis with its deviant inhabitants.

*'Some sort of acquaintance': the imageable city*

The work of the urban geographer Kevin Lynch offers one way of reading the pedestrian's navigation of the cityscape. In *The Image of the City* (1960), Lynch's focus was on 'the apparent clarity or "legibility" of the cityscape', 'the ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern', and he argues that 'a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern'.<sup>22</sup> For Lynch, 'a distinctive and legible environment' contributes to a positive urban experience by promoting feelings of 'security' and 'individual growth'.<sup>23</sup> Urban planners attempting to create successful cities should therefore pay attention to the question of legibility or, as Lynch also terms it, '*imageability*: that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image . . . that

shape, color, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment'.<sup>24</sup>

Lynch studied the ways in which people find their way around a city, noting that 'way-finding', the ability to '[s]tructur[e] and identif[y] the environment', is a 'vital ability' and that pedestrians resort to 'a consistent use and organization of definite sensory cues from the external environment'.<sup>25</sup> He identifies five organising principles or 'image elements' used by pedestrians to master their environment: 'path, landmark, edge, node, and district'.<sup>26</sup> Of these, paths, 'channels along which the observer . . . moves', are 'the predominant city elements', for '[p]eople observe the city while moving through it'.<sup>27</sup> Landmarks are a 'type of point-reference' such as 'building, sign, store, or mountain' that must be visible.<sup>28</sup> Edges denote 'boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity: shores, railroad cuts, edges of development, walls', and distinguish between districts, 'medium-to-large sections of the city . . . recognizable as having some common, identifying character'.<sup>29</sup> Finally, nodes are 'strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter' such as 'junctions, places of a break in transportation, a crossing or convergence of paths, moments of shift from one structure to another' or, alternatively, 'concentrations' such as 'a street-corner hangout or an enclosed square'.<sup>30</sup> Lynch argues that a high concentration of these strategic elements results in 'an imageable landscape: visible, coherent, and clear', in which the pedestrian feels more comfortable than in a less imageable city.<sup>31</sup> Imageability makes way-finding, the pedestrian's navigation of the city space, possible: a city lacking in imageable elements that facilitate way-finding is an unpleasant, confusing and even frightening environment.

Lynch's analysis of city space suggests that pedestrians 'read' a city by registering and mastering the images it offers, that navigating the city space is an interpretative activity akin to reading. Conversely, Robert T. Tally argues that 'a map may also constitute itself in words' so that a story or a genre could be seen as a map of a particular kind of environment.<sup>32</sup> For Raymond Williams, novels could be interpreted as 'knowable communities' containing characters, settings and values that the reader can expect to recognise.<sup>33</sup> It could, then, be argued that the reader can expect to find familiar loci in fictional landscapes

pertaining to particular genres. Like Boston, Lynch's example of an imageable city, London, the central locus of fin-de-siècle Gothic, 'is a city of very distinctive districts and of crooked, confusing paths'.<sup>34</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, London was both a tourist destination with which many readers would be personally acquainted and a city familiar from previous literary encounters.

As Figure 2 records, Marsh's Gothic novels, situated in a recognisable, contemporary London, typically contain realist 'image elements'. The narrative journey of *The Beetle* takes the reader from Hammer-smith Workhouse towards the lower-middle-class suburb of Walham Green in west London, then towards wealthy Belgravia, the West End and Westminster, and finally via Waterloo and the East End to St Pancras station, and then out of London towards Luton. As discussed in the next section, the scenes following Robert Holt's flight from the workhouse are shrouded in indeterminacy, but much of the novel situates the action with precision. Holt's journey takes him along a 'route . . . with which [he] had some sort of acquaintance' from 'some part of Walham Green; then along the Lillie Road, through Brompton, across the Fulham Road, through the network of streets leading to Sloane Street, across Sloane Street into Lowndes Square'.<sup>35</sup> In Lynch's terms, Holt follows a path that leads him from a nondescript new suburb through the more respectable districts of Fulham and Brompton into desirable Belgravia. The rising politician Paul Lessingham resides in a house 'somewhat smaller than the rest' in Lowndes Square, a node that becomes the site of key encounters in the text and is located within easy reach of Hyde Park, the West End with its entertainments and the Houses of Parliament.<sup>36</sup> The novel also makes use of two of London's key Gothic landmarks: the Palace of Westminster, rebuilt at the mid-century in the neo-Gothic style, faces the River Thames in Westminster and features as the scene of Lessingham's political triumphs and as the backdrop to his courtship of Marjorie Lindon; and the neo-Gothic St Pancras station in Euston Road, opened in 1868, which is the scene of the Beetle's attempted escape. Holt's journey involves the crossing of a number of boundaries or edges: between districts but also between modes of life as he travels from a modest suburban district to one of great wealth and culture. Such journeys are central to the novel's spatial logic. Later on, Holt's journey is reversed as the novel's investigator figures trace

