The Magical Imagination
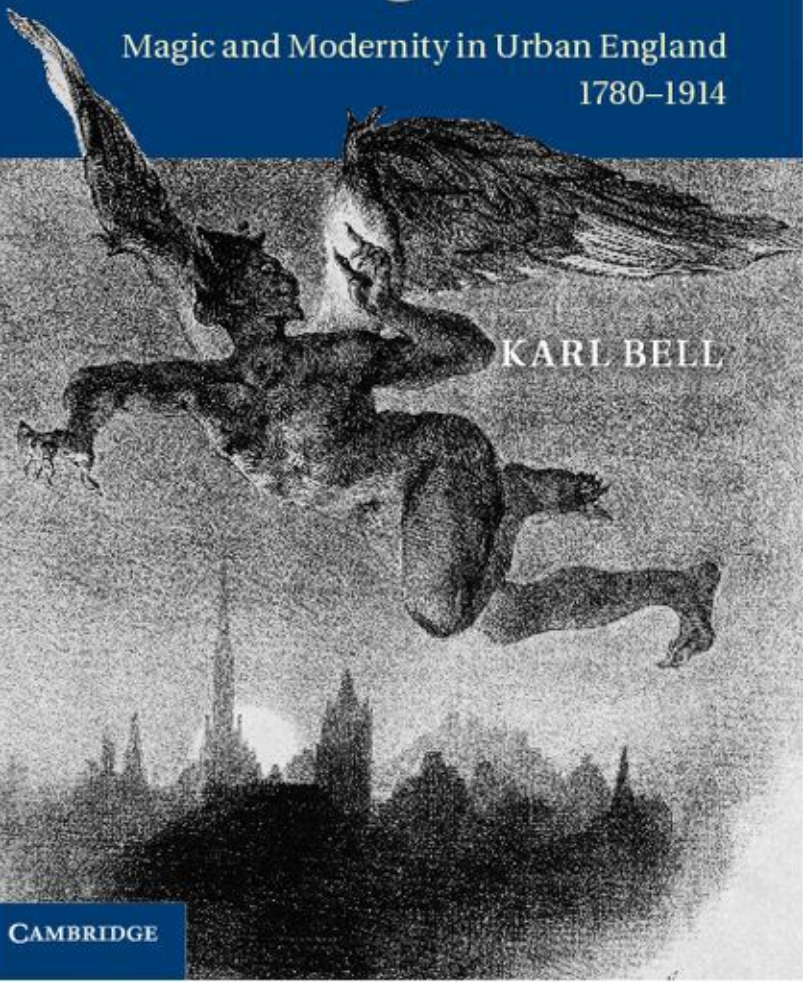
Magic and Modernity in Urban England
1780–1914

KARL BELL

The Magical Imagination

This innovative history of popular magical mentalities in nineteenth-century England explores the dynamic ways in which the magical imagination helped people to adjust to urban life. Previous studies of modern popular magical practices and supernatural beliefs have largely neglected the urban experience. Karl Bell, however, shows that the magical imagination was a key cultural resource which granted an empowering sense of plebeian agency in the nineteenth-century urban environment. Rather than portraying magical beliefs and practices as a mere enclave of anachronistic 'tradition' and the fantastical as simply an escapist refuge from the real, he reveals magic's adaptive and transformative qualities and the ways in which it helped ordinary people navigate, adapt to, and resist aspects of modern urbanisation. Drawing on perspectives from cultural anthropology, sociology, folklore, and urban studies, this is a major contribution to our understanding of modern popular magic and the lived experience of modernisation and urbanisation.

KARL BELL is a senior lecturer in History at the University of Portsmouth. He is a cultural and social historian who specialises in the history of Britain from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century.

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Introduction: the magical imagination

> If we would know man in all his subtleties, we must deviate into the world of miracles and sorcery. To know the things that are not, and cannot be, but have been imagined and believed … to observe the actual results of these imaginary phenomena … is one of the most instructive studies in which we can possibly be engaged.[1]
>
> William Goodwin,
> *Lives of the Necromancers* (1834)

In the context of this book my term for William Goodwin's 'things that are not, and cannot be, but have been imagined and believed' is the magical imagination. This is perceived as a broad, overarching concept, not only embodying specific magical practices such as witchcraft and astrology, but also encompassing a fantastical mentality informed by supernatural beliefs, folkloric tropes, and popular superstitions.[2] This is not to assume that the magical imagination was a unified, bounded, stable, or necessarily coherent mode of thought and action. Rather, as this study aims to illustrate, it encompassed multiple and diverse forms of knowledge, social interactions, cultural practices, behaviours, and customs. It is to gain a sense of the scope of such expressions that I have necessarily cast my interpretative net so wide. A single strand of this magical mentality, be it witchcraft belief or supernatural legends, may appear thin and brittle in the nineteenth century, giving an illusion of merely being a lingering cultural 'survival', the derogatory terminology of contemporary critics. A broader appreciation of its reinforcing warp and weft reiterates just how strong this mental fabric actually was in this period.

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[1] Goodwin, *Lives of the Necromancers*, p. vii.
[2] In breadth it most closely reflects what Judith Devlin termed 'the superstitious mind' and what Annales historians refer to as *mentalités*. See Devlin, *The Superstitious Mind* and J. Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. A. Goldhammer (University of Chicago Press, 1992). For a summary of the Annales approach to the history of mentalities see P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: Annales School, 1929–1989*, 2nd edn (Stanford University Press, 1991).

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The magical imagination therefore resembled what the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss referred to as a *bricolage*, a 'creative, associational … mode of thought', a mentality defined by its acquisitive nature and adaptive capacity to fuse disparate elements of totemic or 'magical' rituals and practices into a heterogeneous but somehow comprehensible assembly of its own. This positive interpretation contrasts sharply with Christopher Lehrich's recent claim that *bricolage* is formulated from 'the shattered remnants of past systems', or 'the odds and ends' as he rather dismissively puts it. In his view this detritus lacks any creativity beyond its ability to form new combinations out of old components. For Lehrich, bricolage is an inert 'endpoint' collage rather than a dynamic process.[3] This study fundamentally contests this view for rather than reading the magical imagination as consisting purely of residual ideas, concepts, and energies it will be argued that it possessed contemporaneous purpose and vitality. Rather than viewing supernatural beliefs and magical practices as residual remnants it argues for their ongoing applicability as valuable cultural inheritances.

Sasha Handley has recently warned against conflating witchcraft and ghost beliefs, being rightly critical of the way in which the former has eclipsed and even subsumed the latter into a footnote of academic study.[4] While appreciating that these were two distinct elements this study seeks to avoid imposing false hierarchies of supernatural beliefs, examining both as incorporated aspects of the magical imagination. Implicit to this approach is a view that historians tacitly score artificial fissures into the supernatural worldview when they choose to study its various features as rigidly separate topics. Of course the magical imagination should not be considered as a monolithic entity which required belief in all its multitudinous manifestations at the same time. The extent to which belief in the efficacy of spells, the reality of any given ghost story, or the validity of a particular superstition was held naturally varied from person to person, and in all likelihood oscillated between poles of belief and disbelief throughout an individual's life. It should be stressed from the beginning that the principal focus of this study is not so much on obtaining some gauge as to this (shifting) extent of belief, something virtually impossible in quantifiable terms, but more on perceptions of these beliefs and the functions in which they were employed.

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[3] See Hylland Eriksen, *Small Places, Large Issues*, pp. 239–40, and Lehrich, *The Occult Mind*, p. 163.
[4] Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*, p. 6.

Whilst stating intentions it should also be made clear from the start that this study consciously diverges from the predominant and certainly more familiar historiographical narratives of the supernatural in the nineteenth century. In the past two decades considerable ink and effort has been expended on an ever-increasing body of fascinating research into spiritualism, psychical investigations, elite occultism, and literary ghost fiction. Yet with few bold exceptions, historians have not ventured far from topics that can be intellectually justified to their peers on the grounds of their rich cross-fertilisation of literary, scientific, psychological, philosophical, and gendered discourses. Of course this is overwhelmingly due to the wealth of insights that can be garnered from such research, but one cannot help but wonder how much it is also informed by a certain mindfulness as to which topics can be deemed to possess academic credibility and which cannot.[5] The result has been that highly educated scholars have tended to focus on the 'magical' beliefs and practices of the nineteenth century's educated elite, a narrowness that is noticeably absent when historians approach magical mentalities in the medieval and early modern period. Although some practices such as spiritualism clearly crossed social boundaries, the academic focus on predominantly bourgeois approaches to the supernatural has largely eclipsed study of the magical mentalities of the majority of England's population in this period, especially its urban dwellers. This book hopes to go some small way towards redressing that situation for while it necessarily touches upon these more 'modern' supernatural trends, its emphasis is emphatically on what could be termed the popular or plebeian magical imagination.

[5] See A. Butler, *Invoking Tradition: Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2010), McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self*, Smajic, *Ghost-Seers*, Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, A. Smith, *The Ghost Story 1840–1920: A Cultural History* (Manchester University Press, 2010), Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, R. Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870–1901* (Oxford University Press, 2002), J. Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings*, J. Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), Bown *et al.* (eds.), *The Victorian Supernatural*, Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking*, D. Pick, *Svengali's Web – The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000), P. Buse and A. Stott (eds.), *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 1999), Winter, *Mesmerized*, A. Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), M. K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester, Vermont, Park Street Press, 1995), D. Basham, *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 1992), Owen, *Darkened Room*, and J. Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1985). Amongst those rarer works which consider more popular expressions of magical and supernatural beliefs are Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, and L. Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850–1910* (London, Routledge, 1986). See also Lehrich, *The Occult Mind*, pp. xi–xiv.

My use of the word 'imagination' should not lead one to belittle this raft of magical mentalities as simply make-believe, the dismissive conclusion of Goodwin and numerous other nineteenth-century commentators. It is only in the term 'imagination' that one can find a workable concept large enough in which to contain all these various elements. Despite, or perhaps because of the conceptual vagueness of a magical 'imagination' or 'mentality' it makes a useful distinction from ideology. Ideologies tend to be conscious and more clearly defined intellectual constructs than mentalities, which have a less precise, fuzzier definition indicating more innate, and unarticulated mental processes. Such mental aspects are also less obviously shaped along lines or language of social and political divide such as 'popular' and 'elite'. Appropriating Lucien Febvre's interpretation of mentalities as 'the underlying characteristics of the mind', the magical imagination represents expressions of its most fantastical propensities, not rigidly deterministic 'structures' but rather a predilection towards particular 'operations … capacities or predispositions'.[6] As such the magical imagination can be defined as a mode of cognitive or epistemological interpretation manifested through specific cultural practices.[7] While its emphasis on the fantastical means the magical imagination is necessarily more specific than the popular imagination in general, its parameters are nevertheless broad enough to encompass not just 'traditional' expressions of the supernatural but also its transformed, secular, and self-consciously 'modern' manifestations in this period.

In this context the magical imagination could be situated in relation to two recent works which explore alternatives to a supposedly normative modern rationality. The aforementioned Christopher Lehrich's thought-provoking *The Occult Mind* focuses predominantly on the early modern period whilst Jeffrey Kripal's *Authors of the Impossible* provides a fascinating examination of twentieth-century discourses between the paranormal and the sacred. Heuristically, it would be convenient if the magical imagination could simply be slotted into place as the 'missing link' in an evolutionary transition from the 'occult' mind to a paranormal mindset. Unfortunately histories of mentalities, magical or otherwise, are rarely that neat. Although some aspects were incorporated into (pseudo-)scientific discourses, one cannot claim this as representative of a plebeian 'paranormal' turn. The significant conceptual shifts

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[6] Lloyd, *Demystifying Mentalities*, p. 136.
[7] For similar formulations see D. E. McCarthy, *Knowledge as Culture: The New Sociology of Knowledge* (London, 1996), and A. Swindler, 'Culture in Action. Symbols and Strategies', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 51 (1986), pp. 273–86.

and recategorisation that accompanied moves from the 'magical' to the 'psychical' and from the 'occult' to the 'paranormal' were largely elitist endeavours in this period, a fact recognised by Kripal's focus on the efforts of learned academics to attempt what might be termed the scientification of the sacred.[8]

The emphasis on 'imagination' is not purely determined by its capacity to encompass a range of magical expressions and a useful degree of conceptual elasticity compared with other mental processes. Recently both historians of secular magic and philosophers and sociologists of modernity have turned to the imagination as a means of exploring and understanding the dynamics of modernisation and this study seeks to situate itself within that context. Importantly, my conceptualisation of the magical imagination differs considerably from what could be termed the ironic imagination, not least in the latter's explicit self-awareness of its own functioning, particularly its knowing suspension of disbelief. This has been advocated by a number of predominantly American scholars who have viewed the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as witnessing the development of various forms of disenchanted enchantment.[9] Commercial entertainments such as phantasmagorias and magical stage shows encouraged an engagement with the supernatural and enchanted grounded in the certainties of 'modern' scepticism; performers and audiences both appreciated such activities as deceptions but willingly enjoyed them as entertainments. From the rise of Gothic fiction in the mid-late eighteenth century the supernatural was fictionalised and transformed from folkloric 'realities' to the literary imaginary. This emphasis on modern enchantment has encouraged an appreciation of the antinomies of modernity, emphasising the complicated co-existence of belief and disbelief in, or at least desire for, the 'magical'.

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[8] See Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, pp. 8–9, and pp. 36–91. Until the end of the nineteenth century plebeian interpretations of science's mysterious energies and influences tended to be expressed through a familiarly persistent lexicon of the 'magical' rather than an emerging 'paranormal' framework. See Bell, 'Remaking Magic', pp. 46–48. Notions of the paranormal eventually filter into popular consciousness but, as Kripal suggests, they largely arrived via 'the back door', through commercialised, popular cultural forms that came to maturity during the course of the twentieth century – science fiction, superhero comics, and horror films. See Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, p. 31. See also Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West, vol. 1, Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (London, T And T Clark, 2004), and Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2001).

[9] See Castle, *Female Thermometer*, Cook, *Arts of Deception*, During, *Modern Enchantments*, and Landy and Saler, *The Re-enchantment of the World*.

Regardless of whether we view magical mentalities as over or under-lying more rational conceptualisations of the world, their potential clearly extended beyond the boundaries of the latter. The rational, the logical and, indeed, the ironic set limits on the possible that the magical imagination ignored. Yet the existence of both suggests the potential plurality of magical and rational mentalities within a single individual, reiterating an antinomial position in which people were capable of main-taining seemingly contradictory but concurrent modes of thought.[10] Therefore while sympathising with this approach this study questions the seemingly intrinsic bias towards disbelief (or at least its temporary suspension) in works on antinomian modernity, a bias that arises from the ironic imagination's formulation as knowing indulgence, a stance that inherently avoids threatening its own 'modern' rational founda-tions. Challenging that imbalance, it will be argued that the agglomer-ation of supernatural aspects in the magical imagination testifies to the previously underestimated extent of genuine belief in the fantastical in the nineteenth century. Of course the operation of the magical imagin-ation did not exclude the possibility of disagreement, division or even oppositional disbelief. It was a way in which individuals and communi-ties could approach, constitute, navigate, and understand their urban world but it was neither sufficiently self-conscious nor rigid enough to demand conformity; rather than closed meanings it offered open inter-pretations which naturally engendered tensions. Given this it was also unable to operate as a sustainable oppositional mode of thought for subaltern groups, though later chapters will suggest that it could inter-mittently articulate such views. While being treated with scepticism or self-knowing deception by some, the magical imagination clearly differs from the ironic imagination in that these were not its default positions. Here rationalism had to vie with the power of the imagination and the very real belief it could foster.

Beyond this ironic engagement with secular magic, the imagination has been variously conceptualised and employed by theorists of mod-ernity. Johann P. Arnason has argued that modern culture derives from confrontation between Enlightenment and Romanticism, not to be conceived as narrow historical epochs but as labels for the broader cul-tural forces of reason and imagination. This division between an ability to variously imagine or rationalise the modern world necessarily gener-ated different perspectives, even different modernities, a point that will be developed later. These polarised responses supposedly offer us 'the cultural infra-structures of interpretation' by which we can understand

[10] Lloyd, *Demystifying Mentalities*, p. 42.

modernity.[11] However, in the mode of the antinomy approaches indicated above, this study suggests a more ambiguous confluence between such opposites, for while under Arnason's criteria magical mentalities form a popular expression of Romanticism, the functionality of the magical imagination necessarily includes rationalising and pragmatic components too. It is this that renders the magical imagination more than just make-believe, escapism, or mere perception. Rather it grew from, was sustained by, and found functional application in the nineteenth-century urban experience.

This study explores two general levels of engagement with the magical imagination; the individual and the collective. This has resonance with what Cornelius Castoriadis has termed the 'radical imagination' and the 'social instituting imaginary'.[12] The 'radical imagination', socialised into the individual but encouraging resistance to socialisation, possesses many of the empowering aspects of the individual applications of the magical imagination, for it is directed towards the individual psyche seeking to give meaning to the existing world rather than constructing mere fantasies. In particular its supernatural elements offered a distancing perspective from mundane reality, potentially disrupting the accepted 'weight' of normality, though how people chose to interpret and fill that distance varied. By contrast the 'social instituting imaginary' is the means by which collectively created meanings are institutionalised within societies. This study examines how the collective applications of the magical imagination tended to operate at the local communal level, where its mainly narrative instituting of meaning was less formalised than in Castoriadis' larger society. As such, the magical imagination has both resonances with and divergences from other formulations of the modern imagination and these will be developed throughout the course of this book.

The application of a shared mentality to a group or section of society is always problematic given that it potentially encourages a homogenous, straitjacketing view of past thought processes that obscure diverse individual perspectives. At the same time there are issues of how we gauge change, over time and between individuals. Just as magical mentalities were not monolithic nor were they static, for they interacted

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[11] D. Roberts, 'Epilogue', pp. 174–5. See also J. P. Arnason, 'Reason, Imagination, Interpretation' in G. Robinson and J. Rundell (eds.), *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity* (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 155–70.

[12] Robinson and Rundell (eds.), *Rethinking Imagination*, p. 9. See Castoriadis, 'Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary', pp. 136–54. See also R. M. J. Byrne, *The Rational Imagination: How People Create Alternatives to Reality* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2007).

with changing social, cultural, technological, and historical circumstances. This diachronic dimension raises the awkward question of how (far) mentalities develop and transform, and to what extent underlying modes of thought remain broadly the same even when expressed in different ways. To apply a term like the magical imagination to a group's modes of thought and behaviour requires characteristics that are not just distinctive but also pervasive and relatively persistent.[13]

A further problem, ever the issue for cultural historical interpretation, is how far we as observers and analysers are prescribing defined mentalities that were not viewed as such by the people we are applying them to, thereby granting them an artificial coherence and self-awareness. In doing so we risk acting like nineteenth-century folklorists who made explicit and self-conscious what had been a largely implicit, more subconscious mode of thinking. The observer altered the observed by recording it, and thus detaching it from the cultural, environmental (and mental) context in which it thrived. This subsequently led these aspects of the magical imagination to be distinguished in contemporary discourse as those which were unusual, conceptually distinguishing them from perceived (or promoted) norms of thought and behaviour.[14] As will be examined in a subsequent chapter, the delineation of various contemporary mentalities served an ideological function in promoting some as 'norms' and eclipsing or distancing others. In part this study is intended as a compensatory attempt to appreciate a mode of popular nineteenth-century thought that has been overshadowed by our predominant emphasis on rationalisation or, at best, a (culturally) elitist counter-rational Romanticism in this period.[15] It necessarily approaches the magical imagination at least once removed, not by arrogantly claiming direct insight into intimate thoughts but rather by viewing the way these mentalities found expression, as actions and cultural practices, in the modernising urban environment. In short, it makes intimations about the mental world of many urban dwellers by studying the effects of such beliefs, exploring the powerful relationship between people's perceptions, responses, desires, fears, and plans, and

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[13] See Lloyd, *Demystifying Mentalities*, pp. 4–6.
[14] See Styers, *Making Magic*, p. 25. See also M. Gaskill, 'Time's Arrows: Context and Anachronism in the History of Mentalities', *Scientia Poetica*, vol. 10 (2006), pp. 237–53.
[15] Craig Calhoun suggests Romanticism was as significant as rationalism in the construction of modernity and it is testament to the power of a discursive 'rational' modernity that it is still frequently positioned as oppositional. See Calhoun, 'Postmodernism as Pseudohistory', pp. 75–96.

the way these internal processes were then externally manifested in the prosaic realities of individual and communal lives.[16]

The magical imagination as agency

This study transposes to a modernising, urban, Western environment the functionalist theory of magic that the pioneering anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski applied to the Trobriand islanders. He observed that magic provided a sense of control in situations of insecurity and impotence, offering the powerless some form of influence over a chaotic, powerful environment. Serving short-term individual or social psychological needs, magic granted a sense of influence in circumstances through its institutionalisation of hope and fear, assuaging anxiety and defending against feelings of impotence by granting the confidence to act in manifesting one's intentions.[17] If application of Malinowski's functionalist interpretations of magic may seem both dated and culturally specific to the Trobriand Islanders it is worth emphasising that anthropologists are increasingly coming to appreciate not just the presence but the role of magic in modernising societies.[18] This approach may engender obvious criticisms that the cultural gulf between early twentieth-century Trobrianders and English urban dwellers was too wide as to enable any application of such theories. Yet to not at least consider the potential application of such a theory to nineteenth-century England is to merely perpetuate occidental notions of the West

[16] See Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, pp. 13–14. For more on this interaction between popular mentalities and material realities see P. Spierenberg, *The Broken Spell: A Cultural and Anthropological History of Preindustrial Europe* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1991), P. Camporesi, *Bread of Dreams: Food and Fantasy in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989), and C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Miller*, trans. J. and A. Tedeschi (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

[17] Malinowski, 'Magic, Science and Religion', pp. 69–70. See also Bailey, 'The Meanings of Magic', pp. 1–2, O'Keefe, *Stolen Lightning*, pp. 318–19, Jahoda, *Psychology of Superstition*, p. 134, and P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 114–54. There has been considerable debate over this functionalist interpretation of magic. See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 58–59, and Thornton and Skalnik (eds.), *The Early Writings of Bronislaw Malinowski*, pp. 40–41.

[18] See for example Meyer and Pels, *Magic and Modernity*, R. Romberg, *Witchcraft and Welfare: Spiritual Capital and the Business of Magic in Modern Puerto Rico* (Austin, Texas, University of Texas Press, 2003), G. C. Bond and D. M. Ciekawy (eds.), *Witchcraft Dialogues – Anthropological and Philosophical Exchanges* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2001), H. L. Moore and T. Sanders (eds.), *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft, and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (London, Routledge, 2001), Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, and J. and J. Comaroff (eds.), *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago University Press, 1993).

as inherently more 'rational' than alleged 'primitives', an obfuscating and highly dubious viewpoint that holds us enslaved to late Victorian imperialist notions of innate racial superiority. Few anthropologists would now accept Lucien Levy-Bruhl's divide of a 'primitive mentality' compared to a rational Western one, a division that even he came to soften in later works when he declared a 'mystical mentality' was 'present in every human mind'.[19]

The broad historical narrative of urbanisation has been presented as the story of increasing human control over nature, and therefore one that appears to offer an overarching explanation for the increasing redundancy of magic in this period. However, this study will consider the ways in which the nineteenth-century urban environment generated new anxieties: feelings of powerlessness in the face of socio-economic forces (poverty and unemployment), faceless bureaucracies, changing living and working conditions, an evolving physical environment which included threats such as epidemic disease and crime, and the growth of the unknown crowd as cities gradually increased in size and density. The risks from invisible forces in the supernatural world were replaced by the invisible forces of a developing capitalist economy and the cities that frequently formed its hubs.[20] Such forces and fears only intensified during the long nineteenth century and it is the nature of hindsight to obscure the scale of such uncertainties, if not in quantitative terms then certainly in the way they occupied people's minds.[21]

Given this, it is one of the central contentions of this study that magical mentalities were not a mere enclave of anachronistic 'tradition' ghettoised in modernity. Rather than portraying magical beliefs and practices as mere 'survivals' and the fantastical as merely an escapist psychological refuge from the real, it argues for a more rigorous reinterpretation of the magical imagination as a cultural resource that granted an empowering sense of agency in the nineteenth-century urban environment. Illustrative of the urban dweller's adaptive faculties, the magical imagination will be analysed as a way in which individuals and local communities managed uncertainty, offset feelings of impotence,

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19 See Lloyd, *Demystifying Mentalities*, p. 2. For Lucien Levy-Bruhl's ideas see his *Primitive Mentality*, trans. L. A. Clare (London, Allen & Unwin, 1923), *How Natives Think*, trans. L. A. Clare (London, Allen & Unwin, 1926), and *Notebooks on Primitive Mentality* (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 1976). For the rational dimensions of folk psychology see K. R. Stueber, *Rediscovering Empathy: Agency, Folk Psychology, and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2006).

20 For the eighteenth-century development of this trend see Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, p. 311.

21 See Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth*, p. 74.

and constructed meaning in their lives.[22] Its capacity to grant a meas-
ure of control over urban existence should be seen as co-existing with
(rather than replacing) the subconscious, adaptive mental attitudes of
Georg Simmel's 'metropolitan man', the evolved urban dweller who
supposedly adopted a blasé attitude to the nervous stimulation around
him so as to accommodate himself to the city's constant sensory bar-
rage.[23] Aspects of the magical imagination will be presented as a form
of social action, a means of informing and reinforcing local commu-
nal identities, catering to the psychological needs created by the nature
of urban dwelling, and protesting against perceived exploitation or
the pace of urban development. Implicit within this approach is the
view that the magical imagination was inherently radical, encouraging
engagement with powers and entities beyond the realm of explainable,
mundane norms.[24] This radical potential echoes Antonio Gramsci's
appreciation of folklore as an alternative worldview which opposes more
'official' interpretations.[25] It is in these more politicised and perceptual
ways that I wish to explore the magical imagination, considering its
ability to inform, maintain, reinforce, or challenge (in this case, local-
ised) power relations.

  This is not to romanticise the magical imagination as a form of
conscious resistance to modern urbanisation, for it was more often a
mental tool popularly employed to temper, accommodate, and navi-
gate those developments. As such the magical imagination's use in the
nineteenth-century urban environment reiterates classical sociological
and anthropological notions of the magical as something secular rather
than spiritual, functional rather than ceremonial.[26] Magical mental-
ities have often been defined in negative relationship to other modes
of thought in scholarly discourse and this was especially true in the
nineteenth century, when 'magic' served as a foil through which to

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[22] For the underlying individual and collective functions of magical mentalities see
Meyer and Pels (eds.), *Magic and Modernity*, p. 16.
[23] See Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity*, p. 153. For other urban copying strategies
see King and Tomkins (eds.), *The Poor in England 1700–1850*, T. Hitchcock and
H. Shore (eds.), *The Streets of London*, and T. Hitchcock, P. King, and P. Sharpe
(eds.), *Chronicling Poverty – The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor 1640–1840*
(Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997).
[24] See Bown *et al.* (eds.), *Victorian Supernatural*, p. 1.
[25] Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology*, p. 99.
[26] Anthropologists and sociologists have long defined religion against magic on the
grounds of the latter's narrowly pragmatic applications. Emile Durkheim, one such
proponent of this interpretation, argued that unlike the collective, speculative, and
supplicatory nature of religion, magic was orientated towards assertive secular, indi-
vidual needs and tangible outcomes. See Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious
Life*, p. 42. See also Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion*, and Styers, *Making Magic*.

define modernity's 'norms' of Christian religion, science, rationalism, and disenchantment.[27] Yet while James George Frazer's *Golden Bough* delineated three progressive stages of human development, from magic, to religion, to science, this study will show that in the late Victorian English society in which this great armchair anthropologist was writing such clear distinctions could not be sustained.[28] The popular magical imagination will be seen to have been entwined with religious beliefs and practices, while also frequently adopting the dress of the period's (pseudo-)science. Defined by dynamism, fluidity, conflation, and seepage across boundaries and categories, the magical imagination challenges simplistic tripartite divides between magic, religion, and science.