the Beetle's residence, 'a tumbledown cheap "villa" in an unfinished cheap neighbourhood' at the end of 'an interminable journey' from central London into the western suburbs, before pursuing their prey through London to Waterloo station and on to the notorious slums of Limehouse.<sup>37</sup> The spatial hierarchies of the metropolis are disturbed as the city's centre of gravity shifts to the peripheral slums and suburbs at its edges.

*The Goddess* is spatially a less expansive novel that never strays much beyond Piccadilly Circus. The beginning of the novel sees Edwin Lawrence and John Ferguson in the comfort of the West End, at the luxurious Trocadero Restaurant, which had opened in Shaftesbury Avenue in 1896, and at the Empire Theatre, a music hall in nearby Leicester Square, notoriously frequented by prostitutes who paraded on its promenade. Both landmarks were firmly on the tourist trail and represented the newest offerings of the West End entertainment industry. Lawrence and Ferguson have rooms at Imperial Mansions, possibly intended for the block of that name in New Oxford Street, at the edge of the very different districts of Soho, Fitzrovia, Bloomsbury and St Giles and thus suggestive of the intangible social status of both men, while Lawrence's eminently respectable brother Philip resides in the desirable Arlington Street in St James's, off Piccadilly and yards from Green Park. The heroine of the novel, Bessie Moore, lives in a 'nice, clean, old-fashioned house' in Hailsham Road, a 'nice, wide, clean, old-fashioned street' in The Boltons in Brompton, a respectable residential district on the western outskirts of central London.<sup>38</sup> The nearby Brompton Road, Fulham Road and King's Road are also referenced. The paths between these well-known and central loci are clear and keep us well within our comfort zone. It is only at the end of the novel that we go off the map as we follow Lawrence from Victoria station to his new residence in an unspecified part of Pimlico.

The beginning of *The Joss* is, like *The Beetle*, set in a well-known suburb, in this case Clapham in south London, patronised by clerks working in the city, but no exact coordinates are provided. The novel then proceeds northwards to Mitre Court in the Temple, one of London's legal districts and a distinctive spatial enclosure in central London, where the lawyer Frank Payne has his chambers. Apart from brief references to the Strand, Fleet Street and Haymarket, *The*

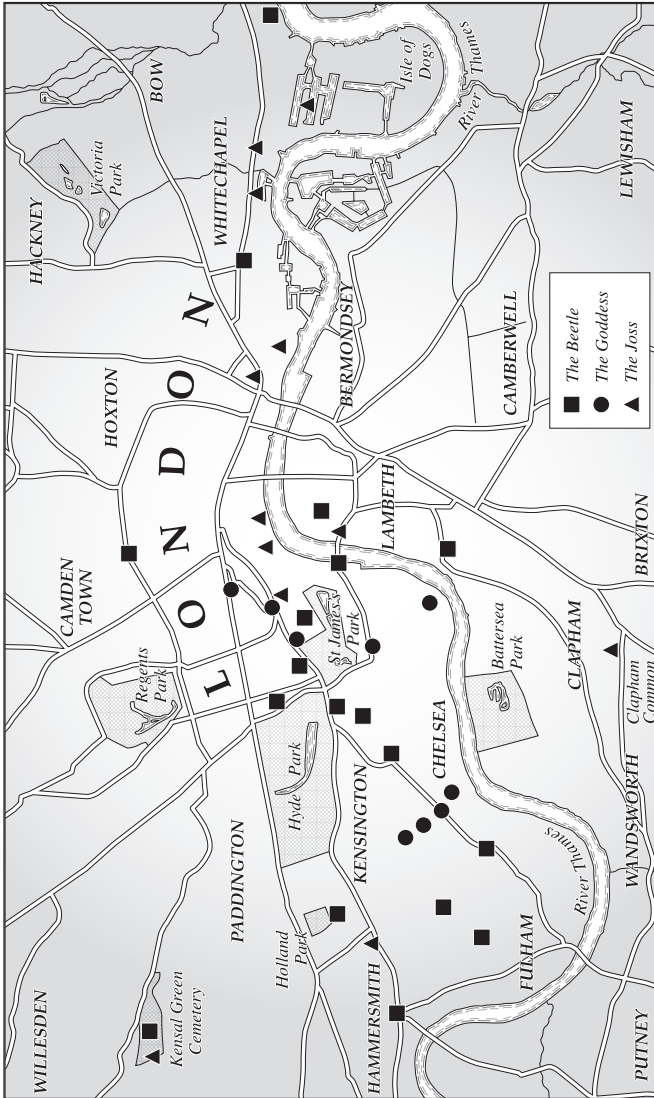


Figure 2 The London locations of *The Beetle*, *The Goddess* and *The Joss*.

*Joss* is rather short of central London landmarks. Instead, much of the novel takes place in the imaginary and squalid Camford Street, discussed in the next section, located off the Westminster Bridge Road on the Lambeth side of the river, across the bridge from the Houses of Parliament. The river represents an edge that separates Pollie and Emily from civilisation. The Limehouse Basin in London's docks, with its shipping connections to the Empire, and Olympia, an exhibition space in west London known to visitors to the capital, are also namechecked. Whereas *The Goddess* is chiefly focused on fashionable central London, then, *The Joss* skirts around the West End in favour of the margins within easy reach of the centre. Of the three, *The Beetle* is spatially the most expansive, encompassing London in its entirety and traversing the city extensively in all directions.

Thus far, we are reassuringly on the map. As Franco Moretti notes, many nineteenth-century London novels feature the same 'squares', 'exclusive gathering places' and 'parks'.<sup>39</sup> Moretti argues that novels set within confusing, rapidly changing cities 'protect their readers from randomness by reducing it' through '*simplifications* of the urban system' that result in 'a "humanization" of the metropolis'.<sup>40</sup> Marsh's London contains a high concentration of well-known, central locations that allow both characters and readers to produce a mental map of their surroundings. However, such a simplification is also complicit in panoptic control: the characters and the reader are subjected to the schemes of a controlling urban-planner novelist who exercises power through the process of mapping and simplifying the fictional world. As Tally notes, the map is not only 'one of the most powerful and effective means humans have to make sense of their place in the world' but also 'a preeminent form of knowledge and power'.<sup>41</sup> The expansion of the Empire had led to significant advances in cartography in the nineteenth century, and, as discussed above, attempts were also being made to map the spaces of the city in an effort to contain undesirable elements. The ready imageability of Marsh's urban Gothic might suggest that we are in a well-governed, knowable, modern city with no hidden nooks in which danger might lurk. This fictional London centred on the West End and the wealthy districts of the city accords well with Foucault's idea of the well-governed city in which visibility enforces obedience through

self-regulation, and, as Henri Lefebvre argues, the 'great height' of civic architecture suggests to the pedestrian 'the spatial expression of potentially violent power'.<sup>42</sup> This apparent imageability is crucial to the success of Marsh's urban Gothic because it lulls the reader into a false sense of security. Danger, in fact, does lurk within the reassuringly imageable city. Once the lines between realism and fantasy begin to blur, the reader's sense of unease is also heightened.

*'Leaving civilisation behind': the unreal city*

As Tally observes, the fictional spaces of a text and the 'real' geographical spaces they represent are 'connected' and yet 'do not coincide exactly'.<sup>43</sup> If Marsh's London contains recognisable landmarks, paths and districts, the complacency created by familiarity is soon disturbed by the blurring of the seemingly real and the uncanny, fuzzy or disorientating. All three novels involve the frequent crossing of boundaries or edges from one district to another. These crossings typically signal a moral transgression and a generic shift from realism to Gothic, associated with the entry into the monster's dwelling, which functions as a significant transformative node. In keeping with Charles Booth's poverty maps, respectable loci, associated with realism, are situated in close proximity to sites of disrepute, rendered in Gothic hues. At a time of a national debate on the immoral and criminal condition of London's East End, the location of monstrosity in Marsh's urban Gothic is surprising. Limehouse and the Docks make fleeting appearances in *The Beetle* and *The Joss*, where the East End is represented as the squalid home of disreputable and criminal characters but not of the monsters. The geographical centre of the three texts is instead firmly rooted in central and west London, with scenes of horror occurring primarily in indistinct suburban settings.