Therefore this book attempts to use this supposedly most un-modern of mentalities to obtain fresh insights into the communal, spatial, and temporal experiences of nineteenth-century urbanisation. This interaction between the urban environment and the collective imagination engages with the developing 'spatial turn' in urban historiography, an appreciation of space as a determining or at least influencing agent, not just as the backdrop to social dramas that happen to take place in cities.[29] In doing so it seeks to explore the pluralities of differently paced and conceived expressions of 'modernisation', variously formulated as continuous or discontinuous, as lived experience in the streets and ideological discourse from 'above'.[30] If these uses of the magical imagination in the urban environment present a seeming contradiction of 'traditional' practices and beliefs being used in 'modern' ways, then such a formulation only conforms to the paradoxical quality frequently cited as intrinsic to nineteenth-century modernisation.[31] Engaging with the falsity of a rupture between the 'traditional' and 'modern', it seeks to explore the dialogues across this ideologically constructed divide.

[27] See Styers, *Making Magic,* p. 13.
[28] See J. G. Frazer, *Oxford World Classics: The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, ed. and abridged by R. Fraser (Oxford Paperbacks, 2009).
[29] For more on this see Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, and Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. For recent examples of the 'spatial turn' see F. Williamson (ed.), *Locating Agency: Space, Power and Popular Politics* (Cambridge Scholars, 2010), Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, and L. Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-century London* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000).
[30] See Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*, p. 8.
[31] Marshall Berman argued that in the 1790s a sense of modernity arose from the sense of experiencing a revolutionary new world whilst still being products of a pre-modern one. See Berman, *All That Is Solid*, p. 17. For Thomas Carlyle's contradictory impressions of rapidly modernising Manchester see Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 93.

Historiographical context: the decline and rise of modern magic

The academic study of modern popular magic is still largely in its infancy. Up until the mid 1990s, historians of magic were generally unwilling, or at least hesitant, to launch beyond the legalistic boundary of the 1736 Witchcraft Acts, being content to cite a few later examples as evidence of anachronistic magical beliefs. James Sharpe went some way towards sketching out a preliminary map of where historians of modern magic could venture in the conclusion to his *Instruments of Darkness* (1996) but it was a new terrain that, by his own admission, he was reluctant to explore.[32] Later Victorian expressions of 'magical' mentalities, be they spiritualism, the stage shows of Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin or John Maskelyne, 'Pepper's Ghost', or the occult activities of the Order of the Golden Dawn, have generally been presented as something specific to the age and largely unconnected with older, ethnographic beliefs.

This approach was informed by the seemingly axiomatic belief that magic declined as modernity advanced. This paradigm, summarised as modernity *versus* magic, had long antecedents, not least in one of the earliest theories of magic provided by Hegel. It was he who promoted the idea that reason triumphantly emerged in a deceptively linear progression from magic to religion to science.[33] The theorist who best encapsulated this view of magic and modernity, and the one who haunts its historiography, was the early twentieth-century sociologist Max Weber. Weber argued for the decline of magic and a subsequent disenchantment of the world arose from modernity's shift towards more rational, bureaucratic systems and modes of thought. For Weber, the concepts of magic and modernity existed in a direct relationship with one another, the former emerging in proportion to the latter's decline. Particularly significant to this study was Weber's view that the city was 'a rational institution whose development can be traced to the decline of magic in all spheres of social life'.[34] Weber viewed the urban environment as the cradle of Western capitalism and hence European modernity. As such, magical thought had been increasingly replaced with an empirical, rational reality orientated towards procedure, calculation, and technological applications which allowed for mastery over everyday life.[35] Yet the cost of such control was the creation of a disenchanted

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[32] See Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, pp. 276–94.

[33] See O'Keefe, *Stolen Lightning*, p. 9.

[34] Morrison, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber*, p. 228. See also p. 342, and Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, p. 182.

[35] See Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', p. 139.

world in which bureaucratic efficiency and planned routine diminished the role of spontaneity, fantasy, and imagination.[36]

Weber's *Entzauberung* or disenchantment of the world was epitomised in Keith Thomas' monumental *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. Thomas' scintillating fusion of intellectual, social, and cultural history, his innovative methodological use of social anthropology, the wide-ranging exploration of magical healing, witchcraft, astrology, ghosts and fairies, and his multi-causal explanation for the decline of magic seemed, for a generation, to offer the final word on the topic. His authoritative work cast such a shadow over the field that it took over twenty years for early modernists to gradually chip away at the detail of his thesis. Challenging Weber and Thomas' emphasis on (Protestant) rationalism, Robert Scribner highlighted the way in which the Reformation actually represented a Protestant re-enchantment of the world, not least through the power of the (biblical) word which was to continue to form the basis of many spells and charms until at least the end of the nineteenth century.[37] More recently Sasha Handley's work on ghosts and ghost stories in the long eighteenth century has presented an engaging attempt to re-enchant the age of Enlightenment.[38] Yet by self-definition, early modernists stay within the chronological boundary set down by Thomas (even Handley's account makes only tentative inroads into the early nineteenth century). It falls to those who wished to venture beyond the eighteenth century, to 'modern' historians, to really question his argument.

As a result Weber's thesis of disenchantment and Thomas' comprehensive treatment of the topic have necessarily drawn the fire of recent historians of modern magic. Perhaps viewed with justifiable chagrin as immovable obstacles which denied magic a place in the modern world, various historians have formulated a number of ways of overcoming, undermining, or adapting the Weber–Thomas thesis by lacing their conceptions of modernity with complications, ambiguities, and seeming paradoxes. In their various ways all take issue with the way Weber underestimated the tenacity with which (a desire for) enchantment remained in the modernising world. From a popular rather than an intellectual perspective, there are fundamental weaknesses in many

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[36] See Hughs, Sharrock, and Martin, *Understanding Classical Sociology*, p. 13.
[37] See Scribner, 'The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the "Disenchantment of the World"'.
[38] See Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*. Handley's work on popular ghost beliefs suggests that historians' efforts to re-enchant the nineteenth century are unnecessary, a belief in the supernatural having never been as overwhelmingly dismissed as previously assumed.

of Thomas' assumptions about disenchantment arising from the emergence of statistical societies and the quantitative measuring of social sciences, the growth of insurance companies, the spread of science and mechanistic interpretations of the universe that left no room for appeal to supernatural forces beyond God as a first cause. These developments supposedly enhanced a sense of human control over nature and society, thus rendering one of the principal functions of magic void. Yet these were abstractions, institutions, interpretations, and processes that would have been largely unknown or invisible to the common man or woman. It is not enough to simply point to these developments as self-evident advances; one has to consider the more nebulous issue of their relative significance and impact. For most urban dwellers, local cooperative and friendly societies had far greater influence than a city's statistical society.[39] Statistical societies may have gathered and measured quantitative data that gave an impression of greater understanding or control but to have significance this information had to be converted into direct social effects, perhaps via municipal policies of 'improvement'. In contrast the cooperative society at least had a tangible role in offsetting the unknown future, helping to militate against the consequences of possible misfortune and thereby reducing the need to resort to magical practices.

Given Thomas' challenge to the validity of a history of modern magic, the debt owed to Owen Davies' groundbreaking efforts in the late 1990s is huge. Davies almost single-handedly opened up new academic vistas that comfortable, whiggish assumptions about 'superstition' and rationality had largely occluded.[40] Rather than re-enchantment, his studies provide a compelling argument for sustained enchantment throughout the period. Demonstrating a fairly robust continuity of early modern practices, albeit ones that were influenced by modern developments, he implied that these pre-industrial customs generally provided the same (personal) functions they had always done. Davies recognised degrees of continuity and decline among different types of magical practitioners, often responding to the social and communal upheavals of the period, with some forms of magic adapting better than others. While

[39] See for example P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies, 1580–1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2000).
[40] Davies' earlier work crystallised in his excellent *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736–1951*. For similar arguments related to the nineteenth-century European context see Blecourt and Davies (eds.), *Witchcraft Continued*, and Gijswijt-Hofstra *et al.*, *Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, vol. 5. For a summary of recent developments in the historiography of modern magic see K. Bell, 'Breaking Modernity's Spell – Magic and Modern History', *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 4 (2007), pp. 115–22, and Saler, 'Modernity and Enchantment'.

witchcraft beliefs lingered longer than witchcraft practices, astrologers, fortune-tellers, and clairvoyants were able to prosper into the early twentieth century.

Yet like all pioneers, Davies' mapping of modern magical beliefs necessarily provided a somewhat sketchy and general overview of the terrain. He noted how our assumptions about magical mentalities and cities as centres of rationality had caused historians to neglect the urban context as a site of magical beliefs.[41] This study's comparative approach will allow for a more nuanced investigation that will suggest the importance of regional variation and local contexts (social, economic, and cultural) in shaping the use and transformation of magical mentalities in differing urban environments. In exploring the nineteenth-century urban functions of the magical imagination this study also takes issue with Davies' arguments for decline. While convincingly illustrating that such a trend occurred considerably later than previously thought, his explanation for the increasing redundancy of magic towards the end of the nineteenth century is implicitly rooted in the changing nature of rural communities in this period, an argument that frequently reflects the contemporary bias that such beliefs were located in remote areas of the country.[42] While always mindful of the debt that is owed to Davies' trailblazing, this book seeks to build upon and advance considerably beyond his seminal investigations. Essentially, my approach to and interpretation of the subject is the opposite of Davies'. His central concern is how magic was affected by modernisation. While sharing this interest this book also explores how the experience of modernisation was navigated through the use of magical mentalities; in effect how modernisation was affected by magic. In doing so it seeks to use the magical imagination to broach bigger questions about the way we think about modernity itself.

With the exception of Davies' work, recent historiographical trends in modern magic have tended to focus on elite occultism, parapsychology, and commercialised or secular magic.[43] Given its focus on popular rather than elite occultism it is recent anthropological reflections upon magic's relationship with modernity that are often more pertinent

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[41] Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, p. 272. For the limited research on nineteenth-century urban magical mentalities see Davies, 'Urbanization and the Decline of Witchcraft', his engaging *Murder, Magic, Madness – The Victorian Trials of Dove and the Wizard* (Harlow, Longman, 2005), and S. C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880–1939* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

[42] See G. Bennett, 'Folklore Studies and the English Rural Myth', p. 87.

[43] See Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, Winter, *Mesmerized*, During, *Modern Enchantments*, and Pick, *Svengali's Web*.

to this study. Admitting that anthropology was the principal academic discipline that drove our sense of a binary divide between magic and modernity, Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels have made the distinction between 'the existence of magic *in* modernity' and 'the ways in which magic *belongs to* modernity'.[44] Through a broad range of case studies their book explores the ambiguous interaction between magic and modernity, and in so doing raises questions about our conceptualisation of both terms in the singular. It is this appreciation of the messiness of modernity, and the way magic has the potential to further encourage its greater conceptual chaos, that is one of the underlying values of Meyer and Pels' work. While earlier practitioners such as Edward Tylor, James George Frazer, and Lucien Levy-Bruhl may have been inclined to draw rigid divisions between 'primitive' (magical/oriental) and 'civilised' (rational/occidental) mentalities, Meyer and Pels demonstrate how more recent anthropologists have been ahead of historians in their appreciation of the plurality of modernities in a global context.[45] This study seeks to explore the applicability of such a concept to nineteenth-century England.

Of most recent historiographical significance is Joshua Landy and Michael Saler's *The Re-enchantment of the World*. Their recognition that as religion was pushed from its dominant position in modern society it was replaced by a counter-trend towards enchantment or re-enchantment is not particularly new.[46] They also abruptly dismiss and subsequently ignore 'traditional' ethnographic magical practices in this context, effectively echoing elitist Victorian ideas of magic as past belief. Landy and Saler's contributors are predominantly philosophers and intellectual and literary historians and the focus of their 'strategies' of re-enchantment are, for the most part, unashamedly elitist. Nevertheless, the diverse ways in which they demonstrate efforts towards re-enchantment in the nineteenth century make us firm compatriots in a continuing struggle to dismantle the Weberian thesis of modern disenchantment. While our interpretations of what can and should be termed 'enchantment' may differ, the importance of Landy and Saler's work lies in their conceptualisation of enchantment vis-à-vis

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[44] See Meyer and Pels, *Magic and Modernity*, p. 3.

[45] See *ibid*., pp. 29–31. See also R. W. Hefner, 'Multiple Modernities: Christianity, Islam and Hinduism in a Globalizing Age', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, no. 27 (1998), pp. 83–104, and Featherstone and Lash, 'Globalization, Modernity and the Spatialization of Social Theory'. For Tylor's ideas see E. B. Tylor, *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization* (London, MacMillan, 1881). For Frazer and Levy-Bruhl see the works cited in notes 19 and 28 above.

[46] Landy and Saler (eds.), *The Re-enchantment of the World*, p. 1.

modernity. Suggesting three approaches to our thinking about magic and modernity they first delineate (and reject) a *binary* approach which views magic as a residual remnant from a pre-modern age and spiritualism and the occult as a reaction to the arid rationalism and secular, existential angst of modernisation. This view of magic frequently posits, implicitly or explicitly, a hierarchy of superiority (the modern) and inferiority (the pre-modern) which assumes, asserts, and attempts to persuade us of both a dominant rationalism and the attendant marginalisation of 'superstition', making it a self-consciously 'modern' discourse with controlling intentions.[47]

They similarly reject a *dialectical* approach which views modernity itself as deceptively enchanted; modernity *as* magic. Such a view was principally derived from Marxists' attempts to explain the allure of consumer culture and the attendant failure of advanced capitalist societies to produce the expected proletarian revolution. As articulated by Theodore Adorno, secular enchantments such as consumerism, advertising, technology-driven mass entertainments such as early cinema, political oratory, personality cults, and spectator sports replaced supernatural ones supposedly banished by the Enlightenment's dictatorial rationalism.[48] Again, such a depiction perceives modern societies as insidiously controlling. Yet this dialectic formulation is important for initiating a move away from the specifically supernatural to a more ambient 'enchantment', the altered concept at the heart of their third way. Coined the 'antinomian' by Michael Saler this represents secular 'magic' and modernity in co-existing, frequently paradoxical tension in the formulation of modernity *and/also* magic, in which modernity 'simultaneously enchants and disenchants'.[49] Although it slightly predates such a formulation, Alex Owen's *The Place of Enchantment* is an important example of the antinomian approach which seeks to engage with the ambiguity and seemingly contradictory tensions within 'modernity'. Focusing on the period 1880–1914, Owen locates elite occultism

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[47] Maureen Perkins' *The Reform of Time* provides a good example of the binary approach. Her study of how popular magical prediction clashed with hegemonic nineteenth-century conceptualisations of time and progress illustrates a hard dichotomous divide between conceptions of magic and modernity.

[48] See Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), and G. G. Germain, 'The Revenge of the Sacred: Technology and Re-enchantment' in A. Horowitz and T. Maley (eds.), *The Barbarism of Reason: Max Weber and the Twilight of Enlightenment* (University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 248–66.

[49] Landy and Saler, *Re-enchantment of the World*, p. 3. For more on antinomial conceptualisations see Saler, 'Modernity and Enchantment'. See also M. Taussig, 'Viscerality, Faith, and Skepticism: Another Theory of Magic' in Meyer and Pels (eds.), *Magic and Modernity*, pp. 272–306.

as an intrinsic element in constructing and renegotiating a sense of the modern 'self', a way of reconciling the rational and the numinous in a more secular age.[50] The value of this antinomian approach is that it liberates us from the binary notions of continuity and decline, dominance and marginalisation, while at the same time it appreciates a more complicated interpretation of enchantment and modernity than that offered by dialectical transformation.[51] Yet as valuable as this approach is there are problems with its formulation which prevent the current study from offering itself as just another antinomialist work. Popular magical mentalities and nineteenth-century urbanisation do not allow a straightforward embracing of the empowering sense of agency that Landy and Saler envisage in their formulation of an antinomian theory of modernity. Their contributors enchantments are perceived as '*voluntary*, being chosen (*pace* Adorno) by autonomous agents rather than insidiously imposed by power structures, *respectable*, compatible as they are (*pace* Weber) with secular rationality'.[52] As will be seen, the degree of voluntary adoption of various aspects of the magical imagination is questionable, and certainly dependent upon a host of factors. Similarly, the issue of respectability remained highly contested, even when members of the social elite were found to be believers, clients, or practitioners of magic.

This book is intended to contribute to this developing strand of historiography but, as indicated above, there are several key elements which delineate it from earlier historiographical approaches. Firstly, the plebeian magical imagination will not be conceived just as a contested ideological terrain and certainly not as mere 'rigid' survivals from an earlier period; rather it will be examined as a functional sociocultural resource which enabled people to navigate and manage the experience of modernisation. Secondly, its focus on magical mentalities in the nineteenth-century cities, an environment frequently taken as a barometer of 'modernity', engages with a historical, cultural context long-neglected by historians and contemporary commentators alike. Thirdly, through examining plebeian magical mentalities and

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[50] See Owen, 'Occultism and the "Modern" Self', p. 73. The 'antinomial' label gives retrospective coherence to earlier studies that had independently explored these issues. Beyond Owen's *The Place of Enchantment* see also Laqueur, 'Why the Margins Matter', D. Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (Dekalb, Ill., Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), C. Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), J. Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, During, *Modern Enchantments*, and Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*.

[51] Landy and Saler, *Re-enchantment of the World*, pp. 6–7.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

supernatural beliefs rather than more self-consciously elite occult practices it seeks to reassess our understanding of the nature of modernisation, ultimately questioning the extent to which we can talk of the period as witnessing the onset of 'modernity' when supposedly 'traditional' mentalities maintained an intrinsically functional role in the contemporary imagination.[53]

Conceptual context: modernity and modern urbanisation

If the field of modern magic is still finding its feet, the same cannot be said of conceptualisations of modernity and urbanisation in social theory. The historiography of both has an extremely long tail that stretches back beyond the period of this study. Modernity has typically been conceptualised in a number of ways: as historical periodisation, as a socio-cultural experience, and as a historical/ideological project, one that, depending on whose view you are persuaded by, has either come to an end or never really got off the ground.

Modernity as an expression of periodisation is problematic, not least because the present, be it the twenty-first, nineteenth, or seventeenth century, is always 'modern' compared to the past. What is often deemed the first phase of modernity, from around 1500, looked back upon a medieval 'other' for its self-definition. Each age obviously defines its sense of modernity by comparison with what has preceded it. Just as difficult is the dynamic element(s) of change we inherently choose to focus on in that conceptualisation. Conceived in socio-economic and political terms, modernity has most often been associated with the emergence of capitalist modes of production. Yet, it has also been defined by intellectual movements, closely associated with the Reformation and the Enlightenment. Differing criteria naturally influence the chronological positioning of 'modernity', and tend to encourage historians of different specialisms to talk past one another whilst employing a common term. Promoters of modernity have always attempted to sever themselves from the historical continuum of which they were a part, the 'modern' being used to assert 'a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time'.[54] At the same time they reformulated certain

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[53] For a detailed study of the conscious self-construction of the occult in late nineteenth-century England see Butler, *Invoking Tradition*, and Owen, *Place of Enchantment*. Laqueur has argued that Owen underestimates the extent to which drives towards modern occultism were expressions of 'a much more old-fashioned kind of enchantment'. See Laqueur, 'Why the Margins Matter', p. 131.

[54] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 10.

aspects into a dark 'other' against which the new, the revolutionary, and the 'progressive' could be more sharply defined; enlightenment versus ignorance, rationalism versus superstition, dynamism versus stasis. As such modernisers never completely rejected the past, but constructed highly selective narratives that manipulated history as a repository of both positive (proto-modern) and negative ('backward') elements. Given this ideological emphasis on the new, we have to question what it seeks to conceal and dismiss.[55]

In its revisions of modernity, in both its attempts to offset the dramatic rhetoric of rupture and upheaval against the lived experience of ordinary people, and in its exploration of the magical imagination in that context, this study aims to demonstrate a taming of modernity.[56] Discourses of modernity were, and are frequently defined in terms of crisis, conflict, and dualism – autonomy versus fragmentation, agency versus structure, the past versus present (and future).[57] Aided by negotiation through magical beliefs and practices, this book argues that when modernity is studied at street level it is often devoid of this sense of rupture; while undeniably having to adjust to changing circumstances, nineteenth-century urban lives were never rendered as disjointed or disorientating as later theorists may claim. Taking issue with such conceptualisations of modernisation this study explores what could be termed a *pedestrian modernity*. This evokes 'pedestrian' as noun and adjective, associated both with the active urban dweller as a social agent and also with its descriptive quality as prosaic or dull, more plodding and commonplace than dynamic and dramatic. This is modernity as ambling, not racing, at best and only at certain times briskly strolling, a modernity that was neither rushing wildly into the future nor experiencing the disorientating nausea and 'psychic dizziness' propounded in Marshall Berman's over-dramatic interpretation of a cultural experience 'capable of everything except solidity and stability'.[58]

Most contemporary theorists of modernity associated it, at least to some extent, with the city. For Charles Baudelaire the city (Paris) was the location of modern spectacle; for Fredrick Engels the city (London and Manchester) was where capitalist division and class estrangement was most evident. While Marx gave greater emphasis to capitalist modes of production, wherever they happened to be located, his focus on the revolutionary potential of the proletariat was implicitly urban. Later theorists such as Georg Simmel, Ferdinand Tonnies, and

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[55] See Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity*, p. 312.
[56] For more on this approach see O'Shea, 'English Subjects of Modernity', p. 8.
[57] See Delanty, *Social Theory*, p. 42. See also pp. 5–12.
[58] Berman, *All That Is Solid*, pp. 18 and 19.

Werner Sombart placed even greater emphasis on the city as the site of modernity's most intensified expression and influence on people's lives.[59] Max Weber's essentially negative views on modernity reflected a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century disillusionment with the direction society seemed to be moving in, a negativity that frequently found expression in contemporary discourses on the modern city.[60] This study will mainly engage with these classical founders of urban sociology, not least because most were contemporaries of the historical period under consideration. Subsequent contributions from the likes of Bauman, Touraine, Melucci, Giddens, and Beck have undoubtedly enriched our conceptualisations of modernity, particularly the perennial sociological issue of the relative value of and interaction between structure and agency, but their arguments are essentially focused on, and grow from, consideration of late modern or what might be termed 'post-modern' societies.[61] Just as with the application of anthropological studies of postcolonial urbanising Africa, so here there is a strong risk of historical anachronism if one tries too hard to impose theoretical interpretations based on late twentieth-century society back onto nineteenth-century towns and cities.

Urban theorists encourage us to think with idealised (though not necessarily positive) conceptualisations of late nineteenth-century urbanisation.[62] Simmel's 'metropolitan man' was defined by his indifference or reserve yet this sweeping interpretation failed to take into account the realities of a rich variety of social interactions in an urban environment, ranging from strong family and neighbourly bonds, to positive acknowledgement of passing acquaintances, to blasé indifference and even active avoidance. Not all urban relations were necessarily transitory, nor were they predominantly conducted with strangers.[63] Similarly, Emile Durkheim's work on suicide portrayed modern society as being defined by a permanent sense of instability arising from the

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[59] See Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity*, pp. 4–5.

[60] See Ellis, *The Georgian Town*, pp. 87–105, Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, pp. 29–51, and also his *English Industrial Cities*, pp. 48–109, and R. Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 215–47.

[61] For a concise summary of these various theorists see Delanty, *Social Theory*, pp. 115–78. For the relationship between social theories of modernity and the city see H. Chorney, *City of Dreams* (University of Toronto Press, 1990).

[62] A negative perception of nineteenth-century cities derives from critical Victorian elites but also from early twentieth-century denigrators such as Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford. See P. Geddes, *Cities in Evolution* (London, Williams & Norgate, 1915), and L. Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, its Transformations, and its Prospects* (London, Secker and Warburg, 1961).

[63] See Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity*, p. 153.

pace of change.[64] These changes had supposedly broken social bonds, thereby giving rise to a sense of individualism which invariably degenerated into isolation and social atomism. For Durkheim, modern social solidarity was 'organic' as opposed to 'mechanical', characterised by larger and denser populations, the growth of cities, and the increasing complexity of divisions of labour. All three supposedly helped isolate people, creating social relations increasingly based on contracts rather than sentiment or obligations.[65] Having lost sight of a unified, common purpose, a sense of anomie became endemic within modern industrial society. Like Simmel's theory, when formulated as a generalised abstraction Durkheim's interpretation has a sense of finality to it that is not borne out by historical realities and the fact that people had a capacity to adapt to shifts in lifestyles, communal formation, and work patterns. Therefore while appreciating the panoramic overview that generalised, abstracted theories may offer, it is the duty and arguably the unique contribution of the historian to ground such theorising in the complex realities of past societies, societies whose experiences invariably fail to neatly tally to such ideas.[66]

While critical of these theoretical formulations, the current study also stands in implicit opposition to a general historiographical narrative of accelerating physical and social transformation in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century urban environment.[67] Yet recently

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[64] See Poggi, *Durkheim*, p. 80.

[65] For concise summaries of these two concepts see Morrison, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber*, pp. 129–31.

[66] Most of the classical urban theorists formulated their abstractions based upon their reflections on particular metropolitan cities, especially Paris, Berlin, and Vienna. Beyond a myriad of social, economic, political, and cultural distinctions, there are obvious differences in size and density compared with the provincial centres that will form the focus of this study.