The Beetle's lair is located within walking distance of Hammer-smith Workhouse in 'some part of Walham Green'.<sup>44</sup> Later, the street is given the improbable (and fictional) name Convulvulus Avenue, High Oaks Park, West Kensington, in a parody of the suburban building boom that was making the city unknowable as entire localities were transformed by building activity.<sup>45</sup> Holt's sensations, as he approaches the house, are of disorientation: 'Exactly where I

was I could not tell', Holt admits, noting that he felt as if he were in 'a land of desolation':

In the darkness and the rain, the locality which I was entering appeared unfinished. I seemed to be leaving civilisation behind me. The path was unpaved; the road rough and uneven, as if it had never been properly made. Houses were few and far between. Those which I did encounter, seemed, in the imperfect light, amid the general desolation, to be cottages which were crumbling to decay.<sup>46</sup>

Like contemporary social explorers, Holt is metaphorically leaving civilised London for a more primitive mode of existence when he enters this desolate urban space at the beginning of the novel, but indeterminacy surrounds his exact whereabouts: he can only indicate his approximate location. A more genteel observer, Marjorie Lindon, describes the scene thus:

The road . . . seemed to lead to nothing and nowhere. We had not gone many yards from the workhouse gates before we were confronted by something like chaos. In front and on either side of us were large spaces of waste land . . . The road itself was unfinished . . . It seemed . . . to lose itself in space, and to be swallowed up by the wilderness of 'Desirable Land' which lay beyond.<sup>47</sup>

Both statements are remarkable for their hesitant and tentative tone: the 'perceptual overlayer' that also characterises Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is apparent in the narrators' failure to pronounce any confident judgment in the face of the phantasmagoric and unreliable nature of (sub)urban appearances.<sup>48</sup>

Julian Wolfreys correctly observes that this suburban positioning of horror and monstrosity makes the city unfamiliar.<sup>49</sup> Evidently acquainted with London's topography, Holt yet loses his way in the wilderness of suburban growth transforming west London at the time, while the wealthy Marjorie appears utterly confounded by the scene that confronts her in the western suburbs. In her analysis of nineteenth-century suburban ghost stories, Lara Baker Whelan argues that 'expansive suburban growth' was particularly attractive to writers of supernatural and Gothic fiction because '[r]uinous

suburbanization' could be evoked 'as something that opened a gateway to "other worlds"'.<sup>50</sup> Whelan suggests that a number of Victorian texts 'investigate a ruined suburban landscape as a space completely divorced from the cultural ideal it was supposed to represent'.<sup>51</sup> The "'borderline" status' of suburbia, between respectability and poverty, with its counter-panoptic secrecy and privacy, renders the suburban home suspect.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Whelan argues, the only panoptic agent in suburban ghost stories is the ghost, the keeper of the family's secret, since 'the ghost . . . alone knows the "true" story of whatever happens inside the house'.<sup>53</sup> Holt's entry into the Beetle's suburban den, discussed in chapter 3, is a good example of this kind of scenario, where 'suburban design' predicated on an 'ultimate impenetrability and potential for cultural resistance' results in 'the inability of an observer to look into the space'.<sup>54</sup> While Holt reasons that he 'need fear no spy' when breaking in because '[t]here was not one to see what I might do; not one to care', what goes on behind the blind that screens the Beetle's front window is only known to the monster: Holt and Marjorie, its victims, conveniently faint rather than recount their ordeal, and the nosy landlady who lives across the road can only report that the blind defeats her persistent attempts to police the house.<sup>55</sup>