[67] In exploring this narrative urban historiography has reflected the broad shifts in historical study in the second half of the twentieth century, moving from quantitative analysis, through social historical investigations to cultural interpretations. For examples relating to eighteenth-century urbanisation see A. M. Everitt (ed.), *Perspectives in English Urban History* (London, Macmillan, 1973) through P. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns 1700–1800* (Oxford University Press, 1982), to T. Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban-Industrial Society: Bradford 1750–1850* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance*, and C. B. Estabrook, *Urbane and Rustic England: Cultural Ties and Social Spheres in the Provinces, 1660–1780* (Manchester University Press, 1998). For a concise overview see Clark (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. 2, pp. 16–22, and Borsay (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century Town*, pp. 1–38. For developments in nineteenth-century urban historiography see Morris and Rodger, 'An Introduction to British Urban History 1820–1914', Joyce, *Visions of the People*, Daunton (ed.) *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. 3, P. Waller (ed.), *The English Urban Landscape* (Oxford University Press, 2000), and Gunn, *Public Culture*. Recent efforts have also drawn upon historical geography, landscape studies, and literary analysis, particularly in their understanding of perceptions of Georgian and

others have started to advocate a similar consideration of a more mundane, less dynamic experience of modernity. Nigel Thrift has rejected its dramatic language, arguing that the 'shock of the new' was not new to the post-eighteenth-century period. Nor, he claims, was the alienating anonymity of modern urban life a permanent state; rather it was more likely to be an initial experience that gradually waned as people built up close ties in local communities and within sub-groups of workers.[68] Similarly Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger have suggested that unlike continental Europe Britain did not experience modernity as rupture or crisis. Aided by plodding, underlying trends such as a stable and increasingly democratic parliamentary system, a slow economic and technological industrialisation which was defined by piecemeal developments and lengthy periods of trial and error, and the evolution of class formations that, while forming into hard 'points' of protest and mutual antagonism at particular moments, never engaged sufficiently large and coordinated numbers to muster a revolution like those experienced in nineteenth-century Europe, all ensured British modernisation was more an evolutionary development than an abrupt and dynamic transformation defined by 'deep discontinuities'.[69] For all the pace of change in certain urban environments at certain times (something that was not constant in even the largest of nineteenth-century cities, Manchester's greatest surge coming in the 1820s–1840s period, London's in the second half of the century), there is considerable veracity in Daunton and Rieger's claim that many urban dwellers would have felt themselves 'grounded on historical foundations rather than adrift, without direction, in the present'.[70]

This study argues that we should focus on a plurality of differently conceived modernities, formulations that will necessarily be defined by contradiction and paradox in much the same way as the antinomian approaches to magic outlined above. Nineteenth-century urban dwellers seem to have engaged with at least dual modernities, an ideological one which emphasised fundamental and unprecedented ruptures with

Victorian cities. See for example Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, A. Robinson, *Imagining London, 1770–1900* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2004), Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, and N. Burton and D. Cruickshank, *Life in the Georgian City* (London, Viking, 1990).

[68] Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, p. 3. See also Thrift, '"Not a Straight Line but a Curve"', pp. 233–63. E. A. Wrigley intimated similar views when he argued that the nineteenth-century industrial towns of the north and midlands could be described as 'industrial but not modern', their populations retaining many characteristics associated with traditional forms of communality. See Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth*, p. 74.

[69] See Daunton and Rieger (eds.), *Meanings of Modernity*, p. 8.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

the past, and an experiential one which spoke to more gradual transitions. No mere temporal descriptor, 'progressive' ideological modernities actively demanded something of history, the present and the future, making assertive teleological interpretations of its meaning. Yet at times there were ideological elements to more experiential formulations, for while Baudelaire focused on life in the modern city he tended to exaggerate its dislocating and liberating dimensions to suit his own artistic, bohemian agenda. Such formulations were further complicated by the fact that conceptualisations of modernity transformed within the nineteenth century itself. Prior to the 1870s 'modern' was conceived in terms of industrialisation and 'modernity' in terms of the social and cultural ramifications of such developments. Increasingly from the 1870s this direct association with industrialisation weakened, for as Britain matured into an industrial rather than an industrialising society so 'modernity' became employed in a more diverse range of contexts, many of which came to focus not on society but the fracturing or reconstruction of the self.[71] It is these shifting and often contradictory interpretations of modernity that this study aims to explore, not to judge the validity of one over another, but rather to ultimately consider the interaction and negotiation between modernities.

Structure

The dates that bracket this study, 1780 to 1914, have no explicit bearing on magical mentalities in terms of pivotal cultural changes or dramatic moments of initiation and closure. Rather they represent what has become a familiar and convenient (two words that should instantly make historians suspicious) chronological timeframe that has gained credence as a crucial transitional period for Western modernisation.[72] The American and French Revolutions of the 1780s have associated the decade with if not the actual then at least the symbolic death throes of the *ancien regime*. With its scientific challenges to religious orthodoxy and its development of an advanced capitalist society, the Victorian period is often seen as vital in the move towards a more 'modern' secular world. While magical mentalities continued their metamorphosis into the twentieth century, the outbreak of the First World War seems to mark a 'natural' conclusion to a study that focuses on the transition to

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[71] See *ibid*., p. 2.
[72] This time period roughly complies with David Frisby's second phase of modernity, which falls between 1789–1900. See Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity*, p. 3, and also Berman, *All That Is Solid*, pp. 16–17.

modernity. The mechanised slaughter and socio-psychological trauma of the war ensured 'modernity' finally established itself in the most brutal fashion.

Historians have pushed this transitional phase towards modernity both backwards and forwards. David Rollison has provided an engaging exploration of modernity's roots located firmly in the early modern period, a perspective that could variously be viewed as the assertive colonisation of an earlier era by modern historians or an attempt to situate a discourse on English modernity in a more evolutionary context.[73] In the opposite direction, Richard Dennis' recent study of the modern city takes 1840 as its starting point, Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger began their study of British modernity in 1870, and under Bruno Latour's provocative definition, we have never been modern.[74] Depending on how we define 'modernity' and which historiographical position we find most convincing, it would seem we have either been modern for far longer than initially assumed, or have not actually become modern at all. In social, economic, political, and technological terms, England in 1914 was undoubtedly different to the country it had been in 1780. Such a simplistic jump-cut approach obviously seems to confirm the validity of a sense of modernity, that at some time during that 130-year period, England became modern. Yet, like a skilled Victorian stage magician, the exact when, how, what, and why of this process remains hidden; historians can observe the effects without catching modernity's hands at work. In terms of popular mentalities, such a definite transformation is even harder to quantify. Therefore this study works within common boundaries

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[73] See Rollison, *Local Origins of Modern Society*. Robert Scribner explicitly highlighted this ideological colonisation of the early modern period, arguing that our modern conceptualisation of the Reformation 'as part of a long-term process of rationalization and secularization' is largely a formulation of the nineteenth century and based on the nationalist, rationalising, and evolutionary trends of that later period. Thus the tendency to view the Reformation as one of the great tectonic shifts in the history of magic, a notion of temporal rupture familiar from nineteenth-century concepts of 'modernity', was itself part of that ideological Victorian agenda. See Scribner, 'The Reformation', p. 476. See also A. G. Dickens and J. M. Tonkin, *The Reformation in Historical Thought* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1985).

[74] See Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, Daunton and Rieger, *Meanings of Modernity*, and Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*. Latour argues that we could only become truly modern if pre-modern ideas were completely excluded but this has not yet been achieved. The continuing presence of magic serves to illustrate the way in which rationalisation has never been 'purified' as expected, thus continuing as a compromised hybrid. Chapter 3 of this study will explore how certain advocates of modernity attempted to conceal this hybridity through a progressive discourse.

of 'modernisation' but, as with all periodic dating, recognises their rather arbitrary imposition.

As such 'modernity' is employed here less as a temporal descriptor and more as a way of thinking about lived social experiences, socio-cultural practices, and the way people perceived their (urban) world in the nineteenth century. In bringing together elements that have rarely been considered in conjunction in this period – magic and urbanisation – it will examine three very diverse urban centres: Manchester, Norwich, and Portsmouth. The methodological intention is to mediate abstract, universalising theories of modernity, urbanisation, and magical mentalities through their application to specific cities and towns during a specific historical period.[75] As with urban social theorists, historians also have a tendency to gravitate towards idealised urban types when thinking about nineteenth-century cities, our impressions naturally leaning towards the (often literary) portrayals of London by the likes of Charles Dickens and Henry Mayhew, or to grim northern industrial towns, best represented by the early social investigations of Manchester by James Phillips Kay and Fredrick Engels.[76] The focus on the historical realties of three individual urban centres aims to offset these comfortable stereotypes and counter monolithic interpretations of both modernity and urbanisation. Importantly, as will be indicated in the first chapter, these urban centres did not remain static in relation to one another, the comparative dynamics between them constantly shifting across the time period, each undergoing 'modernisation' at different rates at different times.[77]

As indicated above, urban sociological theories often seem more applicable to the metropolis but this study consciously avoids a detailed focus on London. While not necessarily providing a singularly 'typical' model of urban modernisation, most people's experience of urbanisation in this period was not that of the capital but provincial towns and cities. In the first half of the century contemporaries associated modernisation with the industrial towns, and only in the second half did London become viewed as the key site of modernity again. Yet this symbolic shorthand is to be avoided if one is to remain in touch with

[75] Marshall Berman has been criticised for his universalising conception of modernity (one which includes the idea of rapid urbanisation). See O'Shea, 'English Subjects of Modernity', pp. 8 and 9.

[76] See C. Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 3rd edn (Philadelphia, Lea & Blanchard, 1841), Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Class*, and Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*.

[77] For the shifts in population size between Norwich, Manchester, and Portsmouth over this period see Chalklin, *Rise of the English Town*, pp. 77–79.

fluid historical realities, viewing cities not as visual spectacles of cultural, political, or ideological signification, but as lived realms. In terms of English urban history London's size and rate of growth had always been and remained atypical and an emphasis on the metropolis would only encourage a return to the stereotypical abstractions associated with dislocating, anonymous urban modernisation. Given its dynamic growth in the first half of the nineteenth century even Manchester is arguably an atypical example of urbanisation, although it tended to be visitors rather than locals who spoke of change in such hyperbolic terms. Living within the gradually transforming city its residents were less inclined to appreciate what visitors recognised as an aggregate of change. I am also wary of assuming that historians' work on London should form the context in which provincial studies are situated, for this tends to automatically subjugate them to metropolitan 'norms' that were more frequently exceptions. In quantitative terms nineteenth-century London was undoubtedly rich in magical and supernatural practices but in qualitative terms it was not necessarily much different to the cities and towns that form the focus of this study. It is one of the arguments of this study that neither size nor pace of urbanisation had a particularly determining influence on most aspects of the magical imagination.[78] As such this study does not neglect London but chooses to position it less as the comparative 'other', more simply as 'another'.

Rather than being employed as separate case studies it seems more appropriate in a study exploring the mercurial nature of popular mentalities to use the three urban centres as the context for thematic chapters. This investigation does not necessarily demand a laboriously pedantic referencing of each of the three cities in every instance, but uses them in a more fluid way that best highlights the thematic point being explored. There is another, more pragmatic reason for adopting this comparative, thematic methodology. Evidence in Manchester itself has been relatively harder to locate and quantifiably less than Norwich and Portsmouth. Unlike more conventional political and social historical studies of these cities, the evidence is often oblique, marginal, scattered, and uneven.[79]

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[78] For secondary literature on magical and supernatural practices in nineteenth-century London see the following: for astrologers see Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture,* pp. 236–45; for fortune-tellers see Perkins, 'The Trial of Joseph Powell', pp. 27–45; for spiritualism see Owen, *Darkened Room*, and Oppenheim, *The Other World*; for late nineteenth-century occultism see Butler, *Victorian Occultism*, and Owen, *The Place of Enchantment.*

[79] By comparison the rural hinterlands of all three urban centres contain a richness and depth of detail that was lacking in the cities themselves. This apparent imbalance largely arose from the way rural and urban cases were recorded, the folklorist's

The result of this is that, for all the diligent digging in the archives, one does not conveniently find a neat, comparative example of all aspects of the magical imagination for each city. Therefore while the comparative approach enables the drawing of interesting distinctions in its own right, it is also intended to help offset imbalances in the material. In doing so it is hoped that this book rises above the narrowness of three micro-studies to foster a more general impression of, and to have more widely applicable things to say about, magical mentalities in the nineteenth-century urban environment.

The thematic chapters are focused around the generation, trans-formation, and various applications of the magical imagination. Chapter 1 examines 'inherited' factors that informed the construc-tion, content, and maintenance of the popular magical imagination. Moving from 'superstitious' mentalities to specific magical functions it argues that this rich blend of inherited and contemporary influ-ences nurtured, sustained, and even revitalised the magical imagin-ation throughout the nineteenth century. Emphasising that this mentality was neither static nor a mere 'survival', Chapter 2 advocates an argument for a process of transformation rather than simple con-tinuity, examining three aspects of metamorphosis that closely reflect other nineteenth-century trends, namely the magical imagination's modernisation, commercialisation, and democratisation. While the popular magical imagination's seemingly innate ability to adapt to new cultural terrains was not necessarily specific to the nineteenth-century city it will nevertheless be argued that this particular cultural context and historical period informed the way such transformations were expressed.

Having considered the nature of the magical imagination, subse-quent chapters explore its multiple social functions. Chapter 3 exam-ines the antinomian tensions within the middle classes with regard to 'popular' magical mentalities. While some clearly engaged with magical practices and thinking, especially their more respectably modern mani-festations, others employed the popular magical imagination to pro-mote an ideological modernity of rational disenchantment from 'above'. Through the efforts of various agents such as journalists, folklorists, and clergymen the existence of the magical imagination was used to help shape perceptions of the middle and lower classes and modernity

'scientific' reportage of the former comparing with the sketchy, journalistic novelty of the latter. Both helped to reinforce progressive assumptions about an urban-based modernity that had no place for magical mentalities. These issues will be explored further in Chapter 3.

itself. Taking their lead from Marcel Mauss' claims for the need to focus on the social context in which magical beliefs exist, Chapters 4 to 6 consider the predominantly plebeian socio-psychological applications of the magical imagination in the modernising urban environment.[80] Presented as an empowering means of orientation, adaptation, and resistance, these chapters examine how the magical imagination informed both social divisions and cohesions. Intimately entwined with urban power relations Chapter 4 explores how the magical imagination fostered a sense of gendered and generational boundaries within communities. Chapter 5 considers it as a means of unifying a diverse range of people through an awareness of shared cultural tropes while also being employed as a vocabulary of protest against perceived exploiters outside local communities, fostering a communal identity based not on a language of class but moralised perceptions of 'them' and 'us'. Finally Chapter 6 examines how people adjusted to their changing physical environment, considering how supernatural tales enabled spatial and temporal mapping and communal reclamation of parts of the city via knowledge and transmission of ghost stories.

Beyond exploring the functionality of urban magical mentalities this study employs such ideas as a lens through which to gain fresh insights into what is often presented as a crucial transitional period in England's modernisation. In re-evaluating how contemporaries adapted to 'modern' urbanisation it seeks to complement rather than overturn more overtly political or familiar socio-cultural histories of modernisation. Viewing such interpretations (most obviously those relating to class) as predominantly externalised, explicitly politicised, or consciously engaged in compared with the internalised nature and mechanisations of the magical imagination, its attempts to thread magical mentalities back into nineteenth-century urban history are intended to enrich our appreciation of the socio-psychological experience of the modernising city. More broadly this study seeks to question the extent to which we should conceive of this period, and especially its experience of urbanisation, as 'modern'. In attempting the following I present from the start a lacuna that however capaciously conceived my interpretation of the magical imagination cannot comprehensively recapture the mental world of the nineteenth-century urban dweller. There remain too many variables in terms of individual and group mentalities, and their lived social experiences, to offer anything that could be deemed an encompassing structural

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[80] See Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, pp. 22–30.

framework. At best this book attempts to illustrate the workings of
a popular mode of thought, not outline a comprehensive paradigm
of the collective mind. It will have succeeded if it is able to suggest a
fresh appreciation of the complex interactions between magical men-
talities and modernisation.

1   Constructing the magical imagination

In her study of Norwich in 1855, S. S. Madders had assumed urban living would be anathema to aspects of the magical imagination, for the daily struggles amidst the city's looms and factories left 'little time or room for aught else than the stern realities of existence'.[1] Augustus Jessop echoed this sentiment in 1882, believing town dwellers were 'as a rule, destitute of faith in the unseen', their imaginations left stunted by having 'nothing before their eyes but the factory with its ceaseless roar of wheels'.[2] Like Madders' own subsequent investigations, this study will demonstrate such statements to be completely misjudged.

The Annales historian Lucien Febvre, an early advocate of the history of mentalities and one who was keen to avoid what he termed 'psychological anachronism', felt a study of past mental processes could be achieved through consideration of people's material conditions and an examination of the 'mental equipment' they had available to them.[3] This chapter and the next seek to sketch out something of the mental inventory which informed the construction, content, and maintenance of the plebeian magical imagination while giving due appreciation to the external cultural circumstances which nurtured such ideas. Following a preliminary contextual sketch of the three key urban centres this chapter considers four contextual 'inheritances': the influence of the urban environment; popular religion and religious supernaturalism; the continuing significance of oral storytelling and popular superstition; and the ongoing relevance of magical practices in the nineteenth-century city. In doing so it moves from ambient but pervasive supernatural perception of the world to more concrete expressions in the form of magical activities.

It should be emphasised from the beginning that we have become so naturalised to the ideological assertions of 'modernity' that we must

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[1] Madders, *Rambles in an Old City*, pp. 282–83.
[2] Jessop, 'Superstition in Arcady', pp. 735–36.
[3] Febvre, *New Kind of History*, p. 9.

remember that certain terms that inform the ideas in this study, 'super-stition', 'tradition', and 'folklore' for example, are not neutral descrip-tors but the biased terminology of a 'progressive' agenda which sought to foster an epistemological break from the past.[4] These expressions are employed here as a familiar and convenient shorthand but obviously what was deemed 'superstition' by predominantly middle-class writers was not necessarily perceived as such by those to whom it was applied.

Historical context

The rooting of the magical in historical urban realities is important to a study that argues that the magical imagination took some of its substance and much of its vitality from the demands of living in such an environment in the nineteenth century. While Manchester was a rapidly expanding industrial and commercial centre, until the mid nineteenth century Norwich was a declining medieval city, suffering in part as a result of her northern rival's success. If these two respectively represent new and old urban conurbations in this period Portsmouth provides a third, rather unique urban 'type', being a port and garrison town, the home of the Royal Navy, and possessing a specialised indus-trial sector based on the Royal Dockyards. These urban centres have therefore been selected for their richly divergent social, economic, cul-tural, historical, and geographical identities.[5] The intention is that this comparative approach will generate revealing distinctions and parallels between three very different urban centres with regard to the nature, expression, function, and transformation of the magical imagination. The following contextual sketches are, at this stage, only intended to set the historical scene and emphasise, in broad brushstrokes, their very different natures as urban centres.

Manchester

Manchester, situated south-west of the Pennines, lies on the great Lancashire plain in north-west England, located at the confluence of the rivers Irwell, Irk, and Medlock. To the west lies the coast, Liverpool, and the Irish Sea, to the south the hilly landscape of Cheshire and Derbyshire, while to the north and east lie the more mountainous slopes

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[4] For more on this see Perkins, *Reform of Time* and O'Giollain, *Locating Irish Folklore*.
[5] For overviews of the socio-economic development of British cities in this period see Daunton (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. 3, Sweet, *The English Town, 1680–1840*, J. G. Williamson, *Coping with City Growth during the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), and Dennis, *English Industrial Cities*.

that border Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Yorkshire. Southern Lancashire was agriculturally poor but its moist climate and soft water gave it natural advantages for the spinning of cotton and Manchester had long been known for its fustians and cotton textiles. Its close proximity to coalfields further aided it after the advent of the steam engine. In 1724 Daniel Defoe had unfairly described Manchester as 'the greatest mere village in England'.[6] Even then it was establishing itself as the regional capital of south-east Lancashire. In the eighteenth century Lancashire's cotton industry was based on the domestic system with Manchester merchants employing cottage workers, providing them with raw materials and collecting the resultant cloth. Manchester served as a centre for its various finishing processes and as the store and marketplace for such material. These roles were enhanced by improvements to its eighteenth-century regional infrastructure, with turnpike roads, river navigations and then the Bridgewater Canal, which opened in 1761. As such when Manchester began its rapid expansion in the later eighteenth century it was well-positioned as the commercial hub for surrounding factory towns such as Oldham, Rochdale, Bury, Stockport, Bolton, and Preston.

Mills, originally located in Manchester's hinterland due to their reliance on water power, converged in and around the town when improvements in steam power reduced dependence on water. The first steam-powered cotton mill was set up in Manchester in the 1780s, and by 1816 there were 86, focused predominantly on the working-class district of Ancoats. The power loom was not successfully applied to weaving until the 1820s but when it was Manchester's handloom weavers suffered greatly. Subsidiary industries developed, not just those involved with chemical processes such as bleaching and dying, but also engineering, banking, and construction. The cotton industry prospered and, because it became centred on Manchester, so did the town, displaying its wealth through the construction of large factories, ornate warehouses, and banks. In the 1790s 70 per cent of the British cotton industry was situated in Lancashire and Cheshire, rising to 90 per cent by 1835. In terms of quantity this was considerable. National consumption of cotton cloth in 1780 was 5 million pounds (lbs), reaching 82 million lbs by 1818–1821 and 937 million lbs by 1856–1860.[7]

Despite this seemingly phenomenal increase in industrial output Manchester was more than just a factory town. While large numbers were employed in its cotton manufacture (19,561 in 1841), as a percentage

[6] Messinger, *Manchester in the Victorian Age*, pp. 6–7.
[7] Kidd, *Manchester*, pp. 21 and 27.

of the Manchester labour force this amounted to 18 per cent, compared with 50 per cent in Ashton and 40 per cent in Oldham. Therefore Manchester's growth was sustained by industrialisation but it profited most from its developing role as the region's commercial and financial centre. This was increasingly true in the second half of the century, when Manchester lost its sense of uniqueness as other industrial centres such as Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, and Bradford grew to challenge it. Towards the latter part of the century Manchester's manufacturing of cotton decreased in relation to that produced by its satellite towns and its economy diversified into such endeavours as engineering, metal working, and the production of food and drink. As a result, Manchester drew huge numbers of migrants from the surrounding rural villages and towns, from Ireland, Scotland, and Europe, and it was these that boosted and sustained its population growth. From the 1780s, when its population stood at 40,000, it grew prodigiously. By 1801 it reached 76,788. Between 1801 and 1841 Manchester's population trebled, and by 1851 had quadrupled to 316,213, making it England's second city.[8] This led to increasing population density even as the town physically expanded. Irish-born immigrants, Manchester's largest ethnic minority, were consistently among its poorest residents and while they had formed a fairly steady flow into the city since the early nineteenth century, there was a marked increase in the 1840s, accounting for one third of Manchester's population increase between 1841 and 1851. As the first predominantly industrial city of the period Manchester was (crudely) zoned into concentric rings, its spatial functions seemingly reflecting the divisions between the workplace and home, and between workers and manufacturers in a maturing capitalist society. Its nucleus consisted of a commercial district of warehouses, offices, banks, and shops. This was banded by a ring of districts containing factories and the residences of the workers, the densely packed and frequently squalid housing of Ancoats, Irk Town, New Town, and Chorlton-on-Medlock. Beyond this, the middle class sought escape from the industrial city's pollution in Ardwick Green and the other developing suburbs of the 1820s and 1830s.[9]

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[8] *Ibid*., pp. 22 and 25.
[9] For detailed contemporary descriptions of Manchester in the first half of the nineteenth century see J. Aston, *A Picture of Manchester* (Manchester, 1816), Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Class*, and Engels, *Conditions of the Working Class*. See also L. D. Bradhsaw (ed.), *Visitors to Manchester: A Selection of British and Foreign Visitors' Descriptions of Manchester from c.1538 to 1865* (Manchester, Neil Richardson, 1987).

Rapid growth gave Manchester a sense of newness but a lack of roots. In 1813 the entire region was declared 'nearly barren of antiquities, the whole being a structure of yesterday'.[10] However such a view may have been manufactured for effect. While Manchester remained the symbol of the modern age until the 1850s, there is evidence of traditional customs and pastimes continuing in co-existence with its growth, most notably fairs, wakes, and rush-bearing ceremonies in the Collegiate Church. In 1800 the town had still conducted blood sports such as cockfights and bear-baiting, while it was its 'ancient half-timbered houses' rather than mills that commanded the visual landscape at street level. Prior to becoming a municipal corporation in 1838 it had possessed a form of local governance that dated back to the middle ages.[11]

The city's prosperity was bought, in part, at the cost of early nineteenth-century Manchester having amongst the worst living conditions in urban England.[12] Swelling numbers of people were crammed into increasingly inadequate housing. With no thought to urban planning, speculative builders responded by constructing 'back-to-back' terraces. These were poorly ventilated and around twenty houses usually shared a single water pump and privy, the drinking water easily becoming contaminated by sewage from the privy's cesspit. Usually dark, damp places, those located near the Irk, or in 'Little Ireland' on the curve of the Medlock, could be atrocious. Most of these districts had no common sewers until the 1840s, their narrow unpaved streets full of refuse thrown from dwellings. Worse still were the notorious cellar dwellings, a feature not particular to Manchester in the nineteenth century, but one that was often associated with its poor living conditions, accommodating up to 20,000 people in the 1840s. The health risks in such conditions were reflected in Manchester's mortality rates. At 33 per thousand in the decade 1841–50, it was considerably higher than the same period's national average of 22 per thousand. In the late 1830s and 1840s Manchester suffered typhus, influenza, and cholera epidemics, though the major killer, accounting for 10 per cent of all deaths in the city, was pulmonary tuberculosis. Infant mortality was particularly high, with up to 50 per cent of all deaths occurring in the under-fives, most of those dying within the first year of life. Poorly fed and living in cramped conditions, these children were highly susceptible to death from diarrhoea, smallpox, diphtheria, and whooping cough.[13] Engels, admittedly a rather biased informant but one who was resident in Manchester in

[10] Messinger, *Manchester*, p. 10.   [11] *Ibid*., p. 9.
[12] Kidd, *Manchester*, p. 45.   [13] *Ibid*., pp. 47–49.

the mid nineteenth century, summarised life for its working classes as 'a temporarily endurable existence for hard work and good wages', at worst 'bitter want, reaching even homelessness and death by starvation', with the average being 'much nearer the worse case than the best'.[14] While much historical research has been conducted into the various social initiatives and popular political movements that developed in response to this situation, this study will consider the less conventional function of magical mentalities in catering to such experiences.[15]

Norwich

Norwich is the provincial capital of Norfolk, a low-lying county located on the eastern coast of England, bounded north and east by the North Sea, west by Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire, and south by Suffolk. This medieval city is centred in the east of the county, twenty miles from the coast. Economically, Norwich's fate was the inverse of Manchester's. Norwich's population virtually stagnated in the second half of the eighteenth century, rising from 36,169 in 1752 to 40,051 in 1786, then actually falling in the 1790s so that by the 1801 census it stood at 36,854. The first half of the nineteenth century saw a marked difference, its population roughly doubled to 68,195 by 1851.[16] As with Manchester, a considerable amount of these were migrant labourers pouring into the city to escape rural poverty, though by comparison the numbers were small, the upward trend sluggish.

Norwich started the eighteenth century as one of the most important manufacturing centres outside London but by the turn of the nine-teenth century it was feeling the pressure from rivals in Yorkshire and Lancashire, especially the Manchester region. The mid eighteenth century had represented a golden age for Norwich's textile production, pro-ducing a range of high-quality worsted woollen goods that, due to the county's ports of Yarmouth and King's Lynn, could be traded directly with Scandinavia, Russia, Spain, Turkey, and the Far East. Whereas Manchester would come to sit at the hub of a commercial network based on surrounding cotton towns, so Norwich was a distribution centre for

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[14] Engels, *Condition of the Working Class*, p. 108.

[15] As a result of Manchester having long been seen as the archetypal industrial city, works relating to life in and responses to its conditions are too numerous to mention individually. For an overview see T. J. Wyke's (rather dated) 'Nineteenth Century Manchester: a Preliminary Bibliography' in Kidd and Roberts (eds.), *City, Class and Culture*, especially pp. 239–57. For a slightly more updated summary see Kidd, *Manchester*, pp. 234–37.

[16] Rawcliffe and Wilson (eds.), *Norwich since 1550*, pp. 244–45.

its agrarian hinterlands. The modernisation of Norfolk's rich agricul-
tural industry had aided the city's wealth, as had the fact that it served
as an important cattle market for the region. While Norwich had devel-
oped road links with London in the eighteenth century, its nineteenth-
century transport infrastructure lagged behind Manchester's. It was
relatively late in adopting railways and when it did its first efforts were
internal links within the county, a line to Yarmouth opening in 1844.
Norwich only gained a direct rail route to London in July 1845.

The city's textile trade was based around a domestic system simi-
lar to that in Manchester in the eighteenth century. Wool was spun in
the homes of rural inhabitants and then brought by merchants to the
city's weavers, who also worked in domestic workshops. However, as
Lancashire cotton captured the domestic market, Norwich's worsted
industry found itself increasingly dependent upon exports, which were
continually disrupted throughout the Napoleonic wars. Worst still,
during this conflict machine-spun worsted yarn had been made in
the factories of the West Riding of Yorkshire, undercutting the cost
of Norwich's hand-spun products. When Norwich weavers began to
use this northern yarn, Norfolk's hand-spinners became redundant.
The first half of the nineteenth century was one 'in which the people
of Norwich passed through the wilderness'.[17] For twenty years after
1815 Norwich's woollen-based textile economy experienced cycles of
boom and bust as Lancashire cotton came to dominate the domestic
market. By the 1820s worsteds were being increasingly manufactured
elsewhere by machine. To counter this, Norwich's handloom weavers
responded by producing finer products and patterns. This tactic was
defeated when the steam-powered Jacquard loom, capable of producing
intricately patterned cloth, was introduced into the factories of the West
Riding in the 1830s.

Norwich belatedly developed a factory-based textile economy in
the 1830s, the first spinning mill being created in 1834, and the first
weaving factory in 1838. Their steam-powered production sounded the
death knell for Norwich's handloom weavers, who worked sixty-hour
weeks and still found themselves sliding into pauperism. With the new
factories unable to employ all those they displaced, and with weaving
having been the city's predominant industry, in 1844 75 per cent of
all recipients of poor relief in Norwich were weavers. By 1847 35,596
people were excused paying poor rates because of their own poverty
and a year later one fifth of the city's population were described as

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[17] *Ibid*., p. xxvii.

paupers.[18] From being England's second city at the turn of the eighteenth century, by 1850 it was ranked fifteenth in size and importance. The city's decline into poverty was recorded in the *Second Report of the Royal Commission for inquiring into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts* in 1845. Its appendix recorded that Norwich 'has seen its best days as a place of commerce, and would appear to be in that painful state of transition from a once flourishing manufacturing prosperity to its entire decline … A large portion of its inhabitants are therefore poor … Neglect and decay are now conspicuous in the streets and quarters occupied by the working classes, so as to render them places of the most dismal aspect'.[19]

While Manchester's success had drawn huge numbers that impacted on the city's living conditions, it was Norwich's poverty that did much to create similar circumstances.[20] During its prosperous eighteenth century most of Norwich's medieval timber-framed buildings were rebuilt or concealed behind brick facades but its streets remained narrow, unpaved, and lit only by oil lamps. Behind the Georgian mansions on the main streets were seventeenth-century slums. Squalor and overcrowding had been prevalent in Norwich since the Elizabethan period but from the end of the Napoleonic wars its poorer inhabitants experienced new levels of privation as their living conditions deteriorated.[21] Many inhabited crowded tenements built around enclosed yards. These courts, housing up to forty families, often had only a single water pump. Most accommodation in these courts was ill ventilated and those near the rivers were usually damp. As in Manchester, poor sanitation and ventilation aided the spread of typhoid and cholera. As late as 1864 the Wensum, one of the two rivers that pass through the city, was described as 'presenting all the features of a large sewer', being polluted with dyes and clogged with refuse.[22] Therefore, despite its relatively smaller growth and its declining industrial base, Norwich faced

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[18] Meeres, *A History of Norwich*, pp. 47 and 168.

[19] Barringer (ed.), *Norwich in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 47–48.

[20] Norwich did witness an influx of rural migrants as the county underwent agrarian modernisation. Having been a progressive arable region in the early modern period, a combination of enclosure of common lands during the Napoleonic Wars, the end of the customary living in with the farmer's family, and a shift towards the use of casual or gang labour which reduced regular employment all served to encourage Norfolk's rural dwellers to seek employment in urban centres including Norwich. See Wade Martins, *A History of Norfolk*, pp. 63–65, and Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men* and *Reshaping Rural England – A Social History 1850–1925* (London, Routledge, 1991).

[21] Barringer, *Norwich in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 47.

[22] Atkin, *Norwich, History and Guide*, p. 94.

many of the same terrible public health conditions as Manchester, the principal differences being those of scale and intensity.

The city witnessed a revival of fortunes in the second half of the nineteenth century. With a shift from its predominant woollen textile focus, the local economy diversified, becoming associated with the production of printed shawls, silk items, boot and shoemaking, the production of food and drink (including Colman's patented mustards and Caley's cocoa and chocolate), metal-working (mainly agricultural equipment for Norfolk's arable farmers), printing and book-binding, insurance, and, towards the end of the century, electrical engineering. Despite this, Norwich never became a sprawling urban conurbation like Manchester, its social problems differing in scale and intensity. Even as it grew beyond its demolished medieval walls its epithet as a 'city in an orchard' remained relevant, William White declaring in 1845 that 'it still retains much of its former rural aspect'.[23] With its prominent castle and cathedral, its large late nineteenth-century municipal parks, and extensive suburbs stretching out into the surrounding countryside, Norwich was able to retain this reputation. While possessing an industrial sector and some large factories, its image as a rather sleepy cathedral city meant it was never perceived with the negative connotations associated with northern industrial towns.

Portsmouth

In 1863 *Reynolds' Miscellany* declared Portsmouth to be 'beyond all question one of the most important and interesting towns in the whole kingdom', an accolade derived from its imposing defences of moats, walls, bastions, and 'mighty ramparts, planted with trees, forming a splendid promenade … its magnificent docks, the largest in the kingdom … its capacious harbour, and its heart-stirring historical associations'.[24] As this clearly indicates, Portsmouth was first and foremost a garrison town, dominated by the fact that it served as the home of the Royal Navy. Yet, alloyed to this, it was an industrial centre too, though one quite unlike Manchester and its northern cousins. Its industrial heart was the Royal Dockyard, and it was this that formed the economic base of the town, providing employment for its less transient community members. In fact, while contemporary gazes turned increasingly to Manchester in the early nineteenth century it was Portsmouth (and

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[23] Barringer, *Norwich in the Nineteenth Century*, p. xi.
[24] *Reynold's Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, Science, and Art*, 29 August 1863, p. 151.

Chatham's) dockyards that epitomised 'the largest industrial undertakings in the country at the time of the Napoleonic Wars'.[25]

Such was its local significance that both the town's economic fortunes and spatial expansion were largely determined by the ebb and flow of war and peace throughout the long nineteenth century. Given its location on the tip of the little island of Portsea on the south coast of Hampshire and its role in the servicing and functioning of the Navy, Portsmouth was naturally more outward facing than Manchester or Norwich, tied not so much to broader economic developments of the period as to the influence of military, foreign, and imperial policies. With its emphasis on being a functional environment for the military services, its primary role as a fortified naval base led some commentators to stress the arbitrary nature of its urban development over the centuries. Its sporadic and piecemeal growth derived from it never having been planned as a coherent town, and with strong spatial delineations between military and civilian areas it remained 'incomplete, an accident among towns'.[26] The town, as an urban centre, could often be seen as an appendage to the dockyard itself, its civic existence and culture secondary to the utilitarian needs of the Navy.

The dominance of the Admiralty as the town's key employer had a marked effect upon the development of an independent middle class in Portsmouth. While its professional population was similar to elsewhere the emphasis on private business was truncated by the town's work for the government and the dockyard's emphasis on self-sufficiency that prevented wealth or contracts being spread to local manufacturers or the town's producers.[27] Although Portsmouth made a shift from being a garrison town to a naval port in the course of the nineteenth century, the continuing presence of the Marines and Navy meant in the second half of the century 20–25 per cent of the working population were in the armed services. By comparison, merchant seamen remained relatively small in number, just 3.6 per cent of the working population in 1851, the town never developing commercial docks like other ports. Again, it has been suggested that this was a result of the Admiralty's strategic desire to keep the harbour clear of commercial shipping.[28]

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[25] Stapleton and Thomas (eds.), *The Portsmouth Region*, p. 72. See pp. 72–82. See also J. Coad, *The Portsmouth Block Mills – Bentham, Brunel and the Start of the Royal Navy's Industrial Revolution* (Swindon, English Heritage, 2005).

[26] Vesey-Fitzgerald, *Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, p. 243.

[27] See Field, 'Wealth, Style of Life and Social Tone', pp. 68–106.

[28] Stapleton and Thomas, *Portsmouth Region*, pp. 76 and 77. This presence was reflected in the building of the Cambridge Barracks in Portsmouth High Street in 1856, and the Royal Marine Barracks at Eastney between 1862 and 1867.

Despite the dominance of the Royal Navy, and an emphasis on ship-building within the dockyard, Portsmouth did have a more diverse economy. As in Manchester and Norwich, textile production was the largest sector outside the dockyard, and numbers employed in these two areas were roughly similar. While there were naturally large numbers of naval tailors catering for servicemen (officers and sailors had to buy their own uniforms before free issues were introduced in the late nineteenth century), the bulk of employees were poorly paid women, many of whom were engaged in corset-making. Given the dockyard's near-exclusive male workforce, and with many wives and daughters of servicemen dependent upon their absent men's wages, there was a large local pool of female labour eager to make ends meet. This drove wages down, with many manufacturers actually reverting to an old-fashioned 'putting out' system, many women collecting materials from warehouses and then producing the garments in their homes. If shipbuilding and clothing production accounted for the vast bulk of the town's manufacturing sector much of the rest was based on the production of goods and services used by the townspeople, most notably a robust brewing industry.

As Southsea developed, first as a middle-class suburb of the expanding town and then as a Victorian seaside resort, boosted by the coming of the railway in 1847, so the local economy began to include an aspect of leisure and hospitality, plus the subsidiary industries linked to the building of villas, lodging houses, and hotels.[29] Local population growth also facilitated an ongoing building of dwellings, moving from the squalid courtyards of Portsea to more regimented terraces. While it would be 1851 before a population census indicated that the majority of people in England were living in an urban environment, as early as 1801 Portsmouth was already housing just over half the population of predominantly rural Hampshire. This continued throughout the century, with each decade in the 1840s to the 1860s seeing a population increase of over 30 per cent.[30] Such growth was fuelled by employment opportunities resulting from the Royal Navy's involvement in colonial encounters in India and Burma and, slightly closer to home, the Crimean War. They were further encouraged by the Admiralty's development of steam-propelled ships which required the dockyard to build a steam basin, new workshops, and foundries, explicit signs of at least a technological modernisation in the town's central industry.[31] These

[29] See R. C. Riley, *The Growth of Southsea*.
[30] Stapleton and Thomas, *Portsmouth Region*, pp. 72–73.
[31] See R. C. Riley, *The Evolution of the Docks and Industrial Buildings in Portsmouth Royal Dockyard 1698–1914* (The Portsmouth Papers, no. 44, November 1985).

developments were reinvigorated by the intensive programme of ship-building at the turn of the twentieth century as Britain fully engaged with the naval challenge presented by Germany.

Portsmouth governed under its ancient charters until 1836 when the new municipal corporation came into existence. Despite this, public health remained a key issue in Portsmouth throughout the nineteenth century, especially in poorer parts of Portsea and Landport. Even after sprawling beyond its traditional walls and fortifications, the town's dense population ensured that its death rate remained above the national average. While the architect Thomas Ellis Owen was transforming Southsea with his vision of distinctive villas and attractive terraces, the poorer areas of the old town remained little changed. In 1850 Robert Rawlinson's *Report to the General Board of Health on the Sewerage, Drainage, and Water Supply of Portsmouth* gave a damning account of public health in the town, stating that 'many of the least-favoured inhabitants lived in low, weather-boarded cottages packed together without the most elementary facilities'. These poorly constructed buildings were 'scarcely better than hovels'.[32] It noted that 'many houses are erected back to back, and the ground floors of all are excessively damp; the streets are long, narrow, dilapidated, damp, and filthy beyond description … Most of the courts are extremely confined, the approaches being low-tunnel passages, averaging from three to six feet wide.' It was the families of soldiers who 'inhabited some of the most wretched, crowded, and unhealthy quarters of the town'.[33] Despite such criticism it was another seventeen years before mains drainage was started, and the Borough of Portsmouth Waterworks Company did not start providing piped water to the entire population until 1873. The overcrowding that had been a result of not only population growth but also the need for workers to locate next to their place of work (particularly the dockyard) was gradually eased as Portsea Island witnessed a hungry urban expansion during the rest of the century.

The urban environment

Nineteenth-century folklorists clearly appreciated that popular belief in supernatural agency arose from responses to the terrain in which it was located.[34] While much of what follows suggests considerable urban-rural cultural continuity and transmission this first section explores

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[32] Webb *et al.*, *Spirit of Portsmouth*, p. 88.
[33] Wigram, *A Letter on the Spiritual Necessities of Portsea*, pp. 9–10.
[34] See Forby, *Vocabulary of East Anglia*, vol. 2, pp. 385–87.

specifically urban influences on notions of the supernatural, grounded in the experience of the urban environment itself. In doing so it contributes a further retort, if one were still needed, to Philip Abrams' misjudged critique that the city environment should not be considered as an independent variable in historical analysis.[35]

To begin with the most obvious influences, the magical and supernatural have a long association with darkness and the night, conditions that distorted the senses, stirred fears, and played to the imagination's sense of the fantastical. Writing in 1820, George Grote observed that it is during darkness 'that the impression of surrounding beings, whom we cannot see, and who are yet acting around us, is fastened upon our minds in the strongest manner'.[36] While a brooding, agoraphobic darkness was recognised as a factor in rural supernatural beliefs, urban centres possessed an unsettling, claustrophobic darkness created by narrow streets, clustered buildings, and the presence of unknown pedestrians. It was not unusual for parts of the eighteenth-century streetscape, much of which remained essentially unchanged well into the nineteenth century, to be so darkened by shadows that people resorted to candlelight at midday.[37] In 1771, Manchester's borough reeves and constables had to request that shopkeepers take down their signs and put them against the side of their establishments as they 'darken the streets', while nineteenth-century industrialisation increasingly polluted its air, casting a gloomy pall over the sky.[38]

Night obviously added its own particular sense of dramatic unease for urban dwellers. Mark Knights' description of Norwich in 1887 clearly suggested how an eerie, nocturnal urban environment could foster a sense of the supernatural: 'Mysterious almost is the influence of these venerable thoroughfares over the minds of the reflective during the silent watches of the night, when the pale moon sheds athwart them in a flood of silvery light, throwing into picturesque relief hoary towers and pointed gables. Fancy twists ordinary objects … into forms such as

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[35] See P. Abrams and E. A. Wrigley (eds.), *Towns in Societies: Essays in Economic History and Historical Sociology* (Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[36] British Library Manuscript Room (BL ms.), Add. 29531, p. 24. See also Ekirch, *At Day's Close*, especially pp. 3–30. There was a tradition of 'night writings' and nocturnal urban wandering that often dwelt upon the supernatural elements it inspired. See for example 'The Terrors of the Night or a Discourse of Apparitions' in T. Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972), pp. 208–50, C. Lamb, 'Witches and other Night-Fears' in R. Vallance and J. Hampden (eds.), *Charles Lamb: Essays* (London, Folio Society, 1963), pp. 90–96, and C. Dickens, 'Night Walks' in *Selected Journalism, 1850–1870* (London, Penguin, 2006), pp. 73–80.

[37] Ellis, *The Georgian Town*, p. 88.

[38] Axon (ed.), *Annals of Manchester*, p. 100.

might have belonged to the buried past'.[39] Portsmouth Harbour could take on a similar supernatural aura at night. In his 1878 local novel, *By Celia's Arbour*, Walter Besant and James Rice wrote that after night-fall the dockyard encouraged one to imagine 'the ghosts of wrecked ships haunting the places where they were built', and 'the ghosts of old shipbuilders … criticising the new-fashioned models'. This sense of a haunting past was encouraged by the practice of leaving decommissioned ships moored and rotting further up the harbour. One character even declared that the ghosts to be found in 'old inns, deserted houses, ruined castles, and country churchyards … are nothing … compared with the ghosts on an old ship lying forgotten in the harbour'.[40] In both cases there were no objectively 'uncanny' buildings or spatial configurations, just circumstances which stimulated mental projections of supernatural unease, interpretations which were (temporarily) associated with a specific locality and would be weakened, though perhaps never wholly erased by the return of daylight.[41]

Lighting in late eighteenth-century towns could be very poor. Despite the fact that householders had been obliged to place lights outside their homes until eleven at night and that there were 882 public oil lamps in the streets of Norwich in 1803, this muted illumination simply 'made the darkness more visible'.[42] Gas lighting had first been used commercially to light a Manchester mill in 1806 and was trialled in many cities and towns from the early 1820s. Gas lamps were introduced to Norwich in 1820, the British Gaslight Company building a new gas works at Bishop Bridge in 1830. Introduced into Portsea in 1821 its high costs meant its adoption was rather slow and piecemeal. Yet urban lighting did not put an end to latent fears roused by darkness. While providing a more stationary illumination than oil lamps, gas lighting tended to soften the rigidity of urban surroundings, its 'sudden pools of light fringed by blackness' creating a streetscape full of potential mystery and threat.[43] In January 1880 electric lighting was experimented with on The Hard, Portsea, though, again, early electrical lamps were known to make the shadows between the lights even darker. It was with this expectation

[39] Knights, *Highways and Byeways*, p. 14.
[40] Besant and Rice, *By Celia's Arbour*, pp. 160 and 164.
[41] Vidler, *Architectural Uncanny*, p. 12. In Manchester winter fogs had a similar influence on the imagination, transforming the city so that 'people passed like ghosts through phantom streets'. See *Manchester City News*, 5 December 1908.
[42] *Norfolk and Norwich Notes and Queries, 1896–99*, 2 July 1898, p. 362.
[43] Ackroyd, *London – The Biography*, p. 444. Gunn suggests this nocturnal anxiety continued in Manchester until the 1860s when the mysteriousness of its illuminated nightscape increasingly obtained a more romantic quality. See Gunn, *Public Culture*, pp. 52–53.

that commentators on the Portsea lighting experiment were pleased to note that the 'dense shadows about which we have heard so much are obviated by the use of large glass globes'.[44]

Historians have tended to favour the visual in our appreciation of the sensory experience of the past, and this is particularly true of the modern urban environment.[45] This has eclipsed the role of the aural in fostering the raw materials from which supernatural 'incidents' were constructed. That said, historians are gradually coming to appreciate the importance of the rich soundscape that formed an intrinsic part of the urban environment.[46] Nineteenth-century cities became increasingly noisier than their early modern predecessors, and their inhabitants were certainly well attuned to their localised soundscape. In Portsmouth in the 1860s the noise from the dockyard may have appeared a deafening cacophony to outsiders but locals could distinguish 'half a dozen distinct sounds … the multitudinous mallets of the caulkers, which were like the never-ceasing hum and whisper of insects on a hot day … the loud clanging of the hammer from the boiler-makers' shop' and 'the heavy thud … from the Nasmyth steam hammer'. This contrasted sharply with the silence that befell the dockyard after six o'clock when work ended and the only sound to be heard were birds in the trees and the hourly striking of the clock.[47]

Yet like the visually obscured nocturnal streets, the urban soundscape could also be characterised by its indeterminacy, particularly at night. In 1860 the *Manchester Times* reported that 'When strange noises are heard in a house, we rather say it is haunted than that the material

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[44] H. G. Ames (ed.), *Portsmouth in 1880* (Portsmouth Central Library (PCL) ref. 942.27), p. 3.

[45] For modernity's privileging of the visual see D. M. Levin (ed.), *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993), and D. Pick, 'Stories of the Eye', in R. Porter (ed.), *Rewriting the Self – Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London, Routledge, 1997), pp. 186–200. For the visual emphasis in the modernising urban environment see A. Robinson, *Imagining London 1770–1900* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2004).

[46] See for example E. Cockayne, *Hubbub: Filth, Noise and Stench in England, 1600–1770* (Cambridge, MA., Yale University Press, 2008), D. Garrioch, 'Sounds of the City: The Soundscape of Early Modern European Towns', *Urban History*, vol. 30 (2003), pp. 5–25, B. R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England – Attending to the O-Factor* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), A. Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th Century French Countryside* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1998), S. Connor, 'The Modern Auditory I' in Porter (ed.), *Rewriting the Self*, pp. 203–23, P. Bailey, 'Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Historian Listens to Noise', *Body and Society*, vol. 2 (1996), pp. 49–66, and P. J. Corfield, 'Walking the City Streets: The Urban Odyssey in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 16 (1990), pp. 132–61.

[47] Besant and Rice, *By Celia's Arbour*, p. 28.

substances are moving about of their own accord … the supposition of spiritual interference, though it clashes with our experience, is more in harmony with our nature than one which infringes the ascertained laws of material existence.'[48] This was developed in another article on the importance of misinterpreted sounds as accounting for 'ghosts'. It quotes the case of a man who heard a strange sound every night when he went to bed. Although he was 'not naturally superstitious' the regularity with which the sound occurred played on his imagination until he finally deduced it was merely the wardrobe door slowly opening itself. Taken with its theme of misunderstood sounds and the ghost stories people wove around them, the article exclaimed 'How many bells have been preternaturally rung by rats running over the wires! How many owls have given houses the reputation of being haunted!'[49] Of course while appreciating how it *could* generate supernatural accounts we must be wary of accepting too readily these efforts by journalists to explain away the supernatural completely.

Underlying the influence of these various sensory perceptions were psychological impressions. While wary of falling back on Durkheim's assertions of modern society's fragmentation it was undoubtedly the nature of the growing urban conurbation that one could only ever possess a limited, and, relatively speaking, decreasing knowledge of surroundings and people. In such circumstances it is possible to see how the sense of 'the wild' that 'superstition' militated against and the supernatural helped explain in a rural locale could find itself manifested in urban streets.[50] In fact it was frequently the point where urban and rural environments physically met that supernatural tales manifested. This is best demonstrated by Mousehold Heath on the fringe of Norwich, a nexus between the urban and rural 'wildernesses'. The winds that whistled across Mousehold gave rise to accounts of a phantom in a black coach, drawn by headless horses and 'driven by a headless coachman, from whose whip leaped lightning flashes' as he flew through the skies above the city.[51]

This mysterious, claustrophobic cityscape fed an urban Gothic sensibility, at least among commentators who have bequeathed us a record

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[48] *Manchester Times*, 22 September 1860. See also 13 June 1885.
[49] *Manchester Times*, 1 September 1883. For more on sound in the fostering of ghost accounts see C. Ollier, 'A Few Passages on Dreams, Night-Noises, and Phantoms', *Ainsworth's Magazine*, no. 5 (June 1844), pp. 504–09, and Davies, *The Haunted*, pp. 136–37.
[50] The division between perceptions of the village and the wild in terms of magical mentalities and beliefs is outlined in Wilson, *Magical Universe*, p. xviii.
[51] Knights, *Highways and Byeways*, p. 111.

of their views. While usually outsiders to the parts of the city they were investigating, social investigators often perceived the nineteenth-century urban environment as a dark, labyrinthine world. This was in part due to the nature of Georgian towns, which had tended to accommodate their growing populations by increasing settlement density rather than expanding their area, sometimes resulting in an 'oppressive maze' of streets and buildings.[52] This could prompt a sense of the uncanny in the urban environment, a feeling Anthony Vidler has equated with both agoraphobia and claustrophobia. This was not necessarily associated with an overt supernaturalism as much as a more ambiguous sense of unease and strangeness derived from spatial fears, not an open fear of direct threat as much as its fantasised, lurking potential.[53]

By the mid nineteenth century the social and physical consequences of urban growth meant the most extreme examples, most obviously London, but also Manchester and other northern industrial towns, encouraged a reimagining of their built environments and unknown populations in terms of Gothic monstrosity and decay. While less applicable to smaller urban centres like Norwich and Portsmouth, such views reflect a deep anxiety about urban living. This was reflected in government reports such as the 1842 *Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, which found a surprisingly large readership partly because it frequently read like sensational Gothic fiction.[54] James Phillips Kay's *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Class Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (1832) had portrayed Manchester as a contemporary netherworld, his report full of Gothic undertones as he recounted his efforts to deal with a cholera outbreak as following 'in the steps of this messenger of death'. Referring to the poorest quarters of Manchester as 'mighty wildernesses of building', he described how one 'must descend to the abodes of poverty, must frequent the close alleys, the crowded courts, the over-peopled habitations of wretchedness' which form 'the hot-bed of pestilence, ills that fester in secret, at the very heart of society'.[55]

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[52] Ellis, *The Georgian Town*, p. 88.

[53] See Vidler, *Architectural Uncanny*, pp. 4–6 and 22. For a contemporary example of how differing environments influenced people's moods see Samuel Bamford's contrasting descriptions of Manchester and its rural hinterland in the early nineteenth century in Bamford, *Early Days*, p. 78.

[54] Tropp, *Images of Fear*, pp. 75–76. See also Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire*, p. 42.

[55] Kay, *Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Class*, pp. 8 and 11. See also Angus Reach's work on north-west industrial towns in the *Morning Chronicle*, 1849–1851, reprinted in Ginswick (ed.), *Labour and the Poor*. For supernatural beliefs arising from such circumstances see Goodwin, *Town Swamps*, pp. 90–91.

While Portsmouth had witnessed the removal of some older buildings and the introduction of street lighting and paving following a 1768 Act of Parliament, these developments had been confined to the old walled town, not the urban expansion that was gradually taking place beyond it in Portsea and Landport. Mid nineteenth-century Portsmouth was still described as a place where the 'streets were narrow, its houses small, it had no system of drainage, its public buildings were mean'.[56] As late as the 1880s St. Mary's Street, colloquially known as 'Squeeze Gut Alley' on account of its narrowness, was known for its small, poorly lit tenements which were 'hemmed in all round by high brick walls, and no escape in case of fire except by the low, narrow, front entrance'.[57] Norwich similarly hid its poverty in little courts accessible from the main streets by narrow entranceways. As it modernised throughout the nineteenth century the principal thoroughfares received new facades, while older hovels remained concealed and decaying like guilty Gothic secrets.[58]

This Gothic sensibility can be read as an imaginative projection of an unease that incorporated and responded to the obvious inequalities in the changing urban landscape of the period.[59] Peter Ackroyd has suggested that this 'uniquely urban sensibility' developed in the eighteenth century, with the extreme juxtaposition of urban wealth and poverty encouraging 'imaginative extremity', a response arguably best articulated through the supernatural.[60] As will be explored further in later chapters, such a response suggests how the magical imagination provided new ways of experiencing the modernising city, its density and later its spatial expanse playing to the imagination's sense of a haunting, hidden 'otherness' buried within its rich urban fabric.