Pollie and Emily's first encounters with monstrosity in *The Joss* take place in the south London suburb of Clapham, but the bulk of the novel is set in the imaginary Camford Street, '[a]n old, and not particularly reputable street, one end of which leads into the Westminster Bridge Road'.<sup>56</sup> Camford Street, 'long, dreary, out-at-elbows, old', is described as being 'in the heart, if not exactly of a slum, then certainly of an unsavoury district . . . Buildings stretched from end to end in one continuous depressing row'.<sup>57</sup> While the street itself is imaginary, it is nonetheless carefully situated on the south side of the Thames and opposite the Houses of Parliament in an area that was known to contain pockets of chronic want and criminality but that was yet in close proximity to the centre of British politics.<sup>58</sup> *The Goddess*, similarly, maintains a central-London focus in locating Edwin Lawrence, following his descent into alcoholism and insanity, in a squalid 'building which, outwardly, was more like a warehouse than a private residence' in Pimlico, a respectable residential area in close proximity to political power in Westminster but nonetheless

containing its share of poverty.<sup>59</sup> While we know that we are in Pimlico, within walking distance of Victoria station, the exact address is 'a secret', and for Lawrence the city has taken on the appearance of 'hell' with its 'attendant demons'.<sup>60</sup>

In each case, Gothic horror is located in an imaginary or unreal space that is however within walking distance of a recognisable London point-reference: Hammersmith Workhouse, Victoria station, Piccadilly Circus, the Houses of Parliament. As noted above, the monster's lair acts as a node connecting the real with the imaginary. Marsh disorients the reader by omitting or inventing street names while providing the name of the district. This process of 'defamiliarisation of the self in relation to location', as Wolfreys puts it, is furthered through the Gothic trope of the pathetic fallacy.<sup>61</sup> An imagery of darkness, fog, rain and enclosure conveys a sense of the city as a place of danger, corruption and secrecy. Much of the action in the novels takes place at night, in reduced visibility. In *The Joss*, the 'miserable' and 'disagreeable weather', 'nasty east wind' and 'wet and slimy' pavements mean that the streets are 'deserted'.<sup>62</sup> 'Such was the darkness', Emily complains, 'that we could not see six feet down [the alley], so that it was impossible to tell where it led to, or what was at the end.'<sup>63</sup> The suspense and mystery created by darkness render the city Gothic, and fog and rain reduce visibility, and thus the legibility of the city, further. In *The Goddess*, 'a delightful fog', 'a cutting east wind' and 'a filthy rain' turn day into night as outside, 'the shadows . . . deepen' and 'the lamps [a]re lighted' 'between three and four o'clock in the afternoon' while the 'fog still h[a]ng[s] over the city' so that 'it might have been night'.<sup>64</sup> In *The Beetle*, rain and fog merge into a visibility-reducing 'fine but soaking drizzle' on the 'miserable night' on which Holt falls prey to the monster: '[t]he rain was like a mist, and was not only drenching [Holt] to the skin, but it was rendering it difficult to see more than a little distance in any direction. The neighbourhood was badly lighted.'<sup>65</sup> A 'keen north-east wind', bringing with it odours of East End tanning shops, is 'howling wildly' and 'shrieking' through the city, 'playing catch-who-catch-can with intermittent gusts of blinding rain' to heighten the reader's sense of unease for Holt, caught out on this 'deuce of a night'.<sup>66</sup>

In the darkness and the fog, the 'devious and dirty by-streets' of London take on an obscure and menacing 'quality . . . pregnant with

horrible suggestion'.<sup>67</sup> Mapping, and often very careful mapping, is undermined by the Gothic devices of disorientation and lack of visibility, and the reader's, as well as the characters', mental map of Marsh's Gothic London will by now be growing indistinct. Lynch notes that the 'need to recognize and pattern our surroundings is so crucial' that 'ambiguity of shape at the city core' can be seen as 'a major orientation flaw'.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Lynch posits, the inhabitants of a modern city are so well supported by 'way-finding devices' that 'becom[ing] completely lost is perhaps a rather rare experience'.<sup>69</sup> Feelings of disorientation generate 'fear', a 'sense of anxiety and even terror' out of all proportion to the practical inconvenience occasioned by being lost so that the 'very word "lost" in our language means much more than simple geographical uncertainty; it carries overtones of utter disaster'.<sup>70</sup> 'Utter disaster', of course, befalls Holt when he loses his way somewhere south of Hammersmith. Bessie Moore, the amnesiac female protagonist of *The Goddess*, is luckier than Holt to fall into friendly hands in her state of utter bewilderment and horror caused by loss of her bearings. Bessie's words indicate that her identity is closely bound up with her sense of her 'place' in the world: 'I can't think where I am', she states, 'I don't know where my home is . . . I don't know who I am or what is my name.'<sup>71</sup> 'Where am I?' she asks, 'Where did I come from?'<sup>72</sup> She is utterly disoriented: 'Where are we? I have not the least idea where you are taking me.'<sup>73</sup> And she has lost her home: 'Going home? Where is my home? Yes, I know I ought to know . . . but – I can't just find it.'<sup>74</sup> Bessie's bewilderment is so extreme that it disturbs the reader. Her inability to provide details of her provenance and home amounts to a complete loss of her identity.