Unease and fear inspired by obscured perception, eerie sounds, and the sense of a relative loss of comprehension of the environment beyond familiar localities all formed the warp and weft of supernatural accounts. Contrary to the views of contemporary commentators such as

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[56] Gates, *Portsmouth in the Past*, p. 1.
[57] Proctor, *Reminiscences of Old Portsmouth*, p. 16.
[58] See Suffling, *Land of the Broads*, p. 97, and also Stimpson, *Old Nooks and Corners*, Norfolk Heritage Centre (NHC) ref. N942.615 (084).
[59] The shift in focus of Gothic literature in the mid nineteenth century addressed a fantasised, anxiety-ridden awareness of the modernising city. See Botting, *Gothic*, p. 123, Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, and Punter, *Literature of Terror*, vol. 1. For important examples see Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (1843), G. W. M. Reynolds, *Mysteries of London* and *Mysteries of the Courts of London* (1848–1854), James Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874), Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Arthur Machen, *The Red Hand* (1895), and Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897).
[60] Ackroyd, *Albion*, p. 314.

Madders and Jessop, people naturally wove a sense of the supernatural from whatever locale they found themselves in. This obviously complicates urbanisation's conventional historical narrative, for the experience of the nineteenth-century city prompted fantastical imaginings that appear at variance with the progressive assertions of a rational, ideological modernity.

Popular religion and religious supernaturalism

If the urban environment provided both context and stimulus for the plebeian magical imagination, one of the principal influences that informed its content was popular religion. Despite a well-established narrative of increasing nineteenth-century secularisation, a narrative that has recently come under fire from a range of historians, religion still played an important part in urban dwellers' lives.[61] In the context of the magical imagination this was less dependent upon regular church attendance and more on a potent, tenacious, but diffused sense of religiosity that informed a deeply ingrained element of popular 'superstitious' beliefs and practices. While not the central focus here, these popular expressions of religious supernaturalism add yet further impetus to the need to re-evaluate the extent of nineteenth-century secularisation.

Although not a determining factor, one has to situate this religious supernaturalism in the context of urban denominational allegiances, for these bodies provided official sanction for beliefs that continually stoked the magical imagination, even if they did not recognise or condone such interpretations or applications. The 1851 religious census conveniently enables us to take stock of these official religious practices at the halfway point in the nineteenth century. Generally, religious attendance was higher in ports and the older woollen textile cities than in newer, cotton-manufacturing ones. This is borne out by Manchester, Norwich, and Portsmouth. As the cotton town par excellence Manchester had a below national average attendance, with just 34.7 per cent of its population attending a religious service on the

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[61] See Nash, 'Reconnecting Religion with Social and Cultural History', pp. 302–25, J. Cox, 'Master Narratives of Long-Term Religious Change' in H. McLeod and W. Ustorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 201–17, S. Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2002), C. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000*, 2nd edn (New York, Routledge, 2009), P. Collinson, 'Religion, Society and the History', *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 23 (1999), pp. 149–67, and S. J. D. Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline: Organisation and Experience in Industrial Yorkshire, 1870–1920* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Sunday of the census. Attendance at Catholic churches was comparatively high, owing in part to Manchester's large Irish population, while attendance at both nonconformist chapels and Anglican services was relatively low.[62] Anglicanism certainly fared better in Norwich and Portsmouth. Yet these findings cannot be taken at face value, the census commissioner Horace Mann appreciating that they were most likely skewed towards predominantly middle-class attendance.[63]

While nonconformity continued to grow in popularity in urban areas in the second half of the nineteenth century one also has to make distinctions between major groups such as the Wesleyan Methodists and the smaller Primitive Methodists who remained comparatively weak in large towns and cities.[64] Even this needs to be qualified. While the Wesleyans always dominated in Manchester, the Primitive Methodists had a substantial presence.[65] Their first representative had arrived in Manchester in 1819 and they had considerable success in establishing themselves in working-class districts, their first chapel opening in Jersey Street, Ancoats, in 1823. They arrived in Norfolk in 1821, again establishing a presence in urban centres including Norwich and King's Lynn. With predominantly working-class leaders and members, by the time of the 1851 religious census they numbered 25,000 and had 234 chapels, actually making them the dominant Methodist faction in the county. By contrast, they arrived relatively late in Portsmouth in 1849 and struggled to make an impact, only establishing their first chapel

[62] See S. J. D. Green, 'Religion in Industrial Societies: The North of England since c.1750', *Northern History*, vol. 33 (1997), pp. 238–58, and Dennis, *English Industrial Cities*, pp. 30 and 32.

[63] For a summary of the historiographical debate on the 1851 religious census see D. A. Reid, 'Playing and Praying' in Daunton (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History*, vol. 3, pp. 788–92.

[64] *Ibid*., p. 791. See also H. McLeod, *Religion and Society in England 1850–1914* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1996), McLeod (ed.), *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities, 1830–1930* (London, Routledge, 1994), particular pp. 237–86, Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society*, and S. Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernisation: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford University Press, 1992).

[65] The Methodists had opened their first chapel in Birchin Lane, Manchester in 1751. John Wesley then opened a larger chapel in Oldham Street in 1781 and the early nineteenth century witnessed an increase in Wesleyan chapels in Bridgewater Street (1801), Grosvenor Street (1820), and Oxford Road (1826) in Chorlton-upon-Medlock. The Oldham Street Chapel was demolished and replaced with Central Hall in 1886, a centre of evangelical missionary work in Manchester in the later nineteenth century. For an account of Methodism's development in Portsmouth see W. D. Cooper, *Portsmouth Papers no.18 – Methodism in Portsmouth 1750–1932* (Portsmouth Council, 1973). For Norwich see R. Hale, 'Nonconformity in Nineteenth Century Norwich', in Barringer, *Norwich in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 176–98. See also D. Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, c.1750–1900* (London, Routledge, 1996).

in 1851. Here the Wesleyans remained the largest Methodist faction, aided in part by the initial impetus given by John Wesley's numerous personal visits to the town between 1753 and 1790. They also suffered from stiff competition from the Bible Christians who had been established in Southsea and Landport since 1824, and the Anglican Church remained more influential in Portsmouth than in most comparative urban centres.[66]

While recruiting from across the social spectrum Portsmouth Wesleyans were mainly drawn from the ranks of small shopkeepers and tradesmen, and artisans, a trend representative of more national patterns.[67] By contrast Primitive Methodists tended to be from lower down the social order, typically being factory workers, handloom weavers, colliers, labourers, and servants. In the first half of the nineteenth century their lay preachers often made a virtue of being uneducated, plain-speaking, and thus possessing more in common with their congregation than educated middle-class clergymen. Primitive Methodist meetings were loud and passionate, with preachers being known to clamber over pews to rebuke penitents with threats of eternal damnation.[68] Importantly Primitive Methodists drew upon popular superstitious beliefs to articulate their ideas about a directly interventionist God and the ongoing struggle between spiritual forces in everyday life. Writing of the Primitive Methodist influences on the popular imagination in nineteenth-century Norfolk, Augustus Jessop noted how the speakers in their meetings expressed firm belief in, and even experience of, direct personal revelation with angels and spirits. As indication of the tropes and passions which the Primitive Methodists bequeathed to the magical imagination, Jessop cites one particular orator who stormed, 'Don't you go a leanin' on the angels; they've got quite enow to din to fight the devil for ye.' Reflecting on this, Jessop declared that he had expected the demonology but 'the angelology has a little surprised me'. He noted that the labourer's 'great fascination in all these appeals to his imagination' was encouraged by contemplating 'the wonders of the unseen world and its denizens'.[69] There is little reason to expect that

[66] Cooper, *Methodism in Portsmouth*, p. 11, and Yates, *Church and Chapel*, p. 24.
[67] Cooper, *Methodism in Portsmouth*, p. 9.
[68] For examples see Howkins, *Poor Labouring Men*, p. 43, and Virgoe and Williamson (eds.), *Religious Dissent in East Anglia*, p. 80.
[69] Jessop, 'Superstition in Arcady', pp. 740–41. In the late eighteenth century such ideas were reinforced by the Wesleyan's *Arminian Magazine* and, in the nineteenth, by the Primitive Methodists' own publications which provided numerous, ongoing examples of providential and supernatural happenings. While ecclesiastic denominations gradually moved away from talk of 'miracles' and 'providence', the secular press and broadside ballads, and supposedly many of their readers, were still willing to

the potency of such images and narratives would have necessarily been toned down simply because it was conducted in an urban context.[70]

Given this, historians have tended to single out Methodists as important in the perpetuation of nineteenth-century beliefs in spirit manifestations.[71] There is some merit to this idea, although such a direct association is questionable. While building in the late eighteenth century, it was only in the nineteenth that Methodism became a significant movement, and, even then, one riven between its respectable and radical elements, promoting temperance and self-improvement that did not fit naturally with 'popular' cultural mentalities. When it was at its most zealous in promoting the supernatural, it was still relatively small. By the time it had the potential to influence aspects of popular culture it was already distancing itself from such ideas. Primitive Methodism may have sustained into the nineteenth century the supernatural enthusiasm that had characterised earlier Wesleyan Methodism in the mid eighteenth century, but it also mellowed towards respectability from the 1850s, the emphasis on the supernatural being toned down as its ministers became more professional, its services more restrained. Therefore while this was a factor that informed aspects of the magical imagination, both its potential influence and actual impact should not be overstated.[72] Magical beliefs remained evident in areas where Methodism was weak as much as where it was strong. As Owen Davies has highlighted, perhaps the important difference between early Methodism and other denominations was that while it may not have boosted existing beliefs in the supernatural, it did not deter them either.[73]

Yet while sympathising with, and perhaps even stimulating a popular perception of a largely unseen spirit world that enveloped or intersected the material one, Methodism did not condone popular supernatural

entertain such ideas For an 1804 Norwich newspaper report about a man who 'providentially' regained his sight after fourteen years of blindness see NHC Colman 58B [OS] – Sillett, *Broadsides, Bills and Cuttings* (1893), p. 15.

[70] With less dynamism but no less earnestness, evangelicalism was also promoted in Norwich through the City Mission, an organisation created in 1837 by nonconformists that received Anglican cooperation. Targeting the poorest areas of the city, agents read to families and distributed thousands of tracts urging them to repent. See Barringer (ed.), *Norwich in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 189.

[71] Meyer and Pels, *Magic and Modernity*, p. 242.

[72] See Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, p. 15. See also J. Obelkevich, 'Religion' in F. M. L. Thompson (ed.), *Cambridge Social History of Britain*, p. 324.

[73] See Davies, 'Methodism', pp. 254 and 260. For the influence of Methodism in small communities see R. Colls, 'Primitive Methodists in the Northern Coalfields', in J. Obelkevich, L. Roper and R. Samuel (eds.), *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), and J. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825–75* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976).

beliefs in themselves; rather they informed a basis for their own doctrine which ultimately set them apart from such interpretations. While Methodists saw the Devil as Satan, ethnographic interpretations tended to perceive him as a folkloric malevolent trickster and punisher of evildoers. Similarly, Methodists viewed witches as agents of the Devil while popular concern with witches was principally as a malevolent neighbour and immediate threat to loved ones and livestock, older conceptions of diabolism having never been as strong in English popular culture as it had been in 'elite' ones. If popular beliefs in diabolism did linger they were certainly fading by the first half of the nineteenth century as the idea of hell gradually transmuted from a reality to allegory, being increasingly consigned to what Prime Minister William Gladstone referred to as 'the far-off corners of the Christian mind'.[74] While popular conceptions of the Devil remained, popular religious supernaturalism did not tend to speak of 'God' but rather 'providence', perceived as 'a fatalistic and inscrutable power' which guided and warned via omens.[75] Likewise, popular belief in clergymen's power to break witchcraft by praying or reading the bible over the victim situated these 'magical' abilities in the clergymen themselves while Protestant doctrine placed such power in the word of God (though as will be seen below, as contained in the Bible there was an implicit totemic emphasis on the book itself as a magical object). Therefore Methodism was a fellow traveller with regard to popular supernatural beliefs, but ultimately they would always take a different fork on the road.

Despite these influences, church and chapel attendance cannot be taken as indicative of broader popular religious beliefs. In 1851 the Archdeacon of Winchester had lamented what he called 'the religious destitution of Portsea', and little had changed by 1903 when Father Dolling, writing of his experiences in the town, claimed 'many places would be virtually heathen, if the Church of England was the only representative of God in England'. He added that more respectable forms of religious nonconformity also failed to register a presence in urban slums.[76] One also has to take care when gauging the extent to which

[74] Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, p. 358. See also N. Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), R. Muchembled, *A History of the Devil from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Cambridge, Polity, 2003), especially chapters 5 and 6, S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, new edn (Oxford University Press, 1999), M. Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), and Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles*.

[75] See Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, pp. 12 and 13, and Jessop, 'Superstition in Arcady', p. 743.

[76] Wigram, *Letter on the Spiritual Necessities*, p. 5, and Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, p. 21.

supernatural beliefs were upheld by ecclesiastical doctrine and practices since such concerns were clearly informed by inter-denominational fighting. In a circular read before the Lancashire and Cheshire Association of Baptist Churches in Everton in 1874 it was claimed that despite 'the great enlightenment of the present age, there was probably more superstition in England now than there was 100 years ago'. By this it did not mean witchcraft or fear of ghosts, both of which it wrongly claimed to be in decline, but rather a revival in Catholic 'superstitions', what it referred to as 'the magical circle of ecclesiastical fascinations'.[77] While Protestants accused Catholics of sustaining magical superstition through their rituals, especially the sacrament, Anglicans also used this taint to tar nonconformists, suggesting a simplistic interpretation of popular superstition as devolved from Catholicism and rejuvenated by Methodism.[78] This impression conveniently concealed the fact that nineteenth-century urban dwellers were also kept in touch with the idea of an invisible spiritual world via extreme evangelical elements within the Anglican Church too. Boyd Hilton has indicated that this grew vociferously from the mid 1820s, with the early-mid nineteenth century's economic hardships, religious changes surrounding Catholic emancipation, demands for political reform, and periodic outbreaks of cholera all stirring a sense of millenarian upheaval.[79] It has even been suggested that Anglican clergy sometimes indulged their parishioners' appeals for their 'magical' aid, pressured by an awareness of their pragmatic shopping around for clergymen from other denominations who might be more willing to oblige them.[80]

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[77] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 27 June 1874.
[78] See Davies, 'Methodism', p. 253. See also Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, pp. 12–16, Styers, *Making Magic*, pp. 36–38, Hutton, 'The English Reformation and the Evidence of Folklore', pp. 89–116, and T. F. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites That Transform Our Lives and Our Communities* (San Francisco, Harper, 1991), pp. 168–76. For the formulation of 'a Protestant form of magic' see Scribner, 'The Reformation, Popular Magic', p. 490.
[79] Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, p. 10. In Norwich the dormant power of popular millenarianism was demonstrated in a brief apocalyptic scare in March 1844 which resulted in popular claims that the devil was seen on Norwich Castle. See K. Bell, 'The "Humbugg of the World at an End": The Apocalyptic Imagination and the Uses of Collective Fantasy in Norfolk in 1844', *Social History*, vol. 31 (2006), pp. 454–68, J. Wolffe, 'Judging the Nation: Early Nineteenth Century British Evangelicals and Divine Retribution' in K. Cooper and J. Gregory (eds.), *Studies in Church History 40 – Retribution, Repentance, and Reconciliation* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 292–96, E. P. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class* (London, Penguin, 1991), pp. 411–40, and J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming – Popular Millenarianism 1780–1850* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).
[80] See Davies, 'Methodism', p. 263.

As such, rather than focusing on institutional denominations, it is best to wade into what Bob Bushaway has called the 'dense spiritual under-growth' of popular religion.[81] It was this ambient but robust and per-vasive 'field' of religiosity which sustained the popular religious aspect of the magical imagination. Regardless of denominational affiliations, ecclesiastic buildings, graveyards, objects, and rituals sustained a rich body of church folklore and popular magical belief. Like much that informed magical mentalities, this was usually an inherited, ingrained, unsystematic collage of beliefs and practices. The rich blending of the aura associated with consecrated ground and superstitions surround-ing the dead meant churchyards were a natural focus for supernat-ural imagining, especially if the interned were associated with a tragic demise. This was particularly true of suicides, whose spirits were often considered to be restless and who tended to be buried in the north-ern part of the churchyard.[82] Not merely sites to be feared in case of encounters with ghosts, churchyard soil, like holy water, was assumed to have curative powers and it could also be the locale for certain div-inatory practices. It was popularly believed that if one watched the church porch on St. Mark's Night, 25 April, at midnight the observer would witness a ghostly procession of parishioners entering the build-ing. Those who stayed inside were destined to die sometime in the next twelve months.[83]

Beyond particular sites was the popular appropriation of ecclesias-tic symbols, rites, and their written or spoken nomenclature. Religious supernaturalism generated a popular conception of the uneven nature of time. Into the 1890s regional newspapers and folklore collections continued to record belief in the unevenness of lucky and unlucky days, much of which related to the bastardised legacy of a rich ecclesiastical tradition of festivals and saints' days. In a summary of sailors' supersti-tions the *Hampshire Telegraph* indicated that 'Saints' days and Church holidays were regarded as 'unlucky' although 'Sunday was always looked upon as lucky'. Friday, the day of the crucifixion, encouraged a 'special veneration' which 'became converted into a feeling of fear for the results which would follow its violation'.[84] Eating a loaf baked on

[81] Bushaway, '"Tacit, Unsuspected, but still Implicit Faith"', pp. 189–215. See also K. Cooper and J. Gregory, *Elite and Popular Religion: Papers Read at the 2004 Summer Meeting and the 2005 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2006), and Royle, *Modern Britain*, pp. 296–98.

[82] Boase, *Folklore of Hampshire,* p. 77.

[83] Dew, *Dyshe of Norfolke Dumplings*, p. 89.

[84] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 29 February 1986. See S. Roud, *The English Year* (London, Penguin, 2008) and R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year, 1400–1700* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

Good Friday was, in one case at least, credited with causing the swift recovery of a young man who had been suffering from cholera, its curative powers deriving from when it was made rather than any special ingredients.[85]

This use of religious cures to tend to illnesses and ailments was among their most common application. To cure typhus one remedy was to lay the church plate on the stomach of the sufferer, while rings made from coffin handles supposedly prevented cramps and rings made from shillings from the communion collection were used to cure epilepsy. Demonstrating the lingering faith in religious cures, the *Hampshire Telegraph* recorded how scraps of paper bearing the name of St. Apollonia and 'a few words of indifferent Latin' were used to prevent or cure toothache.[86] In Norwich in the late eighteenth century a body was exhumed in St. John's Church and when it was revealed that the woman's hair had kept growing after her death parishioners took locks of the hair, seemingly believing it possessed magical properties. Into the 1840s parents from the city's St. Lawrence parish sent their children to a woman to regularly have their ears cut with the mark of a cross to cure them of illness. Baptism was believed to cure a sick child while one old woman was said to have gone before the Bishop of Norwich to be 'bishopped' (receive confirmation) seven times to alleviate her rheumatism. Religious 'magic' was not so much internal and spiritual, as external and pragmatic.[87]

Perhaps of greatest importance to the magical imagination was the Bible itself. Its scriptural authority was among the most common justification for belief in spirits, witchcraft, and other forms of magic, and it undoubtedly remained a primary source of such ideas throughout the nineteenth century. From a popular perspective, these 'alternative beliefs' were merely extensions of more conventional ones, drawing upon the respectability of the Bible by way of explanation.[88] Biblical justification for supernatural beliefs had been a tenacious popular stance since at least the early modern period. As early as 1656 Thomas Ady's *Candle in the Dark* had argued that contemporary ideas of witchcraft were not actually mentioned in the Bible though this did not stop

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[85] See Gomme (ed.), *Gentleman's Magazine Library*, p. 127.
[86] See Glyde, *Norfolk Garland*, pp. 30–40, and *Hampshire Telegraph*, 23 June 1900.
[87] See *East Anglian Notes and Queries*, vol. 1 (1864), p. 426, *Norfolk Chronicle*, 18 April 1840, and Forby, *Vocabulary of East Anglia*, pp. 406–07. For more on urban popular religion and popular superstition in London see S. C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880–1939* (Oxford University Press, 1999).
[88] See Bushaway, '"Tacit, Unsuspected, but still Implicit Faith"'. See also Waters, 'Belief in Witchcraft', pp. 108–10.

believers imposing such interpretations back on to it so that more 'modern' notions of witchcraft coloured their reading. Throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries detaching popular magical belief from biblical justifications without undermining popular faith in biblical authority had proven a tricky theological manoeuvre. This was particularly the case for all shades of Protestantism which placed such importance on the authority of the written word. As late as the Tring incident in 1751 it was claimed that clergymen could not dismiss witchcraft as 'an idle delusion' without risking accusations of latitudinarianism.[89] Nineteenth-century clergymen continued to struggle with this dilemma and often resorted to Ady's semantic argument that the frequently cited 'witch' of Endor was not actually a witch as people in the early modern or modern period would define one. Despite this, popular belief remained strong. When Russell Scott, minister of the High Street Chapel in Portsmouth, undertook a series of sermons aimed at dispelling the scriptural claims for the existence of the Devil in 1820–1821 he expected to be met with considerable opposition, even 'reproach and indignity'.[90] Even if the clergy had had some success in prising apart the Bible and continuing belief in witches by the mid nineteenth century, a highly questionable proposition, from the 1850s such ideas received renewed impetus from the growth of spiritualism. Its advocates argued that such was the evidential support provided by biblical scriptures that belief in spirits, 'clairvoyance, laying on of hands, or healing mediumship … should not be cursed as witchcraft'.[91]

While this complicates the 'otherness' implied in ideas of 'alternative' beliefs it did not automatically align the magical imagination with orthodoxy and respectability. As indicated above, nineteenth-century religious cultures were unable to offer such straightforward notions, embodying as they did contradictory impulses towards, on the one hand, a rationalised, moral Christianity seeking to shed all 'archaic' remnants of the supernatural and, on the other, a passionate evangelicalism, even millenarianism, that fervently appealed to it. This left the Bible open to multiple interpretations, from the literal to the allegorical and metaphorical, a debate that contemporary clergymen were necessarily involved in. In a published letter of 1875 Reverend Gunn of Irstead, Norfolk, called for the 'expurgation of fabulous stories and

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[89] *Manchester Times*, 28 August 1880.
[90] Scott, *An Analytical Investigation*, p. 1. For a similar denial of the reality of miracles and supernatural revelations see Hunt, *Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 266. See also Styers, *Making Magic*, p. 42, Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, pp. 95–106, and Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, pp. 7–11.
[91] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 16 January 1875.

statements from the Bible', believing that 'to tell such tales as true to children cannot but produce injurious and demoralizing effects'.[92]

Yet in the context of this chapter, it is not so much biblical justification as stimulation that is of key importance. Rather than the theological arguments that could be reasoned through resort to biblical stories, it was the power of those tropes and narratives themselves that coloured and stirred the imagination. While we do not have abundant evidence of how reading informed the imagination it is fair to say that most of those who learned to read were likely to do so through the Bible, particularly if their literacy skills were gained through a Sunday school education. As a result, angels, demons, 'witches', and ghosts were powerful tropes that the Bible continued to reinforce and transmit into nineteenth-century popular culture. Indicative of this was a popular protective 'prayer' recited by children as late as the 1890s:

> Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
> Bless the bed that I lie on.
> Four corners to my bed,
> Five angels there lie spread;
> Two at my head, two at my feet,
> One at my heart, my soul to keep.[93]

The doggerel rhyme invoking the gospel writers and angels transformed its Christian content from a simple prayer into a vocal 'spell', appropriating it from religious orthodoxy while still drawing upon its power.

Beyond specific localities, artefacts, and tropes, some critics condemned the mere aura of religion as sustaining 'superstition'. One such critic, writing about Portsmouth in 1835, questioned the appropriateness of calling the Landport ward '"All Saints"', dismissing it as 'absurd to mete out the sections of a town to various Saints … What has St. Thomas, or St. John, or St. Mary to do with wards or Corporations?.' This complainant urged the corporation to 'Get rid of superstition, and preserve secular affairs from being associated with those which are religious'.[94] Similarly, when Norwich Council bought a new municipal burial ground in 1855 to alleviate its overcrowded churchyards, Richard Bentley criticised the idea that it should be consecrated. Writing to the Mayor of Norwich, he declared the Church deliberately fostered superstitions about consecrated ground until people became convinced that 'they cannot lie in peace, except in ground over which the Bishop has

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[92] Gunn, *Letter Addressed by Mr John Gunn*, pp. 22 and 26.
[93] Dew, *Dyshe of Norfolke Dumplings*, pp. 79–80.
[94] Slight, *History of Portsmouth*, p. 3.

said his mummery'.[95] Despite the theories of late Victorian anthropologists, such a persistent wealth of religious 'superstition' emphasises that magic and religion were not two dichotomous cultures in nineteenth-century cities. Rather people conflated magical and religious rites into a popular 'system of the sacred' without inherent contradiction.[96]

Oral 'folklore' and popular superstition

Like religion, the vast bulk of beliefs and practices that fostered and sustained the magical imagination were culturally inherited. This inheritance could be long, rich, and complex. S. J. Coleman associated Norfolk's phantom black dogs and witches with the region's Saxon, Jute, and Angle predecessors. Similarly T. W. Shore, writing in the 1890s, felt some of Hampshire's nineteenth-century folklore derived from 'the fertile imaginings of the Middle Ages', especially its ghosts.[97] William Henderson, dissecting the component parts of 'superstition' in northern counties in 1866, identified 'heathen' aspects associated with fairies mixed with beliefs that had their origins in the rites of the pre-Reformation Church and the customs and tales of Saxons and Vikings. Such ideas suggest an imaginative inheritance associated not just with locations but the distant past. Yet he also credited the origins of some 'superstitions' as arising spontaneously from 'sensitive and imaginative minds, yearning for communion with a mysterious past and yet more mysterious future'.[98] It is this last aspect that hinted at the unending creation of new forms of magical belief in the nineteenth century.

Oral storytelling in childhood primed people from their youth with superstitions, magical beliefs, and supernatural fears. This practice was a long-established custom with an equally long tradition of elite criticism. In an extract from Reginald Scott's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, republished in the *Manchester Times* in 1848, it condemned 'our mothers' maids' who frightened children with a veritable army of 'spirits, witches, urchens, elves, hags, faerie … and such other bugs, that we

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[95] Bentley, *Consecration of Cemeteries*, p. 11.
[96] See D. Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch: The System of the Sacred in Early Modern Terra d'Otranto* (Manchester University Press, 1992). See also H. Parish and W. Naphy (eds.), *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe* (Manchester University Press, 2002), Wilson, *Magical Universe*, pp. 459–68, and Thomas, *Decline of Magic*, pp. 25–173. For distinctions between magic and religion in the nineteenth and early twentieth century see Styers, *Making Magic*, and Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion*.
[97] Coleman, *Norfolk and Its Folklore*, NHC ref. C398.3, pp. 5–6, and Shore, *History of Hampshire*, pp. 171 and 174.
[98] Henderson, *Folk-lore of the Northern Counties*, p. 8.

are afraid of our shadows'.[99] This richly imaginative legacy was recog-
nised by contemporary critics such as George Laurence Gomme, the
Secretary of the Folklore Society. He believed the power of 'supersti-
tion' was sustained into the nineteenth century due to the reverence
granted to inherited tradition, and that the man who could liberate
himself from such thoughts and practices also freed his children for it
only took one generation to 'break the thread of traditional sanction
… and the whole fabric gives way before the march of intellect'.[100] An
inclination towards inherited 'tradition' encouraged a culture that end-
lessly deferred to the past, thereby implicitly opposing the concept of a
forward-looking modernity.

Beyond this magical indoctrination in childhood, particular times of
the year became associated with supernatural storytelling, especially
Christmas. This was blamed on an adherence to a customary oral trad-
ition though from the 1840s it obviously received added impetus from
the literary Christmas ghost tales of Charles Dickens.[101] Giving some
indication of the powerful effect of telling ghost stories when gathered
around the winter fire, *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper* reported:

There is a solemn hush as the preliminary words are spoken and the narrator
begins his legend. Every syllable is heard with attention; shy glances are cast
over the shoulder at the least unexpected sound; the striking of the pale-faced
clock makes the listener start; and finally, they linger by the fire when … there
is the unpleasant journey to be made up to bed in no more cheerful society
than that of a flat candlestick. No doubt many of our readers may recall such
a scene as we have described; and smiling now at their fears, remember well
enough that those fears were terribly real long ago. We had in our younger days
an intimacy with several ghosts – that is, we had heard, with a shiver, the dark
stories belonging to them.[102]

Such tales were not solely the preserve of Christmas custom. W. H.
Saunders indicated a culture of supernatural storytelling in Portsmouth's
taverns in the early nineteenth century. He recounted how after sing-
ing and drinking conversation progressed from tall tales related to sea
monsters and mermaids, to accounts of ghost ships and the ill-luck that
beset certain vessels, to a more general discussion about prophecy.[103]
The popularity of ghost stories in oral storytelling arguably distorted
the written folkloric record, for such accounts remain far more common
than narratives of magic in cities. This is especially true in Manchester.

[99] *Manchester Times*, 29 January 1848.
[100] Gomme, *Gentleman's Magazine Library*, p. vi.
[101] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 17 December 1900, p. 12.
[102] *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper*, 2 January 1864, pp. 92–93.
[103] Saunders, *Tales of Old Portsmouth*, PCL ref. Sau 942.2792, p. 43.

Parts of the township of Droylsden, four miles east of Manchester, were said to have been overrun with 'boggarts' in the mid nineteenth century. Hauntings were so frequent that Droylsden even had its own boggart seer to protect the township. The last, a man referred to as 'J. W.', had been known to 'combat with feeorin' between East End and Droylsden tollgate' on the Manchester to Ashton turnpike, though when he died (in the 1850s) he failed to pass his gift on to an heir.[104]

Socialised and acculturated into such beliefs from an early age, people lived their daily lives closely enveloped in a web of 'superstitious' beliefs, an ongoing faith in the efficacy of specific magical practices being sustained within this broader ambience of supernatural mentalities. S. S. Madders, summarising superstitious beliefs in Norwich in the 1850s, stated that horseshoes were still to be found nailed to doorways to deter witchcraft, that the poor attempted to cure illnesses through charms, and continued to seek divinatory advice from the city's cunning folk.[105] In Moston, Manchester, it was recognised that the introduction of new ideas only slowly established themselves while inherited superstitious beliefs and practices proved resilient.[106] This tenacity is not so surprising. Superstitious interpretations of signs and events had saturated the lives of earlier generations, had become a naturalised, almost subconscious form of thought and behaviour which informed every stage of human life (and death). Such a ubiquitous presence was difficult to jettison swiftly. 'Superstition' offered comfort, and an ability to be proactive, or at least responsive, to the verities of life.

Into the early-mid nineteenth century Mancunians' access to the countryside was still but a short stroll away. Beyond its medieval walls, Norwich's developing suburbs blurred into the surrounding countryside and despite Portsmouth's growth in the first half of the period at least, much of Portsea Island remained undeveloped, with sixteen farms still in existence in 1835.[107] In considering the city as an abstracted,

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[104] See Higson, *Historical and Descriptive Notices*, pp. 68 and 69, and Walker and Nevell, *Folklore of Tameside*, p. 62.

[105] Madders, *Rambles in an Old City*, p. 283.

[106] Roeder, 'Some Moston Folklore', p. 69.

[107] Gates (ed.), *Records of the Corporation 1835–1927*, p. 8. The strength of association between fairies and rural environments restricted them to these liminal regions. Manchester's fairy lore was associated with the fringe of the city, especially Moston and the Buckhold Fields. See Roeder, 'Some Moston Folk-lore', pp. 70–75, and *Manchester City News Notes and Queries*, vol. 7 (1888), pp. 148–49. Fairies supposedly dwelt at Blow Hill, Little Melton, a few miles outside Norwich, but hyter-sprites, a generally benevolent fairy of rural Norfolk, were unknown in Norwich. See Rabuzzi, NHC ref. C398.4, p. 15. Accounts of fairies survived in rural Hampshire throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in the New Forest. In 1934, F. E. Stevens recorded that while Hampshire had its fairy lore it 'indubitably lacks believers'. He

intellectual construct, best (or worst) exemplified in Mumford's notion of 'Coke Town', the platonic ideal of the grim industrial city, commentators have tended to conceive a hermetically sealed environment; focus on the constructed has obscured the continual presence of the natural. Even as cities developed there was continued interaction between the urban and rural, most notably in the sale of rural produce in urban markets, the seasonal traipsing between certain types of urban and rural work, and the attendant migration back and forth between city and countryside. Many of the huge numbers of newly arrived urban migrants retained strong links to their rural families.[108] This is not to imply a linear transition of 'superstition' from rural to urban environments, for that would merely reiterate contemporary rural prejudices. Rather it is to emphasise the commonality between elements of urban and rural superstitions. Cities continued to concoct divinatory animal omens although they were less prevalent and diverse than in rural cases. As late as 1900 the *Manchester Times* outlined a contemporary popular belief that when 'strange white pigeons' tapped on the windows or sat on the sill of a house it was an omen of impending death within the household. It had been popularly believed that if three jackdaws were seen together on the weather vane of St. Peter Mancroft Church, Norwich, that there would be bad weather. An instinct towards weather-lore therefore continued in the city, using a dominant urban landmark for reference rather than natural phenomena.[109]

The bulk of popular superstitions were associated with the body, food, the household, birth, courtship, death, and their related social ceremonies.[110] Most existed within the context of the home. Features of the domestic environment could be altered or imbued with particular significance by sympathetic beliefs associated with the dead and

wistfully added, 'I have not seen the fairies of the Forest, but I have not given up hope.' See Stevens, *Hampshire Ways*, pp. 118–19.

[108] See, for example, Feldman. 'Migration', pp. 185–206, MacRaild and Martin, *Labour in British Society*, pp. 62–85, R. Woods, *Demography of Victorian England* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), and Pooley and Turnbull, *Migration and Mobility in Britain*. Morris and Rodger argued that migration into cities was the dominant influence on nineteenth-century urban population growth. See Morris and Rodger, *Victorian City*, pp. 3–4.

[109] See *Manchester Times*, 14 September 1900. As proof that this belief operated in an urban environment, the article cited an example from Hull. For Norwich see Gerish, *Norfolk Folklore Collection*, vol. 1, p. 66. This appreciation of the weather by urban dwellers was reiterated by the so-called 'penny wizard', who told a London journalist, 'I do a great deal in the weather predicting way', especially for people getting married. See *Hampshire Telegraph*, 26 December 1896.

[110] For good contemporary summaries of these various superstitions see Glyde, *Norfolk Garland*, *Norfolk Notes and Queries* (1903), pp. 387–93 and 398–400, and Harland and Wilkinson, *Lancashire Folk-Lore*.

dying. To aid the release of a soul from a body, doors and windows were opened. It was popularly believed that a person would suffer a protracted death if lying on a mattress of pigeon feathers.[111] In 1893 the *Hampshire Telegraph* argued that before consumption could be effectively treated people had to overcome 'the night air superstition'. A fear of breathing in the night air encouraged people to shut their windows, resulting in their nocturnal hours spent stewing in 'the stagnant, azotised, and offensive atmosphere of [the] bedroom', circumstances which critics felt favoured the transmission and worsening of consumption.[112] Another common superstitious belief was that the ticking of the death-watch beetle presaged a householder's imminent demise. Rationalising this belief through reference to poor urban sanitary conditions, George Goodwin observed that death-watch beetles were more frequently found in damp lodgings, which were themselves the cause of much ill-health and premature death.[113] Writing in 1899, William Axon summarised the ubiquitous nature of domestic superstition when he wrote, 'Whatever happened, good or bad, was referred alike to the supernatural powers, who for bane or blessing were continually intervening in the most trivial details of every home.'[114]

Certain urban sites also pandered to the perpetuation of this superstitious instinct. The gallows were associated with superstitions linked to the curative properties of a recently executed man's hand. In 1825 the *Hampshire Telegraph* reported that following the execution of three men at the county gaol, a small crowd of women and children pressed around the corpses 'eager to be rubbed by the yet quivering hand of the dead men, as an antidote against various diseases'. Such practices were only effectively stopped by the ending of public executions in 1868.[115] Other urban superstitions surrounded crossroad burials in cities. It was often urban redevelopment that led to the unearthing of these interred bodies. A crossroad burial was conducted in Norwich in 1821, and in Portsmouth one occurred on 15 August 1823 (the year the practice was banned) at a junction by the 'Air Balloon' public house. While suicides traditionally had a stake driven through their chest to stop them becoming restless spirits it was not recorded whether this procedure

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[111] *Manchester City News Notes and Queries*, vol. 2 (1879), p. 218.
[112] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 21 October 1893.
[113] Goodwin, *Town Swamps*, p. 89.
[114] Axon, *Echoes of Old Lancashire*, pp. 220–21.
[115] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 21 March 1825. For gallows superstitions see Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*, p. 80–89. For incidents of rubbing with a dead hand see *Norfolk and Norwich Notes and Queries*, 4 August 1900, p. 149. For nineteenth-century superstitions surrounding the dead see Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, pp. 3–29.

was still followed in these two late examples.[116] Yet even once the prac-
tice of staking corpses and burying the restless dead – suicides and
murderers – at crossroads was ended, suicides continued to be treated
differently, often being interred at night.

Particular urban occupations also generated their own superstitions.
Cabmen were known to be particularly superstitious, many of their
practices linked to predicting or even determining trade. A cat crossing
the path of a cab was taken as an omen of poor business for the day,
while it was bad luck for the driver to put his left foot on the wheel first
as he climbed onto his box, or to open his carriage door with his left
hand. It was taken as a good omen if his first fare was 'a drunken man
with a torn umbrella', for it was a portent of coming rain and therefore
that trade was likely to be more abundant. Much of the harnessing of
good luck came from seemingly irrational associations or even 'conta-
gious' magic. To quickly pick up and smoke the cigar stub discarded
by 'a well-dressed man' would supposedly bring luck while many felt
they had to 'turn their horses a certain number of times before they will
catch a customer'.[117] Similarly, in 1908 *Manchester City News* reported
on the costers who affixed 'various bones, tails, claws, and other use-
less impediments' to their borrows as amulets and charms, noting
that Manchester's hawkers still believed in 'the Evil Eye' and looked
to 'a curved tooth or a mole's foot or a wild animal's claw to keep the
unknown foe at bay'.[118] A contributor to the Notes and Queries section
of the *Manchester Times* noted that fixing horseshoes to doors to protect
against witchcraft was prevalent among colliers who liked to ensure
there were 'a couple of horseshoes nailed to the framework at the top
of the coalpit'. He inquired whether this practice was to be found in
the collieries near Manchester though, as was often the case with such
requests, he does not appear to have received a response.[119]

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[116] See R. Halliday, 'Wayside Graves and Crossroad Burials', pp. 80–83, M. MacDonald
and T. R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England*, new edn (Oxford,
Clarendon Press, 1994), and M. MacDonald, 'The Secularization of Suicide in
England, 1660–1800', *Past and Present*, 111 (May 1986). For Norwich see *Norwich
Mercury*, 6 September 1794, and *Norfolk Chronicle*, 8 September 1821. For Manchester
examples see Wright Procter, *Memorials of Manchester Streets*, p. 209 and *Manchester
Evening News*, 18 September 1907. For Portsmouth see Gates, *Portsmouth that Has
Passed*, p. 254.

[117] *Manchester Times*, 22 January 1887.

[118] *Manchester City News*, 5 December 1908.

[119] *Manchester Times*, 13 March 1891. An increasingly industrialised environment did
not negate the possibility of popular superstition or even overt witchcraft. At Holden
Bridge in Lancashire a number of female workers fell into convulsions following
a prank in their cotton factory in 1787. Workers' superstitions about this 'plague'
focused on the belief that a disease had been introduced by a bag of cotton opened
in the factory. See Salverte, *The Occult Sciences*, p. 85. In 1848 a women living near

These apotropaic 'superstitions' naturally clustered around potentially dangerous occupations and it is not surprising to find Portsmouth's sailors, be it merchant or Royal Naval mariners, shared the general nautical folklore of British seafarers. Whistling was forbidden for, it was believed through imitative magic that one would raise a storm, a power that was once thought to have been wielded by witches. It was lucky to have a cat on board, but unlucky to carry women or priests. It was unlucky to sail aboard ships that were named after those that had previously met misfortune and in the 1850s the Navy had considerable difficulties finding a crew to sail in HMS *Asp*, a ship renowned for its hauntings.[120] Such beliefs, aimed at ameliorating the general dangers of a life at sea, were passed on from generation to generation of seafarers. This applied to a disproportionately large percentage of the local male population in Portsmouth and these highly developed superstitious mentalities were not left aboard ship during shore leave. Portsmouth's inhabitants were said to live with 'their eyes fixed upon the ripples of the Spithead', their thoughts frequently dwelling on the potential dangers of life at sea for themselves and loved ones.[121] Writing in the *New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register* in July 1814, a Portsmouth dweller signing himself as 'Robertus' outlined the superstition surrounding the possession of a caul, the membrane in which a baby is born. Noting how they were frequently on sale to the public via advertisements he claimed there was 'a firm belief, entertained by a great portion of the lower class of mariners' that possession of a caul ensured seafarers were 'effectually protected from being drowned, under *whatever* circumstances'.[122] A similar belief was associated with the golden barque that adorned the top of Portsmouth's St. Thomas' Church. When it was brought down for cleaning or repair children would often be stood in the model ship to protect them from the risk of drowning in the future.[123]

While these various factors are indicative of an underlying context and constant store from which the magical imagination's propensity

Stourbridge on the outskirts of Birmingham claimed to have 'the power of witchcraft'. In late July she terrorised the whole neighbourhood by asserting that a large steam-engine boiler at the British Company's Iron Works, Congreaves, would burst. The threat of witchcraft caused disruption to the company as some of its employees avoided going to work. See *Manchester Times*, 1 August 1848, p. 6. Miners and builders had long maintained their own particular superstitions. See Wood, *Politics of Social Conflict*, pp. 195–200, and Thomas, *Decline of Magic*, p. 665.

[120] See Boase, *Folklore of Hampshire*, pp. 159–63.
[121] *National Union of Teachers Conference Souvenir – Portsmouth and its Story* (London, 1926), p. 85.
[122] *New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register*, August 1814, pp. 20–21.
[123] Esmond, *Charm of Old Portsmouth*, p. 39.

towards 'superstition' was generated, it is also important to recognise the significance rare and random events could have in stimulating such a mentality. In 1854 the *Manchester Times* reported on a strange occurrence in Barton-upon-Irwell, a village six miles west of Manchester. Samuel Warburton, his wife, brother, and a twelve-year-old relative had all been greatly alarmed by numerous examples of butter spontaneously appearing on the floor, furniture, and in the beds of their house. When the newspaper sent a journalist to investigate he found discussion of this inexplicable phenomenon was 'rife in the railway carriages between Manchester and Stretford'.[124] Following the October 1863 earthquake in England the *Hampshire Telegraph* glumly noted that popular perceptions of what it presaged would be little different from the Dark Ages, fearing 'hundreds of thousands' would perceive it as an omen of 'an angry Providence'. It despondently predicted that the famous London astrologer Zadkiel would sell 'a hundred thousand more copies [of his almanac] on the strength of another lucky hit' since he had foretold the likelihood of an earthquake that month. The sceptical journalist pointed out that Zadkiel had hedged his bets by speaking of earthquakes 'both physical and political', and had not specified England. Yet this freak stimulus to the validity of astrological prediction was itself rather haphazard. The earthquake's effects had been felt most severely in the west and north-west of England, less so in East Anglia or the south.[125] As such, in this instance those in Manchester may have had their faith in astrology, prophecy, and even divine providence reinvigorated by 'firsthand' experience while those in Norwich or Portsmouth would not.[126]

Beyond these random incidences, the magical imagination was also stimulated by more manufactured 'events'. A fondness for ghost hoaxes fused an uneasy combination of belief and entertainment which blurred boundaries between representations and reality. Drawing upon the frisson of the supernatural, it mattered little if an apparition was 'real' or a prank.[127] Norwich's mid nineteenth-century broadside ballads suggest an enthusiastic fondness for being 'humbugged', a sentiment that was noticeably absent from similar street literature in Manchester or Portsmouth. One Norwich ballad declared:

[124] *Manchester Times*, 4 February 1854.
[125] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 17 October 1863, p. 3. See also A. Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2001).
[126] Mother Shipton had prophesised that the world would end in 1881 and this prediction still had adequate believers to cause 'much perturbation in that year'. This was especially true in Portsmouth when a comet was seen in the night sky. See *Hampshire Telegraph*, 5 April 1890, and Proctor, *Reminiscences of Old Portsmouth*, p. 12.
[127] See Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, p. 46.

Norwichers we know are a rum set of folks,
And clearly delight in a precious good hoaks;
For they will run like the deuce any sight for to see,
No matter how foolish the sight it might be.[128]

Supernatural hoaxes offered brief, tantalising escape from drab realities by holding out the possibility of something beyond the prosaic. In 1893 Charles Roper recorded how in his youth the Heigham ghost created great excitement in Norwich and while some ventured out to capture the prankster others, particularly the old and young, were said to be more convinced that it 'foreboded evil, and might be supernatural after all'.[129] On the rural fringes of Manchester another prankster orchestrated the 'Boggart o' th' Stump' hoax. A stuffed monkey, purchased at an auction after a drinking session in Ashton, was crowned with a paper hat and placed on top of a wooden stump in Daisy Nook by its owner. The joker then concealed himself in the hedge to observe people's reactions to this impish horror. One young man walking by with his girlfriend was so convinced it was the devil that he fled, abandoning his companion.[130]

Yet not all hoaxes were merely mischievous pranks, for some supernatural tales were supposedly perpetuated for illicit commercial gain. In Norwich smugglers were believed to have exploited local tales of the phantom horseman's association with Hassett's Manor House at Thorpe for their own benefit. The house was associated with strange sights and sounds and it was said that there were doors within the building that could never be opened. These accounts kept people away from the smugglers' hiding place, the house a useful depot for conveying their contraband to their contacts and fences in Norwich.[131]

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[128] 'The Monster Humbug', *Broadsides and Songs* (NHC ref. C821.04), p. 145. Supernatural hoaxes perpetrated through street ballads formed part of the established genre of 'catchpennies' that deliberately manufactured such fictional accounts in the knowledge that they would sell well. See Hindley, *Curiosities of Street Literature*, p. 3.

[129] Roper, 'On Witchcraft Superstition in Norfolk', p. 797. Some books of conjuration explained how to perform a supernatural hoax. One warned that the hoaxer must be cautious when practising the trick for people might be terrified into believing it was 'the work of some diabolical agent'. See *Whole Art of Legerdemain*, p. 17. For supernatural hoaxes see Davies, *The Haunted*, pp. 165–86.

[130] *Gorton and Openshaw Reporter*, 27 December 1957.

[131] Varden, 'Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore', *East Anglian Handbook and Agricultural Annual for 1885* (1885), p. 77. For local smugglers' use of the legend of Shuck, the phantom dog of the north Norfolk coast, see L'Estrange (ed.), *Eastern Counties Collectanea*, p. 2. See Norfolk Record Office (NRO) ref. HMN 6/213 for the vicar of Wenhaston's comments on 'ghost raising' as a means of local smugglers keeping people off certain roads at night, and the way supposedly haunted houses proved useful for the temporary storage of their contraband.

This suggests how new hoaxes were linked back into existing 'genuine' accounts for authoritative resonance, reversing the idea that legends tend to filter down through time in one direction. With smuggling in Hampshire at its height between 1780 and 1840, local historians have similarly indicated that many of the county's nineteenth-century ghost stories derived from smugglers seeking to frighten people away from their activities.[132] Therefore, despite these most material of motives, smugglers added to the perpetuation of supernatural beliefs in these localities, at least up until the mid nineteenth century. Thereafter such tales took on a life of their own as they were retold, merging into the larger body of local supernatural lore.

Magical practices and urban practitioners

Beyond 'superstitious' inclinations and proclivities towards a belief in the supernatural were magical practices. Here two related factors helped sustain the magical imagination in this period: the traditional tendency to resort to magical solutions in certain situations and the continued existence of urban practitioners who were able to provide them. Bound in a symbiotic relationship, the known presence of such individuals was likely to reinforce the authority and use of their services while continuing belief in their potential efficacy kept such practitioners in work, at least as a lucrative sideline.

Bob Bushaway has suggested a nineteenth-century resurgence of superstitious beliefs in response to the period's turmoil and apprehension. However, none of the anxieties he subsequently highlights – unemployment, incapacity, illness, death, and the meagre resources of poor communities – were specific to the nineteenth century, forming as they did the perennial hardships of life for the lower orders.[133] Urban existence was frequently a series of trials over which the poor could easily feel they had little control. Swayed by the winds of war or peace the bust and boom of Portsmouth's local economy created unstable periods of prosperity and hardship. For the once-prosperous handloom weavers of Norwich the first half of the century saw incredible hardship as the city's woollen industry died a protracted death, the victim of changing textile fashions. The employment opportunities present in Manchester created its own problems as migrant and immigrant workers flooded into the town, particularly in the 1810–1850 period, exacerbating poor sanitary conditions in high-density neighbourhoods such

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[132] Boase, *Folklore of Hampshire*, pp. 58 and 60.
[133] Bushaway, '"Tacit, Unsuspected, but still Implicit Faith"', pp. 212–13.

as 'Little Ireland'. The claustrophobic nature of such communities was ripe for the transfer of virulent diseases and made people only too aware of the undesirable behaviour of others. Such dangerous and uncontrollable circumstances stoked a sometimes desperate faith in magical practices.[134]

Critics noted that despite the great fluctuations in their wages few of Manchester's factory operatives put money aside in times of prosperity and if they did it was no more than a couple of pence a week. They took this as indicative of this classes' lack of self-sufficiency, believing that operatives turned instinctively to charitable aid upon which they soon became dependent. While this indicated the short-term thinking and frequent crisis-management nature of urban existence for the poor, such an opinion failed to acknowledge the role played by magical practices, some of which undoubtedly had a basis in what one critic recognised as communal mutual support networks.[135] To outsiders, magic represented a passive approach to the world, people ignorantly responding to the vagaries of urban life by foolishly placing faith in hocus-pocus rather than pragmatic self-help efforts. Yet magic can and should be interpreted as an exercise in self-help. Magical practices had contemporary relevance because they continued to temper misfortune and uncertainty and provided empowering means of self-assertion and motivation. In such circumstances magical mentalities should not be read as examples of ignorance but inherited strategies of necessity.

Certain magical practices were sustained by their apparent functionality, offering as they did an alternative means of broadening the range of treatments for illness, a proactive method of protection or detection, and ways of shaping or reinforcing decisions about prospective partners.[136] Unlike the underlying persistence of 'superstitious' mentalities

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[134] See Jahoda, *Psychology of Superstition*, p. 91, and also R. E. Park, E. W. Burgess, and R. D. McKenzie, *The City* (University of Chicago Press, 1925), pp. 128–29. Park provided a tentative sociological exploration of urban magical mentalities in chapter 7.

[135] Love, 'A Few Pages about Manchester', p. 25.

[136] While Thomas highlighted the development of the insurance industry as a factor in the decline of magic, it was, certainly in its earlier stages, a luxury of the wealthy, not the lower classes. See Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 651–54, and also R. Pearson, 'Thrift or Dissipation? The Business of Life Assurance in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, vol. 43 (1990), pp. 236–54. The closest the urban lower classes came to some sort of insurance was the Friendly Societies and burial clubs that developed in the eighteenth century and flourished in the nineteenth. Portsmouth's dockyard workers had their own 'self-help organisations' to protect against the potentially damaging effects of sickness or unemployment. See Webb, *Early Nineteenth Century Dockyard Worker*, p. 3. See also A. Borsay and P. Shapely (eds.), *Medicine, Charity and Mutual Aid: The Consumption of Health and Welfare in Britain, c.1550–1950* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007).

which sought to constantly temper the precarious balance between fortune and misfortune, magical practices were directed towards specific, pragmatic outcomes rooted in the immediate needs of everyday life. The pressing but mundane intentions that drove people to magical solutions can often be belittled or overlooked when perceived through the smeared lens of elite condescension and ridicule. Writing of nineteenth-century Manchester, John Hatton noted that it was the dirty, badly ventilated back-to-back houses and courts which were the source of much of the town's unnecessarily high mortality rates.[137] The first official steps to tackle Manchester's poor accommodation did not begin until around the mid nineteenth century, with back-to-backs being banned in 1844 and cellar dwellings regulated from 1853. Having been chastised for its poor public health provision in Rawlinson's 1850 report, the town made efforts to improve amenities following the demolition of the old ramparts in 1860. Parks and recreational areas were developed although the first, Victoria Park, was not opened to the public until April 1878. Norwich's growing poverty in the first half of the nineteenth century had exacerbated its poor living conditions, its rising population placing a strain on inadequate housing, water, and sanitation facilities. With its churchyards filled to bursting, from the 1850s it was forbidden to bury any new bodies there and municipal cemeteries were set up at Earlham on the city outskirts. Norwich's medieval drainage system was not replaced by the first modern sewer until 1869, and the first slum clearance did not begin until 1877. Therefore while improvements were evident they remained slow, piecemeal, and sporadic. As such, in all three centres health and illness remained a pressing concern into the late nineteenth century. Yet until convinced by more socially acceptable and easily obtainable patent medicines from local apothecaries and chemists, or by the mundane aid offered by affordable insurances via mutual benefit societies, the disenchantment of the world was neither necessary nor necessarily desired.