As discussed above, Franco Moretti argues that nineteenth-century urban novels typically reassure the reader by simplifying the cityscape or reducing its bewildering randomness to 'a binary system' of 'half-Londons', 'a neat oppositional pattern which is much easier to read'.<sup>75</sup> Marsh's urban Gothic is not as simply defined as this, and instead bears a close resemblance to Charles Booth's poverty maps with their fuzzy or non-existent boundaries between different social systems. Turning the wrong corner, as Holt does, may take an unknowing pedestrian, a 'stranger' in a 'strange and inhospitable' district, from relative safety to the direst of perils.<sup>76</sup> It is not clear

where, for Holt, the boundary is crossed, where respectable or 'real' London begins to blend into the 'real-and-imagined' space that can accommodate the monster. It appears, however, that a mental or moral boundary has to be crossed simultaneously. For Holt, this involves rejection by the workhouse; for Pollie and Emily, unemployment and homelessness; for Lawrence, unmanageable gambling debts and alcoholism. In each case, the characters' self-image undergoes a significant shift before the city begins to blur around them. They face the need to reassess their social position, to adjust what Fredric Jameson terms their 'cognitive mapping' of their place in the world.<sup>77</sup> Arguably, then, the spatial shift from the 'real' to the Gothic is inextricably linked to the characters' sense of being lost not only in urban space but also in the social organisation. As discussed in chapter 2, this careful topical linkage between social displacement and spatial disorientation is an important element in Marsh's urban Gothic.

*'A dual world': the alien city*

As Jonathan Schnerer notes, fin-de-siècle London was 'a "world city"' and 'perhaps the most cosmopolitan city in Europe, but not always happily so'.<sup>78</sup> With 'the world's busiest port' and 'its richest, most cosmopolitan financial center', the imperial metropolis 'acted like a magnet not only on the produce of empire and the funds which facilitated its functioning, but on the peoples of the empire and the world beyond'.<sup>79</sup> As a result, 'imperial markers were everywhere' and 'imperialism was central to the city's character' and its 'identity which was fluid, subtle, and the object of contestation'.<sup>80</sup> In an era of imperial expansion, the 'darkness' and unknowability of slums functioned as a rhetorical device that conflated the East End with the Empire.<sup>81</sup> The social explorers depicted their topic in strikingly racial and imperial tones, drawing analogies between the colonial subjects and the indigenous poor.<sup>82</sup> In this discourse, social explorers functioned as anthropologists, 'penetrating' an urban jungle, the uncharted territory of 'Darkest London', as Stanley and Livingstone had braved the jungles of 'Darkest Africa'. As Seth Koven notes, the slums, 'conveniently close' to the West End, were represented as 'anarchic, distant outposts of empire peopled by violent and primitive

racess'.<sup>83</sup> 'As there is a darkest Africa is there not also a darkest England?' enquired General Booth of the Salvation Army,

May we not find a parallel at our own doors, and discover within a stone's throw of our cathedrals and palaces similar horrors to those which Stanley has found existing in the great Equatorial forest? . . . What a satire it is upon our Christianity and our civilisation, that the existence of these colonies of heathens and savages in the heart of our capital should attract so little attention!<sup>84</sup>