The mere presence of patent medicines or mutual benefit societies did not automatically negate resort to magical practices in nineteenth-century cities and may have taken considerable time to persuade those who had been conditioned from childhood into the acceptability of seeking magical solutions. As George Laurence Gomme feared, when a mother faced some pressing emergency to their children's health they would

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[137] Hatton, *A Lecture on the Sanitary Conditions*, p. 8. For an overview see Luckin, 'Pollution in the City', pp. 207–28. For working-class responses to death of family members in this period see Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, especially pp. 56–58, and also Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*.

resort to 'long-forgotten practices which their fathers had told them of, and had used before their eyes, and then we get a revival of traditional superstition'.[138] It was this ongoing link to necessity that gave such practices their vitality. The close proximity of death and illness as a result of increasing overcrowding in poorer urban districts may well have intensified the resort to folk medicine and magic, the alternatives being ineffective and expensive doctors and cheap pills that frequently failed to live up to their bold claims. This inclination was fostered by a degree of popular distrust, even active dislike, for medical professionals. This was widespread throughout English towns in the 1820s and 1830s, and intensified after the details of the Burke and Hare body-snatching case were made known in 1828. In Manchester in September 1832 there was a body-snatching riot, the crowd threatening to pull down the hospital to vent their anger at anatomists.[139] 'Felix Folio' observed that regardless of the provision of free hospitals in large towns, there was a certain section of the urban population who were unwilling to venture into such institutions, seeking instead the remedies offered by street quacks. One such quack, aptly named Dr Coffin, made a considerable reputation for himself in Manchester in the 1840s.[140] As such, many of the urban poor circumvented official medical aid, relying upon quackery, folk medicines, and magical cures.[141] This was not wholly surprising when explanations and remedies prescribed by medical professionals could undoubtedly seem as strange as anything prescribed by magical practitioners.

By contrast with nineteenth-century medicine, magical charms purported to cater for virtually all physical misfortune that could befall an individual, from curing nose bleeds to relieving hysteria, to easing more chronic afflictions such as epilepsy and rheumatism. A contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1823 declared that 'charms and amulets … are still in full possession of their accustomed powers, and wield an influence over the mind not to be controlled by reason and experience'.[142] Beyond these magical charms were folk cures for

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[138] Gomme, *Gentleman's Magazine Library*, p. vi.

[139] Walvin, *English Urban Life,* p. 32. Popular superstition could work against contemporary medical developments, especially vaccinations. See Chadwick, *Victorian Miniature*, pp. 86–87. For bodysnatching in Norwich see Coleman, NHC ref. C398.3, p. 13.

[140] Folio, *Hawkers, Street Dealers and Quacks*, p. 40. See also R. Porter, *Quacks: Fakers and Charlatans in Medicine* (Stroud, Tempus, 2000).

[141] Beyond family remedies were individuals renowned within the local community for their folk cures, as well as herbalists and charmers. See Davies, *Popular Magic*, pp. 83–118.

[142] Gomme, *Gentleman's Magazine Library*, p. 177.

prevalent contemporary illnesses such as smallpox, whooping cough, and consumption. For bronchitis it was recommended that a string of blue beads should be worn around the neck, many Norwich shops supposedly selling these for that very purpose.[143] While the medical profession may offer no cure, magic at least offered some final hope. Even if it amounted to little more than willed desire, one can at least perceive how its empowering psychological effects could be most real, possessing a powerful placebo effect. It was the nature of those who believed in magic that a specific ritual or invocation may fail without damaging their faith in magical solutions in general. Even if a spell proved unsuccessful in curing one family member, it might be resorted to again for another. In this way magical rituals and practices were the external manifestations of a mentality that could be distilled into a strong combination of obstinacy and hope, one which kept believers going in the face of poor public health conditions in nineteenth-century cities.

Crime was predominantly perceived as an urban phenomenon in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1820 the *Norfolk Chronicle* reported how an audacious gang of burglars in Norwich had been nightly conducting robberies and noted that loss of goods or wealth was 'nothing compared with the loss of personal security'.[144] Contemporary views of Manchester as having an exceptionally high crime rate seems to have arisen from anxieties about the influx of migrants, supposedly up to 40,000 people a week according to a police estimate of 1841. These predominantly poor newcomers sought out the cheap lodging houses in Angel Meadow or the rookeries west of Deansgate, places that were deemed 'breeding grounds for crime and disorder'.[145] Fear of crime and criticisms of the increasingly archaic system of a day and night watch led to campaigns for more effective policing in the early nineteenth century, but even after the establishment of modern police forces in Portsmouth in 1835, Norwich in 1836, and Manchester in 1842, urban dwellers still resorted to magical aid. Regardless of the fact that it took considerable time for a proven communal trust to develop in these new law enforcement agencies, as with their predecessors, their principal role was the maintenance of the peace.[146] Not only were

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[143] For a summary of these cures and many others see Glyde, *Norfolk Garland*, pp. 31–40, and Varden, 'Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore', pp. 102–05.

[144] *Norfolk Chronicle*, 2 December 1820. For perceptions of crime as a predominantly urban phenomenon see Emsley, *Crime and Society*, pp. 114–42.

[145] Kidd, *Manchester*, p. 60. The efforts of Manchester's new police in the 1840s were marked by an aggressive approach towards poorer areas of town, adopting the philosophy that they would 'guard Ardwick by watching Angel Meadow'.

[146] See D. Taylor, *Crime, Policing and Punishment in England, 1750–1914* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998), C. Emsley, *The English Police: A Political and Social History* (New

the initial numbers of officers limited, but also systematic detection of crime was not their central concern. As a result magical practices of theft detection continued. Writing in 1865, long after both urban and county police forces had come into being, Robert Forby noted that when a person was robbed one of first things they thought to do was consult a wise woman or cunning man.[147]

Some took more pre-emptive action through casting anti-theft spells upon their homes. In one particular example the spell's invocation declared that thieves who broke into the property would be stuck fast, unable to move until the next morning. The formula was to be repeated three times whilst walking round the place to be protected. Some anti-theft spells seem to have been more spontaneous. The Norfolk folklorist William Gerish recorded how a 'gentleman living near Norwich' in the 1810s returned from a journey to find his house being burgled. Possessing knowledge of the 'Black Art' he cast a spell upon his home and when he went inside he found four burglars 'motionless in the attitudes they were occupying when the spell was placed upon them'. Thomas Boreman's *Love's True Oracle* asserted that if a house-owner concealed the gall of a cow in the eastern side of their home the house would remain unmolested by thieves.[148] While such spells were not specifically urban, they do register a concern with privacy and property that was perhaps most intense in a developing urban environment. In the tradition of magic versus counter-magic, Norfolk magistrates in the 1840s heard the case of a notorious burglar who, when arrested, was found to have a piece of paper stitched into the waistband of his trousers. Upon the paper was the Lord's Prayer written backwards, believed to be a protective charm against capture.[149]

York, Longman, 1996), R. Storch, 'The Plague of Blue Locust: Police Reform and Popular Disturbances in Northern England, 1840–1857' in M. Fitzgerald, G. McLennan, and J. Pawson (eds.), *Crime and Society: Readings in History and Theory* (London, Routledge, 1990), and F. H. Edwards, *Portsmouth Papers, no. 55 – Crime and Law and Order in Mid-Victorian Portsmouth* (Portsmouth Council, 1989).

[147] Forby, *Vocabulary*, p. 397. With reference to Oldham, one of Manchester's satellite towns, Smith has argued that protection was the most valued service provided by magical practitioners. See Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society*, p. 263. Thomas' arguments that magical theft detection was hampered in large urban environments and replaced by newspaper advertisements need to be tempered by consideration that the local knowledge of, and psychological intimidation by, a cunning man may have still been effective among urban communities defined by street or district allegiances. See Thomas, *Religion*, p. 651.

[148] See Gerish, *Norfolk Folklore Collection*, vol. 6, pp. 51 and 116, and Boreman, *Love's True Oracle*, p. 18.

[149] *Norfolk Notes and Queries*, 30 March 1901, p. 218. Similarly, a Norfolk man 'of respectable position in life' had copies of a spell sewn into his daughters' dresses so as to protect them from danger. See Gerish, *Norfolk Folklore Collection*, vol. 6, p. 51.

The nineteenth-century urban environment therefore sustained a need for magical solutions and when 'professional' advice or aid was sought there were numerous magical practitioners willing to oblige. While cunning folk existed in both urban and rural environments, towns offered them steady custom and a degree of anonymity.[150] As late as 1882 Harland and Wilkinson, two prominent Lancashire folklore collectors, could state that there was 'scarcely a town of any magnitude in Lancashire … which does not possess its local "fortune-teller" or pretender to a knowledge of astrology'.[151] Importantly for the sustained popular credibility of magical beliefs, and despite conducting practices that could easily land them before a magistrate on charges of fraudulence, these magical professionals seem to have been well known to urban dwellers. The *Eastern Daily Press* reported that until about 1900 'St Stephen's Back Street, in Norwich, was a sort of Harley Street for white witches, who flourished there as consultants for country people on market days'.[152] When in 1851 a Norfolk farmer went to Norwich to seek the advice of one such cunning man regarding his bewitched flock the practitioner's location seemed to be common local knowledge. A passing chimneysweep knew exactly where to find him though he added that the wise man 'knew nothing, and that [the farmer] might know this if he read his Bible'.[153] Despite this lack of endorsement the farmer still went to the cunning man for a consultation.

Similarly there were renowned cunning men living in Radcliffe Bridge and Hyde on the outskirts of Manchester in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Matthew Halliwell, a weaver and self-taught astrologer, lived on the fringes of Middleton in the early-mid nineteenth century, his small house surrounded by rumour and mystery. Owd Rollison [Rawlinson], a cunning man resident in the township of Worsley, was even known to regularly travel to Manchester to meet other 'wise men' in a public house. They met in an upper-floor room which was locked whilst they gathered, often for many hours,

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[150] Urban magical practitioners were certainly not new to the 'modern' period. See for example A. Ryrie, *The Sorcerer's Tale: Faith and Fraud in Tudor England* (Oxford University Press, 2010), L. Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman – Astrologer, Alchemist, and Physician*, new edn (Oxford University Press, 2007), and M. MacDonald, *Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan London: Edward Jorden and the Mary Glover Case* (London, Routledge, 1991).

[151] Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, p. 173. For a similar comment in 1913 see Weld, *A History of Leagram* (Manchester, 1913), p. 144.

[152] *Eastern Daily Press*, 18 December 1968.

[153] *Manchester Times*, 3 May 1851, p. 2. As this account indicates, people were willing to travel considerable distances to consult renowned cunning folk, often bypassing less-reputed local ones. See Forby, *Vocabulary*, vol. 2, p. 389.

and they even posted a guard at the door. One such sentry would only reveal that 'what they were about was "magic and such like"'.[154] When a journalist for the *Hampshire Telegraph* began her investigation into local fortune-tellers in Portsmouth in 1898, her friends 'showered' her with the names, addresses, and recommendations of a range of practitioners. She had been aware that Portsmouth 'had more than its share of these people' but had never appreciated just how many were plying their trade in the town at the end of the century.[155]

These practitioners also sustained their relevance and role by accommodating the changing needs of their clients. The predictive services offered by the nineteenth-century Norwich astrologer William Fox clearly indicated the numerous ways in which astrology catered to people's anxieties, both old and new. His handbill promised to tackle concerns about absent relatives, pecuniary difficulties, the recovery of lost property, future journeys, houses, speculative gambles, children's health, sickness and ailments in general, marriage and details of future partners including their faithfulness, inquiries about legal matters, dealings with strangers, issues about maritime matter and people who were about to reside in foreign countries, worries arising from dreams and nightmares, questions about success and stability in trade, and even 'the frustration of the evil designs of the malicious and envious'. While the last seems to hark back to the early modern period's concerns about counter-witchcraft, the emphasis on travel, trade, and relocating overseas seems well attuned to the contemporary needs of people drawn into the service of Britain's expanding empire. Fox's ability to provide insight into the success of literary or scientific endeavours also appealed to an increasingly literate, technological age.[156] Magical practitioners continued to service traditional concerns, but, as was the nature of the magical imagination, they could equally adapt their divinatory abilities to emerging facets of nineteenth-century modernisation.

Conclusion

Through consideration of a powerful blend of contextual influences and inherited mentalities this chapter has highlighted how the popular magical imagination possessed a self-sustaining energy that continued

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[154] Harland and Wilkinson, *Lancashire Folk-Lore*, p. 125. See also 'Early Recollections of Middleton' in *News Cuttings*, Manchester Local Studies Archive Centre (MLA) ref. 942.72.M6, p. 57. Early nineteenth-century Manchester could even claim to have several alchemists. See *Cheshire Notes and Queries*, vol. 2 (1882), p. 95.

[155] *Hampshire Telegraph* (Literary Supplement), 26 November 1998.

[156] 'Astrology (or Predictive Astronomy)' in *Norwich Songs, Ballads, etc*, vol. 2, p. 271.

throughout the long nineteenth century. While the urban environment, popular religion, and oral storytelling influenced and stimulated the magical imagination, encouraging 'superstitions' and a sense of the supernatural, it was the eternal concerns of the human condition – health, relationships, fortune, and anxieties about the future – that remained at the root of its more practical manifestations in the nineteenth century. For all its technological developments and increasingly systematised organisation, the slowly modernising world could not provide convincing solutions to such needs. Stripped to its essence, the magical imagination continued to provide urban dwellers with comprehension, an extended realm of explanation, a means of wish-fulfilment, a sense of short-term control, and a compulsion to endure the vagaries of city life. It enabled people to navigate an ongoing, evolutionary urbanisation, providing a coping mechanism when a particular locality experienced a notable but usually unsustained burst of rapid urban development.

The comparative approach has suggested that the foundational elements of the magical mentalities were to be found in large conurbations such as Manchester (and, indeed, London) and more modest, steadily growing centres such as Portsmouth and Norwich. Neither the size nor pace of urbanisation seems to have determined or deterred their presence. Yet while forming its basis the various facets of the magical imagination explored here were far from being simply static continuations from the early modern period, shards of belief and ways of thinking that were slowly being eroded by the grinding combination of 'modern' sceptical and materialistic values. Such a conceptualisation would merely reaffirm the 'survivalist' interpretations of nineteenth-century folklorists who viewed magical and supernatural beliefs as cultural fossils.[157] Rather throughout this study it will be argued that the plebeian magical imagination was defined by its dynamism and adaptability. Responding to the changing nature of the urban cultural context, and building upon the inherited base of ideas, beliefs and practices explored in this chapter, were important transformative factors that mimicked and embroiled themselves in the broader cultural contours and modernising trends of the nineteenth century. It was these transformative elements that encouraged the illusion of magic's disappearance in the modern urban environment, and it is to a more in-depth examination of this metamorphosis that we must now turn.

[157] See G. Bennett, 'Geologists and Folklorists', pp. 25–37, and Ashton, 'Beyond Survivalism', pp. 19–23.

2   Transformation of the magical imagination

On Monday 5 October 1840, George Sutton, the 'far-famed ventrilo-quist, and distinguished professor of necromancy', opened his 'Temple of Magic' at the Wellington Rooms, Peter Street, Manchester. His stage scenery or 'cabinet' had been designed to resemble the inner '"Sanctoria" of the Magi at Ispaban' and was replete with magical apparatus that would enable him to conduct thaumaturgical experi-ments for his audience's entertainment. Two days earlier Sutton had addressed the inhabitants of the town through an advertisement in the *Manchester Times*, declaring his intention to conduct 'mechanical experiments of necromancy'. The advertisement went on to claim that Sutton had spent eight years travelling the world, learning of the magic of the Chaldean Magi and the North American Indian medicine men. Having returned to England in 1837 he had set off on a lengthy theat-rical tour, his magic show perambulating from Liverpool, to Dublin, Cork, Bristol, and Bath, before arriving at the New Strand Theatre, London, where he estimated that he had entertained audiences total-ling 240,000 people. Readers were informed that the show would start at half-past seven each weekday evening when 'the Wizard will enter his Magic Circle [to] perform his Occult Rites', or, as a later account put it, his 'incantations'.[1]

The show was a great success. At the end of its first week the *Manchester Times* claimed that having believed that 'the day of necromancy had passed away … banished from the land by the clear radiance of the uni-versal diffusion of knowledge', Sutton's 'skill and deep knowledge of the occult sciences' was sufficient to almost make one doubt such a fact. In the first week alone 'admiring hundreds' had paid to witness his act and by its third week advertisements were referring to 'houses crowded to the ceiling' and 'amazed thousands' who heaped 'thunders of applause' upon Sutton. Such was the popularity of his show that after a month he had to start performing on Saturdays as well, and on 14 November the

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[1] See *Manchester Times*, 3, 10, and 31 October 1840.

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Manchester Times announced that he would add six more evenings to his run before it would have to be brought to an end. Throughout his time at the Manchester venue the newspaper's readers had been assured that they would be 'much amused' by observing Sutton's 'clever deceptions' and that while he was presented as a 'professor of the "black art" … there was nothing in any of his feats calculated to offend the most fastidious'. Despite the allusions to necromancy and even references to 'mysterious Cabalistic Orgies', there were no nightly dealings with the dead (nor orgies) in the Wellington Rooms that October.[2] For all the talk of witchcraft and black arts, Sutton's craft (and business) was illusion and legerdemain, his intention not to harm but to enthral, baffle, amaze, and, most importantly, entertain.

Sutton's act nicely introduces the transformative nature of the magical imagination in the nineteenth century, for it reflects the antinomial tensions within commercial entertainments that simultaneously alluded to and debunked 'traditional' notions of magic. Such 'modern' spectacles sort to disenchant and (re-)enchant at the same time. Rejecting the Weberian paradigm which posits a decline of magical mentalities relative to the advancement of modernity, this chapter is formulated around an alternative conceptualisation of adaptation and transformed continuation. As such while recognising change it challenges the nature of modernity founded on the rhetoric of rupture, division, and hierarchies. Secondly, while valuing the fact that the paradoxical ambiguities of antinomial approaches have produced more sophisticated interpretations than previous conceptualisations, this chapter also takes issue with many of its underlying notions as inappropriate to the study of nineteenth-century ethnographical magical beliefs.

Antinomial considerations of re-enchantment imply, a priori, both enchantment and disenchantment, while a notion of transformation or 'translation' avoids the false breakages that accompany the enchantment/disenchantment/re-enchantment trichotomy. Secondly, despite the resonances between ethnographic magic and antinomial notions of modern secular 'enchantments', we do not compare like for like. While this study is grounded in 'popular' social practices and cultural beliefs, the antinomialist treatment of modern enchantment tends to consider the issues from an aesthetical perspective, as studies of what James W. Cook terms 'artful deception'.[3] Joshua Landy speaks of 'an aptitude for detached credulity' and 'lucid self-delusion' as vital to a re-enchantment of the mundane but this suggests artificial self-knowing,

[2] See *ibid.*, 10, 24, and 31 October, and 14 November 1840.
[3] Cook, *Arts of Deception*, p. 12.

nicely illustrating the antinomial notion of magic-as-trick, a delusion which is itself an implicitly elitist, 'modern' reading of such activities, but inappropriate to realities which saw (a need for) magic firmly interwoven into everyday life.[4] In fact antinomialists discourage the notion of continuing genuine magical belief by insisting that it necessarily co-existed with conscious disbelief in the individual mind. At the same time their almost exclusive focus on enchanted entertainment relocates the purpose of 'magic' from the functionally pragmatic to the merely diverting, obscuring the vitality of its nineteenth-century pragmatic applications.

Thirdly, the antinomial approach advances a questionable view of a seemingly paradoxical opposition between two coherent ideas held in permanent contradictory tension. This formulation frequently sounds like the clever play of the cultural historian rather than the view of contemporaries who rarely expressed such knowing and dextrous ironic detachment in their engagement with magic. As will be illustrated below, magical tropes may sometimes have been believed, as others dismissed; the tension between opposites was neither static nor equal, nor could it be constantly maintained. Finally, antinomial approaches are beholden to an ideologically progressive 'modern' agenda that will be explored in more depth in the next chapter. Its 'fully secular and deliberate strategies for re-enchantment' are defined in post-Enlightenment terms as being voluntary, respectable, and self-knowing, with ironic detachment co-existing with a willingness to engage (at least for fun).[5] Landy and Saler make their allegiances explicit when they emphasise that they will not be addressing 'the periodic resurgence of *traditional* ideas and practices' even though they recognise 'the stunning longevity of *atavistic* yearnings within industrialised cultures' (my italics).[6] This cursory nod to, and abrupt dismissal of, the continuing existence of genuine magical beliefs invokes the same sense of magic as devalued cultural oddity that was expressed by nineteenth-century critics.

It is for these various reasons that ethnographic magical belief can be neither wholly located nor contained within antinomialist formulations of modern 'enchantment', and, at the risk of appearing over-earnest, this chapter will not approach such ideas from an interpretive position of deliberate choice and ironic detachment. Rather it seeks to demonstrate how the magical imagination was responsive to, interacted with, and appears at least superficially imitative of the nature of the changing

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[4] Landy and Saler, *Re-enchantment*, pp. 110 and 129.
[5] *Ibid*., pp. 2 and 7.   [6] *Ibid*., pp. 2 and 3.

historical context.[7] This translation into 'modernity' enables the likelihood that identifiable surface changes co-existed with underlying continuities, an approach which can accommodate earlier discourses of continuity and decline (in qualitative, if not quantitative terms), while also appreciating the potential for gradual metamorphosis into the developing nineteenth-century cultural terrain. To illustrate this, this chapter considers three such aspects of magical transformation; its modernisation, commercialisation, and democratisation. In doing so it necessarily and artificially separates several strands of magical transformation which, in reality, would have been experienced as aspects of a broader cultural web.

The modernisation of magical mentalities

If defined by its transformative aspects one could argue that magic had always been 'modern'. Early modern magic and witchcraft had not simply been a lingering medieval relic; it had possessed contemporary applicability to a period in which the roots of modernity began to sprout in the form of the Reformation, emerging capitalist economies, developing urbanisation, and intellectual 'revolutions' in science and philosophy. A similar transformation to changing cultural contexts is evident in witchcraft's twentieth-century (re-)invention as Wicca and part of a New Age 'tradition'.[8] While ideologically portrayed as displaced remnants of a former age, magical mentalities and practices were not static fossils embedded in the nineteenth century. Rather one sees the transformation of both magical signifiers and what they signified.

Despite their frequent trumpeting of its atavistic nature, educated Victorians were well aware of how magic appeared to transform by updating itself. In 1885 John Varden noted that 'the same superstition re-appears, clothed perhaps in a different dress, in each succeeding age', the altered appearance not necessarily lessening genuine belief.[9] For example, an instinct towards reading omens accommodated the seemingly mundane change from open wood fires to coal-burning fires with iron grates. Unusually shaped cinders cast from coal fires

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[7] See Styers, *Making Magic*, p. 25.

[8] See for example Klaniczay, *The Use of Supernatural Power*, and I. Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations c.1650–1750* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997). For Wicca see R. Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon – A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford University Press, 1999), and P. Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1996).

[9] See Varden, 'Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore', p. 132. For updated continuations of luck and fortune-telling beliefs see Opie and Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, pp. 206–31 and 323–42.

were taken as indicators of the future; if coffin-shaped they presaged a death in the family, if purse-shaped then money was coming. Similarly soot flakes on the grate forecast the arrival of a stranger at the home.[10] More explicitly magical was the updating of counter-witchcraft measures. During the nineteenth century some who believed themselves bewitched turned from constructing witch bottles to break a witch's spell to using frying pans. The bewitched were to place one of their hairs in the pan and, cutting one of their fingers, let their blood drop onto the hair. As with witch bottles the pan was to be set on the fire and when the blood started to boil the 'witch' would arrive to break the counter-spell by trying to make the individual talk. If the bewitched refused to speak the counter-magic would 'work upon the witch's blood as to cause her death', setting her victim free.[11] While the use of a frying pan appears to be a 'modern' development in counter-witchcraft practices, the underlying principle of a reversible magical link between witch and victim remained unchanged.

If these changes represented the application of old purposes to new forms, in other situations the meaning transformed, with traditional practices continuing under new justifications. Horseshoes best reflect this shifting meaning. Whereas their iron had previously been thought to negate a witch's powers when entering a house they gradually evolved their more modern meaning as tokens of good luck. This shift highlights the difficulty in gauging both the extent and tenacity of the magical imagination, for quantitative analysis would fail to reveal the different meanings that people attached to the displaying of horseshoes. Davies has noted how the horseshoes that had adorned London houses to protect against witchcraft disappeared inside during the 1820s and 1830s, to be placed above the bed as a 'magical' preventative against nightmares.[12] Yet as late as 1890 the *Middleton Guardian* could declare that 'the days of witchcraft are not dead yet', citing the hanging of horseshoes in Middleton [Manchester] as evidence of protection against it. By contrast, in 1892 T. W. Shore claimed that horseshoes were attached to doors in Hampshire 'in order to bring good luck', rather than for their apotropaic powers.[13]

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[10] *News Cuttings*, MLA ref. 942.72.M6, p. 36.
[11] *East Anglian Notes and Queries*, vol. 4, p. 280.
[12] Varden, 'Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore', p. 103, and Davies, 'Urbanization and the Decline of Witchcraft', p. 611. For another altered justification for protection using a horseshoe see *East Anglian Notes and Queries*, vol. 1, p. 45.
[13] See *News Cuttings*, MLA ref. 942.72.M6, pp. 35–36, and Shore, *History of Hampshire*, p. 173. This was also seen in the practice of placing mummified cats in the foundations, roofs, chimneys, or walls of buildings. This practice saw a protracted transformation from being a votive offering, to vaguer notions of 'protection', to a mere

Pseudo-scientific explanations also encouraged the modernisation of magical thought. The aura of a scientific rationale and its apparently demonstrative qualities were important in this transformation, granting magical practices seemingly more 'rational' explanations which allowed them to persist in refashioned form. In the late eighteenth century Anton Mesmer had tried to distance his mesmeric practices from accusations of being 'magical' by offering (pseudo-)scientific explanations based on invisible fluids and fields. These explanations had garnered some credibility from their kinship with contemporary investigations into, and gradual harnessing of, electricity and magnetism. Mesmerism underwent a considerable revival in the 1830s and 1840s but was subsequently eclipsed by the development of spiritualism from the early 1850s to which it bequeathed the séance.[14]

While in no way 'scientific', spiritualism nevertheless offered a more 'modern' approach to spirit-summoning. Given the ethereal nature of spirits Victorian spiritualism made a somewhat paradoxical appeal to a contemporary emphasis on empirical evidence. To bolster their credibility spirits were requested to provide tangible proof of their existence, be it by rapping on or moving tables, leaving impressions in hot wax, writing on slates, or leaking ectoplasm from the medium's body.[15] A late nineteenth-century fascination with psychic ability was also incorporated into a popular awareness of natural forces. By the 1880s telepathy was 'a catchword of the man in the street, who used it like "electricity" to explain anything mysterious'.[16] This was not mere coincidence, for telepathy, clairvoyance, and hypnosis were often conceived as resulting from the transference of an 'electric impulse' which transmitted the thoughts of one person to another, this neurological telegraphy encouraging a mechanical interpretation of both occult powers and human physiological responses.[17] Conversely, as developing technologies entered the popular imagination from the mid nineteenth century they were often infused with a sense of the supernatural. Communication

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good luck token, though their placement in certain symbolic sites, particularly beneath the threshold or hearth, remained the same. See Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual*, pp. 185–88.

[14] See Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, pp. 293–94. See also Owen, *Darkened Room*, especially pp. 109–10 and 119–20.

[15] See McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self*, p. 16. See also Melechi, *Servants of the Supernatural*, Pearsall, *The Table-Rappers*, especially pp. 81–125, and J. Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[16] Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*, p. 25.