George Sims described his account of outcast London as 'a book of travel', 'the result of a journey into a region which lies at our own doors – into a dark continent that is within easy walking distance of the General Post Office'.<sup>85</sup> Robert Blatchford confirmed that 'within half an hour's walk of the City boundaries we were in a foreign country', while Joseph Salter compared the streets of east London to 'an Asiatic jungle of courts and alleys'.<sup>86</sup> This foreignness was due to the different modes of life of the 'natives' of the East End, but also to the number of foreign immigrants in the area. As the first port of call for immigrants to Britain, the East End, with its growing Jewish and Chinese communities, was peculiarly suited to accommodate such imaginary landscaping. Here Sims found 'a page of the old Orient bound up in the book of modern Western life'; almost forgetting that he was 'in London', he felt he could have been 'in Cairo or Mogador'.<sup>87</sup> Jack London wrote of encountering in the streets of outcast London a 'new and different race of people, short of stature, and of wretched or beer-sodden appearance'.<sup>88</sup> These 'rotten adults, without virility or stamina, a weak-kneed, narrow-chested, listless breed' were but 'a welter of rags and filth, of all manner of loathsome skin diseases, open sores, bruises, grossness, indecency, leering monstrosities, and bestial faces'.<sup>89</sup> 'A new race has sprung up', London concluded:

I may say that I saw a nightmare, a fearful slime that quickened the pavement with life, a mess of unmentionable obscenity . . . It was a menagerie of garmented bipeds that looked somethings [*sic*] like humans and more like beasts . . . They are a new species, a breed of city savages. The streets and houses, alleys and courts, are their hunting

grounds . . . The slum is their jungle, and they live and prey in the jungle.<sup>90</sup>

In a conflation of the immigrant with other ‘lamentably alien’ elements in Western society – ‘delinquents, the insane, women, the poor’ – the urban decay of the slums was seen to have stripped the inhabitants of their British characteristics, turning them into an alien race with animalistic, violent and criminal tendencies.<sup>91</sup> A panoptic, cartographic, anthropological impulse is at work in the social explorers’ attempts to classify and contain the ‘alien’ life forms found in the East End.

Marsh’s novels bring to London monsters from topical corners of British spheres of interest: Egypt, or possibly the Sudan, in *The Beetle*, India in *The Goddess* and Southern China in *The Joss*. Glennis Byron notes that the Beetle, a monster that ‘equal[s] even Stoker’s Count Dracula in the number of boundaries she manages to transgress’, is particularly challenging an opponent because ‘she has not remained in Egypt: she has invaded London’, a city that itself represents ‘the locus of cultural decay’ where ‘the threat . . . may well come from within’.<sup>92</sup> The monsters are not located in the East End, so often seen as analogous to the Empire in contemporary discourses, but on the semi-periphery of London’s expanding suburbia, within easy reach of the imperial centre. The analogy with the Empire is nonetheless clearly established in the doubling of London’s suburban wilderness with ‘the native quarter’ of Cairo, the ‘trackless forest’ of China and the ‘queer things’ that ‘still take place in India’.<sup>93</sup> While Robert Holt comes to grief by raising a sash in Walham Green, Paul Lessingham similarly looks through a lattice in a dirty Cairo street to his lasting regret in a scene that bears a remarkable resemblance to Holt’s wanderings in the London night: ‘It was a narrow street’, Lessingham recalls, ‘and, of course, a dirty one, ill-lit, and . . . deserted. I . . . wonder[ed] . . . what would happen to me if, as seemed extremely possible, I lost my way.’<sup>94</sup> After hearing music through ‘an open window’, Lessingham enters what he assumes to be a brothel, though ‘hardly in the ordinary line of that kind of thing’, only to be drugged and kidnapped by the sexually voracious worshippers of Isis.<sup>95</sup> His escape from their ‘den of demons’ sees him ‘rushing through vaulted passages, through endless corridors’ until he is picked up, naked, in

a Cairo street, as Holt is in London twenty years later.<sup>96</sup> In *The Joss*, the Chinese pursue the English imperialists from a ‘monstrous’ ‘heathen temple’, ‘lost in shadows’ and conveying ‘a haunting impression of illimitable distance’, through ‘a trackless forest’ before taking up the chase in the urban jungle of London.<sup>97</sup> In *The Goddess*, gentlemen look for amusement at the Empire Theatre, but in India, a theatre of imperial action, they get more than they bargained for. Atherton may remind the Beetle that ‘this is London, not a dog-hole in the desert’, but the monster’s alien customs and oriental magic transform contemporary London into an alien city.<sup>98</sup> ‘Fleet Street might be within a hop, skip, and jump’, Frank Payne is forced to admit in *The Joss*, ‘but, for the present, this spot in its immediate neighbourhood was delivered over to the methods of the East.’<sup>99</sup> While in accordance with the social explorers’ accounts of the alien spaces within the city, this doubling of the imperial and the (sub)urban contributes to spatial confusion in the three novels. ‘I am living in a dual world’, Lessingham declares, unable to distinguish between London and ‘that Egyptian den’.<sup>100</sup> The city becomes not only a vaguely unfamiliar but a manifestly alien space that harbours inhabitants and customs distinctly un-English.

Raymond Williams contrasts the ‘knowable communities’ of the past with the ‘crowded strangeness’ of the city where people know little of each other.<sup>101</sup> An encounter with this strange, uncanny or alien world, Williams argues, may result in a tolerant crossing of boundaries, or alternatively in ‘mystery and strangeness and the loss of connection’.<sup>102</sup> The panoptic ideal of the well-governed city breaks down in Marsh’s fiction because of the monsters’ ability to hide in the unknowable suburbs, ‘pass’ in London’s anonymous flux and gain allies amongst the city’s marginal inhabitants. If, as Edward Said argues, the imperial territories represent ‘realms of possibility’ in nineteenth-century fiction, then in Marsh’s reverse-colonisation narratives the city mirrors the Empire in facilitating monstrous invasions: it provides opportunities for the monsters.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, for Wolfreys, the Beetle is ‘the most typical London inhabitant: its is the most appropriate identity within a city which, like itself, cannot be fixed as a single identity’.<sup>104</sup> For Said, ‘stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; [but] they also become the method colonized people use to assert their

own identity and the existence of their own history.<sup>105</sup> In Marsh's urban Gothic, two narratives exist side by side: one, British, dominant, overt, set in an imageable city; the other, foreign, marginal, implicit, placed in a real-and-imagined Gothic metropolis. As Johan Höglund notes, concurrent voices often compete within Marsh's fiction without a conclusive resolution in favour of any one viewpoint.<sup>106</sup> It is part of the disorientating world of Marsh's urban Gothic fiction that the alternative narratives of the three monsters are struggling for a voice alongside the panoptic impulse to contain and destroy deviance.

Marsh's urban Gothic, then, articulates a counter-narrative to the nineteenth century's ideals of teleology, rationality and panoptic control of the bodies moving through the well-governed city. Marsh's London, while containing elements of Kevin Lynch's imageable city, is yet not a city that facilitates easy way-finding. The reader, like the characters, is lost in the Gothic cityscape in which only the monster exercises panoptic, and often remote, control over events and people. 'Those eyes of hers!' Edwin Lawrence exclaims of the Goddess, 'They never sleep, and never blink or wink, but watch, watch, watch all the time. They've watched me ever since the game began. They're watching now! ... She's always with me, wherever I am.'<sup>107</sup> The Beetle, similarly, is described as 'nothing but eyes' that 'shone out like lamps in a lighthouse tower'.<sup>108</sup> 'Unseen, in the darkness and the night, I will stalk beside you, and will lead you to where I would have you go', the Beetle assures Holt, 'All the time I shall be with you. You will not see me, but I shall be there.'<sup>109</sup> The reader, too, is left with a confusing map of the city's topography, and a sense of the monster's unremitting gaze controlling the narrative. In Jane Austen's work, Franco Moretti notes, imaginary spaces are happy and real places pessimistic.<sup>110</sup> It is chiefly the opposite in Marsh's urban Gothic fiction: scenes of horror, metamorphosis and the uncanny are primarily located in imaginary or 'real-and-imagined' spaces, disorientation disrupting the characters' sense of identity. Urban Gothic inhabits, even demands, the spatial disorientation of the unreal cityscape. It is, therefore, not surprising that transitory spaces, through which characters pass or which are themselves mobile – stations, hotels, restaurants, modes of transport – feature extensively in Marsh's Gothic fiction as sites of horror and haunting. These 'non-places' are the topic of the next chapter.