[17] Bown *et al.* (eds.), *Victorian Supernatural*, p. 54. For further analogies between thought transference and modern technology see 'Mrs Besant and the Mahatmas', *Manchester Times*, 4 September 1891.

via the telegraph and later the telephone both resonated with the tapping messages and disembodied voices encountered in contemporary spiritualist séances.[18]

Opponents of these occult practices were frequently vocal in promoting the view of a transformed continuation of earlier and therefore discredited ideas. Writing in 1853 William Holt Yates declared mesmerism, clairvoyance, and spiritualism to be 'akin to Astrology, Necromancy, Witchcraft and Magic', though he arguing that such 'antiquated names' were not appropriate to the nineteenth century. Yates claimed Satan was 'well aware that in order to obtain credence in the present age, at least with the learned, all such superstitions must be rendered attractive and fashionable: they must be introduced … in a manner suited to the prevailing taste of the times'.[19] These sentiments were echoed by the evangelical-minded John Beaumont when he visited the Yorke Rooms, St. Paul's Road, Southsea in May 1889 to deliver a damning lecture against spiritualism, a practice which had become particularly popular in Portsmouth from the 1870s. Beaumont suggested that rather than being fraudsters spiritualists' communication with 'the unseen world' involved their interaction with demons rather than the souls of the departed. Citing passages from the Bible to argue that the faddish popularity of spiritualism was merely an updated revival of sorcery he warned, 'What now goes by the name of Spiritualism is nothing new … The only difference is that it is being propagated under a new name, and that a very fine name, for Satan has found out how to bait his hooks … A little game of table-turning? That was how it began; this was the thin end of the wedge.'[20]

Beyond the séance the contemporary emphasis on the scientific and materialistic also informed 'modern' interpretations of ghosts in the nineteenth century. These rationalised discourses sought to encourage a shift from ghosts being viewed as 'real' entities to optical illusions and interior delusions, ideas supported by the period's advancements in 'spectral' technologies, from the magic lantern and late eighteenth-century phantasmagorias, through to Pepper's Ghost in the early 1860s, and on to the advent of the early cinema.[21] In the early modern period

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[18] Bown *et al.*, *Victorian Supernatural*, p. 1.
[19] Wellcome Institute ref. MS5100 – Holt Yates, *Essay on Superstition*, pp. 5–6.
[20] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 11 May 1889. See *Hampshire Telegraph* 18 May 1889 for an account of his second lecture.
[21] For more on spectral technology see M. Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford University Press, 2008), D. North, 'Illusory Bodies: Magical Performance on Stage and Screen', *Early Popular Visual Cultures*, vol. 5 (2007), pp. 175–88, M. Heard and S. Herbert, *Phantasmagoria: The Secret Life of the Magic Lantern* (Hastings, The Projection Box, 2006), Davies,

ghosts had performed an external, communal function, usually return-
ing from the dead to expose crime and sin or to offer prophetic fore-
sight. Keith Thomas argued that these roles became diminished in the
eighteenth century as ghosts lost their social function in a modernising
society no longer governed by the wishes of ancestors, and where their
task in reinforcing collective moral norms was gradually replaced by
emerging institutionalised forms such as police forces. This argument
for a loss of relevance has since been contested and subsequent chapters
of the current study endorse the case for continued revisionism.[22]

Despite this, one identifies three ways in which ghosts 'disappeared'
as objective, external entities during the nineteenth century. While it
would be tempting to suggest they followed a natural progression from
being the product of physiological disorder, to neurological mechanics,
to the overwrought imagination, drawing ever closer to our thought
processes themselves, these developing theories of the spectral seem
to have developed concurrently. As Shane McCorristine and Srdjan
Smajic's recent studies have clearly illustrated, these various psycho-
logical, medical, and philosophical discourses all involved not so much
explaining the supernatural as appropriating it into the natural. The
pre-conditions by which such arguments could become convincing to
those in the nineteenth century can be seen to have derived from the
Enlightenment's challenge to religious orthodoxy, its popularisation
of new scientific attitudes and intellectual shifts, and its resultant ten-
dency towards a more sceptical and mechanistic worldview.[23] If ghosts
were to remain in the modern world they needed to be reconceived and
re-enchanted in thoroughly secular ways.

Physiological explanations provided one way to shift them from exter-
nal manifestations to internal delusions. The spectral illusion theory of
ghosts was promulgated in four key early nineteenth-century books on
the physical causes of apparitions – John Ferriar's *An Essay Towards a
Theory of Apparitions* (1813), Samuel Hibbert's *Sketches of the Philosophy
of Apparitions* (1824), Walter Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*
(1830), and David Brewster's *Letters on Natural Magic* (1832). Ferriar
and Hibbert both explained ghosts as the result of interior mental

   Haunted, pp. 187–215, During, *Modern Enchantments*, pp. 259–87, and Castle, *Female
   Thermometer*, pp. 140–67.
[22] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 595–96. For convincing challenges to
   this thesis see Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*.
[23] See McCorristine, *Spectres*, and Smajic, *Ghost-Seers*. For the broader cultural his-
   torical context informing these developments see also Outram, *The Enlightenment*,
   pp. 93–125, and M. Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy: Intellectual Changes in
   Late Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 1995).

images given seemingly external vividness as a result of some physio-logical imbalance or upset.[24] Summarising these causal factors, in 1870 the *Manchester Times* stated, 'We … relegate to the spiritual world the effects of indigestion, of an overwrought brain, of an exhausted nervous system, an unequal supply of blood from heart to brain', all of which encouraged illusions that appeared to possess an external existence to the viewer.[25] Others developed the idea of ghosts as ocular irregular-ities. Dr Forster distinguished between 'ocular spectres' which 'move with the motion of the eye … hence, they are spectra in the eye', and 'spectral illusions' which 'seem to move with their own proper motion … hence they are not in the eye itself … but may arise in the brain'.[26] By 1882 the *Pall Mall Gazette* offered a neurological explanation which firmly located 'ghosts' within the brain by declaring that due to the many generations of belief in spirits 'we retain, it seems in our nervous mech-anism, "innumerable connections of fibres", which will be developed into superstitious beliefs if we give them the slightest opportunity'.[27] Such ideas not only suggested aspects of the magical imagination were somehow hardwired into the human brain but, as with updated expres-sions of 'magic', critics often seemed to feel there was a latent threat of regression back to earlier 'superstitions'. As early as the mid eighteenth century works such as John Brand's *On Popular Antiquities* and Stephen Fovargue's *New Catalogue of Vulgar Errors* (1767) had declared appar-ition existed only in the imagination.[28] By the mid nineteenth century 'ghosts' were being incorporated into contemporary mental philosophy as arising from 'the involuntary functions of the mind', often encour-aged by reverie and usually symptomatic of mental ill-health.[29] Such views led beyond the neurological to the intimate workings of the imagination itself. Avoiding over-stimulation of the imagination was thus presented as both a preventative and a cure. Writing in 1830, William Newnham believed ghosts to be a consequence of 'imaginary

[24] Bown *et al.*, *Victorian Supernatural*, p. 46. Such theories informed Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, with Scrooge initially denouncing Marley's ghost as a distortion of his senses resulting from poor digestion, the result of 'an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato'. See Dickens, *The Christmas Books*, p. 18.
[25] *Manchester Times*, 18 June 1870. See also Mayo, *On the Truth*, pp. 41–42 and 57, Newnham, *Essay on Superstition*, pp. 190 and 196, McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self*, and Davies, *Haunted*, pp. 149–52. For early modern precursors see S. Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
[26] Hone, *The Everyday Book*, p. 1578. See also Fovargue, *New Catalogue of Vulgar Errors*, pp. 62–64.
[27] *The Pall Mall Gazette* 21 October 1882.
[28] Fovargue, *New Catalogue of Vulgar Errors*, p. 66.
[29] Bown *et al.*, *Victorian Supernatural*, p. 45.

terror and superstitious agitation before going to bed', the mind being over-excited by listening to or reading ghost stories.[30]

In transforming ghosts from external realities to internal delusions these theories pathologised the mind, imagination, and memory. As with modernising magical practices, it was not so much that ghost beliefs (or sightings) declined but rather that they received new justifications better suited to the dominant modes of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought. Focusing on scientific and pseudo-scientific explanations relating to physiological discomfort, neurological disorder and imaginative distress, modern perceptions of ghosts were gradually transformed. Yet these efforts to rationalise ghosts merely displace them into the mind; they could now be explained but not eradicated. The cost of this relocation of the spectral was considerable, for it rendered the mind itself uncanny and unreliable, creating a reservoir of the irrational which threatened to destabilise the seat of the 'modern' rational self.[31] Having once been seen as objective entities that aroused awkward metaphysical and eschatological questions, their internalisation now pointed the way towards modernity's increasing emphasis on self-perception and solipsism, a self-enchantment that was best typified through the rise of nineteenth-century psychiatry. Following a recent trend in literary, sociological, and cultural theory, McCorristine's study goes so far as to appropriate the ghost as a useful metaphor for the ambiguous spectrality of one's modern identity.[32] Yet it is Smajic who best articulates the implications of ocular spectral theories in the context of a transforming magical imagination. Perceived as dysfunctional visual processes rather than the product of a deranged mind, ghosts could justifiably continue to be 'seen' but no longer had to be believed. Yet at the same time such a view challenged both the primacy and veracity of sight in an empirical culture, for delusions which helped perpetuate spectral superstitions disconnected the presumed certainties

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[30] Newnham, *Essay on Superstition*, pp. 191–92. See also Mayo, *On the Truth*, p. 41.

[31] See Castle, *Female Thermometer*, p. 135. See also pp. 168–89. These shifts resonate with Alex Owen's persuasive study of the increasingly introspective, subjective, and psychological nature of the modern 'self' and the rethinking of the occult in the fin de siècle. See Owen, *Place of Enchantment*.

[32] McCorristine, *Spectres*, p. 5. For other applications of the spectral metaphor see M. del Pilar Blanco and E. Peeres (eds.), *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Paces of Everyday Culture* (New York, Continuum, 2010), J. Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* (London, Routledge, 2006), Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings*, and A. F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997). For the development of modern psychiatry see E. Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (Chichester, John Wiley, 1998).

between seeing and believing.[33] Rather than the metaphysical uncertainties that had attended ghosts in the past, these 'modern' interpretations founded on the unreliability of our senses were prone to raise disturbing epistemological doubts about how the individual connected to and understood external realities.

Unlike the transformations in magic indicated earlier, these apparition theories circulated in contemporary bourgeois culture rather than being an organic, popular development, and they raise important issues that will be addressed more fully in the next chapter. While attempting to translate supernatural signifiers by altering what they signified the extent to which these ideas percolated down to become popular opinions in this period remains questionable, especially when cheap literature, the theatre, and ghost projectors all continued to encourage older perceptions of ghosts as external beings.[34] Despite the proclaimed rationality of educated elites it is near impossible to gauge what was popularly known of philosophical ideas derived from Hobbes, Spinoza, Hume, or Locke, all of whom in their various ways criticised and took issue with 'superstition', the existence of the supernatural, or the externality of ghosts. While the lower-class autodidact may have been aware of such renowned philosophers it is less likely that even they engaged with the works of contemporaries such as Ferriar, Hibbert, or Brewster, especially given their dubious subject matter. As several recent studies have indicated, their views were more likely to filter into popular consciousness via the period's literary fictions.[35]

These myriad transformations represented more than the mere adoption of a cloak of 'modern' respectability beneath which people could conduct the unaltered perpetuation of pre-existing magical practices and beliefs. Yet unlike practices and even particular expressions of belief, mentalities are deeper, underlying mental structures and the difficulty here would seem to lie in gauging the extent of genuine structural alteration. Lloyd has argued that the suggestion that a mentality can be eroded or changed weakens the concept of deep structures into shallower notions of mere attitudes.[36] However, this is to equate deep

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[33] Smajic, *Ghost-Seers*, p. 29.

[34] Mathew Thomson has argued that the trend towards psychotherapy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was 'more a product of activities within the popular sphere' than within the medical profession. See Thomson, 'Psychology and the "Consciousness of Modernity"', p. 109.

[35] See Smajic, *Ghost-Seers*, pp. 45–64, A. Smith, *The Ghost Story, 1840–1920: A Cultural History* (Manchester University Press, 2010), and J. Bann, 'Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency: The Changing Figure of the Nineteenth-Century Specter', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 51 (2009), pp. 663–85.

[36] Lloyd, *Demystifying Mentalities*, p. 139.

structures with rigidity, something that has to be questioned when we consider a magical mentality that possessed an inherently fluid and adaptable nature. These mercurial qualities hint at the way that people of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries responded to an emerging 'modern' mental landscape, finding in its new technologies, its pseudo-science, and materialised spectres echoes and resonances with pre-existent aspects of the magical imagination. Yet contemporary responses to this were not necessarily defined by the knowing detachment and ironic playfulness of antinomial approaches. Whether altering justifications for older practices, or assimilating new practices to old beliefs, the magical imagination was able to retain its integrity even as it continually adapted to the modernising world.

The commercialisation of magical beliefs

Presented as constructed enchantments, antinomial approaches tended to treat commercialised forms of magical entertainment as having rendered magic 'safe'. This thesis is not without value but its proponents have not sufficiently explored how such transformations simultaneously sustained genuine beliefs too. The following section explores these issues through an examination of two popular nineteenth-century forms: magic shows and cheap fictional literature.

Magic shows

There were long-established popular cultural traditions which fused the fantastical, the commercial, and the entertaining. Eighteenth-century inns had promoted the custom by exhibiting human 'curiosities', and Georgian fairs and travelling shows commonly included an array of giants, dwarves, hoax mermaids, and intelligent pigs that could either spell or count.[37] Yet there were quantitative and qualitative differences in nineteenth-century 'magical' entertainments compared to earlier centuries. Facilitated particularly by the development of optical technology, including basic components such as lenses and mirrors,

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[37] Parson Woodforde visited a 'learned pig' in St. Stephens' street, Norwich in December 1785. The pig wore 'a magic collar' and spelled out words from the letters put before it. Woodforde willingly paid a shilling to witness 'the sagacity of the Animal'. See Woodforde, *Diary of a Country Parson*, p. 261. For the eighteenth-century development of 'magical' entertainments see F. Coppa. L. Hass, and J. Peck (eds.), *Performing Magic on the Western Stage: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2009), M. Mangen, *Performing Dark Arts: A Cultural History of Conjuring* (Bristol, Intellect Press, 2007), During, *Modern Enchantments*, pp. 79–97, and Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 224–26.

the phantasmagoria and the touring pseudo-scientific magic show both required transportable scientific apparatus that had not been available to Georgian inns. It is these developments that make nineteenth-century magic shows a favoured example of 'secular magic', or 'illusions understood as illusions'.[38] Part of the appeal of what During terms the nineteenth-century 'magic assemblage' was its diversity of attractions, a smorgasbord of legerdemain, mind-reading acts, séances, and ghost projections from which one could select to be entertained.[39] It is this very element of choice which reinforces the sense of secular magic as a constructed enchantment into which consumers willingly bought. Yet it is a shortcoming of those who argue for an antinomial modernity that they focus on this commercialised magicality to the virtual exclusion of all else. It was certainly one aspect of transformation in this period but it neither solely nor wholly explains what became of 'genuine' belief.

Furthermore, there remains something of a sleight-of-hand deception to this approach. The shift from genuine magic to commercialised illusions, a development During locates in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, is accompanied by a shift in terms, from magic per se to more nebulous categories such as the 'marvellous' and 'enchantment'.[40] This offers a semantic sidestep, for despite its 'magical' allusions these modern enchantments did not perform the same function as ethnographic magic. Magic had largely been individual, private, and pragmatic; magic shows were none of these. This is recognised in E. J. Clery's distinction between the 'real' supernatural and the 'spectacular' supernatural, the latter representing the production of ghosts as entertaining spectacle. Yet Clery similarly advocates that genuine supernatural belief became tamed by transformation in form and intention as it was incorporated into sensationalist entertainment. In her emphasis on fictionality and theatricality Clery asserts but does not convincingly explain how such entertainments disrupted or marginalised the issue of 'the truth or falsity of ghosts'.[41] As early as 1603 Samuel Harsnett had observed that 'theatricality kills the credibility of the supernatural' but the obvious corporeality of Elizabethan and Jacobean stage ghosts had caused neither a general transition from belief to scepticism, nor necessarily a self-knowingly 'modern' tension between the two.[42] Like

[38] During, *Modern Enchantments*, p. 2. See also Saler, '"Clap if you Believe in Sherlock Holmes"', pp. 599–622, and Bennett, *Enchantment of Modern Life*.
[39] During, *Modern Enchantments*, p. 66.
[40] *Ibid*., pp. 28–29.
[41] Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, p. 17.
[42] Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, p. 109. For supernatural tropes in early eighteenth-century theatre see Barry, 'Hell upon Earth'.

magic, ghosts continued to exist both within and beyond the bounds of the stage and the 'spectacular' supernatural could not lay claim to a hegemonic dominance over such ideas.

Being sizeable urban centres, Norwich, Manchester, and Portsmouth all paid host to popular magic shows throughout the nineteenth century. These were particularly modern affairs, blending illusions with pseudo-scientific displays, and ensuring their respectability through posters that invoked long lists of aristocratic and even royal attendees who had approvingly witnessed and condoned their shows. As *Chamber's Journal* noted in 1882, while in an earlier age the practice of magic 'incurred the risk of being burned as wizards or ducked as witches … [i]n our own times, its professors make a very good thing out of it; and the public, so far from wreaking vengeance on them in life or limb, will rush to a "magical entertainment" with greater eagerness than to almost any other minor form of amusement'.[43] These past associations were often deliberately embraced by the performers themselves. When Herman Boaz visited Manchester in 1780 his magical exhibition ran for fifteen nights to packed audiences who were so astonished that they 'were in perpetual bursts of applause'.[44] He returned to the Bull's Head Great Room in 1792 and again in 1798 as part of his northern tour. Providing 'thaumaturgic exhibitions' for Manchester's 'principal inhabitants' (the two shilling admittance excluded the poorest citizens), Boaz made a conscious attempt to associate his 'experiments in Natural Magic' with an elite magical tradition, referring in his advertisements to 'Cornelius Agrippa, Bacon … and other most eminent Philosophers both ancient and modern'. His promotion bill advertised 'magic' which involved 'the occult qualities of magnetic attraction and sympathies and their extreme influence over the imagination'. Alluding to mesmeric abilities, Boaz claimed to demonstrate his 'absolute power and command over the words, thoughts, and actions of his audience'. As if to reassure potential attendees of the respectability of his shows handbills declared his feats would form 'a fund of innocent and elegant entertainment, and convey to the mind, important instruction and improvement'.[45]

These various themes were still evident when the 'Wizard of the West' visited the Benefit Society's Hall, Kent Street, Portsea for a week in October 1841. His 'intellectual and scientific performances' and 'mighty wonders' were aimed at 'the fashionable circles of Portsmouth', with his performance on Tuesday 12 October being advertised as receiving 'the

[43] *Chamber's Journal*, 16 December 1882.
[44] *Manchester Journal*, 23 September 1780.
[45] *Cambrics* (Chetham Library), p. 10.

immediate patronage of the Honourable Admiral Bouverie'. Declaring that he had entertained royalty, his promotional poster advertised the fact that a morning performance on the 14th was to be given at the behest of 'several families of distinction'. Yet whereas Boaz's admission charges had largely excluded a more plebeian attendance, tickets for the 'Wizard of the West' ranged from two shillings for a box to sixpence in the gallery. While his act was the standard blend of mechanised illusions and skilful legerdemain the playbill nevertheless touted that the 'Wizard' was 'endowed with more than mortal power'.[46]

The magic show continued to evolve and transform in the mid nineteenth century, Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin often being heralded as the man who made stage magic respectable by bringing it into the theatre and by donning evening dress.[47] Many practitioners adopted the title of 'professor' to allude to bourgeois professionalisation, and acquired reputations as inventors who patented their designs for mechanisms which enabled them to perform their illusions. When one such individual, Professor John H. Anderson, the 'Wizard of the North', visited Norwich in May 1846 he arrived imbued with the added glamour of a metropolitan sensation following his five successful seasons in London theatres. Like Boaz, his posters promised demonstrations of 'mighty wonders of natural magic and experimental philosophy which have no parallel in the annals of the Ancient or Modern magi'. Blending the scientific and the illusory his show promoted magnetic, hydraulic, and chemical experiments and displayed a fortune-telling automaton, the latter supposedly accepted 'by the scientific to be the most perfect Automaton in the world'. Whilst embodying modern mechanisation the automaton simultaneously appealed to older traditions in 'its extraordinary power of divination, its seeming knowledge of your very thoughts'. These displays of 'useful' scientific knowledge were balanced with demonstrations of clairvoyance, and the transformation of water into port, sherry, milk, champagne, and finally into birds. That the Wizard of the North's 'magic' was nothing but illusion was reinforced by the poster's advertisement for his 'handbook of parlour magic'. Costing a shilling, it promised to teach 'two hundred and fifty of the wizard's tricks'. Like the 'Wizard of the West', Anderson catered for a range of purses, the dress box costing two shillings sixpence,

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[46] '*Society's Hall, Kent Street, Portsea*', PCL, Madden Collection of Playbills, ref. 327.
[47] For more on Robert-Houdin see Landy, 'Modern Magic: Jean-Eugene Robert-Houdin and Stephane Mallarme', in Landy and Saler, *Re-enchantment*, pp. 102–129, During, *Modern Enchantments*, pp. 118–33, and Cook, *Arts of Deception*, pp. 182–94.

upper boxes one shilling sixpence, the pit one shilling, and the gallery sixpence.[48] While 'magical' performances may have started as an improving entertainment, part of the enlightening activities of the late eighteenth-century urban renaissance, they gradually became available to poorer consumers as the nineteenth century progressed. This seems to have been driven less by an attempt to educate the lower classes into believing in a progressive, disenchanted modernity than by good commercial acumen.

Nevertheless, the respectability of many magic shows derived from their proclaimed attempts to debunk genuine supernatural beliefs. Representing the sophisticated nineteenth-century manifestation of a process that stretches back to legerdemain in the early modern period, such an agenda enrolled stage magicians into service as missionaries of modernity. At the Exchange Rooms, Market Street, Manchester in March 1849 Anderson offered the audience a 'truly scientific entertainment' which was 'illustrative of the fallacy of Magic, Demonology, Witchcraft and Necromancy'. Such a statement seemed to become a standard way of disarming the residual association with ethnographic magical beliefs. Professor Rosenfield's show at the Queens' Rooms, Lion Esplanade, Portsea, in November 1855 was similarly described as 'illustrative of the fallacy of necromancy, demonology, and witchcraft'.[49] Through such an agenda the stage show seemed to have tamed and ultimately abolished genuine magical belief, not least through its dissecting of magic's false claims via 'scientific' demonstration. This was aided by the fact that such shows were safely contained within a bounded context, usually the respectable institutions of the eighteenth-century 'urban renaissance' and their nineteenth-century successors: assembly rooms, theatres, lyceums, exhibition halls, and mechanics institutes.[50] In contrast to 'backward' magical superstitions, attendance

48 NHC ref. Colman 60A [XL], *Balloon Ascents*, p. 84. Such 'magical' enchantments were not cheap to produce. When some of Anderson's mechanisms and 'paraphernalia' were destroyed in a warehouse fire in Camden Town, London, on Tuesday 9 June 1857 his losses were calculated to have been 'upwards of £7000'. See *The Morning Chronicle*, 11 June 1857. For more on Anderson and the ambiguities of stage magic see Bell, 'Remaking Magic', and During, *Modern Enchantments*, pp. 114–18.

49 See *Manchester Times*, 31 March 1849, and *Hampshire Telegraph*, 3 November 1855, p. 5. The popularity of books which revealed how illusions were performed added to a knowing awareness of stage magic as illusion. For mid nineteenth-century examples see *The Whole Art of Legerdemain*, or *Ingelsby's New London Conjurer*.

50 See Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance*, and also C. B. Estabrook, *Urbane and Rustic England: Cultural Ties and Social Spheres in the Provinces, 1660–1780* (Manchester University Press, 1998), and Gunn, *Public Culture*. Not all magicians were neatly bound within the theatre. For an account of 'a rather wan-looking conjuror in full evening dress' who entertained passers-by in Chapel Street, Salford in 1887 see Tomlinson, *Bye-ways of Manchester Life*, p. 116. Aspects of the magical assemblage

at magic shows could be interpreted as confirmation of one's embracing of a progressive, rational modernity.

Yet it is at the point where magicians and their shift from dingy Georgian fairs to plush Victorian theatres appear to make them part of that larger nineteenth-century project of taming popular cultural practices that the argument starts to falter. Firstly, as suggested above, shows were prone to being compromised from within. As proponents of disenchantment magicians may have explicitly promoted their act as illusion yet as showmen and businessmen few were beyond making allusions to the supernatural or to magical tradition to draw crowds and amaze audiences. As seen with Mr Sutton at the start of this chapter, their advertising certainly invited such ideas, with theatrical entertainments being repeatedly framed through reference to genuine beliefs and practices. The *Manchester Times*, waxing lyrical, declared that Sutton's feats were 'so truly miraculous that the universal exclamation is, "Is he mortal or supernatural?"'.[51] Similarly, a poster advertising Jacobs, 'The Wizard of Wizards' visit to the Queen's Rooms, Portsea in November 1853 explicitly stated that he sought to 'dispel the antiquated notions of SPELLS and INCANTATIONS' through an instructive and 'most pleasing and intellectual entertainment'. Portraying an image of a respectable, tuxedoed magician, the rhetoric of disenchantment was somewhat subverted by the inclusion of imps frolicking around the stage curtains.[52] Press reviews frequently reinforced associations with the history of witchcraft. When Monsieur and Madam Robin, respectively an illusionist and a clairvoyant, appeared at Manchester's Free-Trade Hall in 1851 the *Manchester Times* reported that 'The old dread of witchcraft is fortunately abandoned in this district … otherwise M. Robin and his talented partner would certainly have met with fire and faggot, or the ducking stool, for there is more of the supernatural in their wonderful performances than in the most adventurous broomstick voyages yet on record.' Such puffery conflicted with Monsieur Robin's declaration that his partner's 'clairvoyance' was 'nothing beyond an ingenious trick'.[53]

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were also enacted in the domestic environment via séances, magic lantern shows, and do-it-yourself conjuring books.
[51] *Manchester Times*, 10 October 1840.
[52] '*Queen's Room, Portsea*', PCL Madden playbills, ref. 401. See also '*First Appearance of Mr Thioden*', Madden playbills.
[53] *Manchester Times*, 15 November 1851. Magical entertainments also prompted discussion about contemporary 'magical' practices beyond the theatre. Following stage displays of mesmerism and clairvoyance in Portsmouth a contributor to the *Hampshire Telegraph* argued that it was an apt opportunity to bring the subjects 'before the public … for their serious consideration'. See *Hampshire Telegraph*, 18 February 1871.

Secondly, supernatural associations permeated perceptions of many of the period's technological developments, even those that claimed to enlighten as they enchanted. This was most overtly demonstrated by the phantasmagoria which arrived in England from France in 1801. While it was usually presented as an instrument of enlightenment, dispelling ghost beliefs as the result of hoaxes perpetrated by supposed necromancers in the past, this pseudo-scientific, self-improving gloss was largely superficial. Projectionists were no more willing to reveal how they produced their 'apparitions' than stage magicians were to explain away the mechanics behind their illusions. To add to the drama audiences were presented with the phantasmagoria's eerie spectral images in darkened rooms. The fact that individuals were known to have fended off the 'phantoms' or even fled the room certainly suggests something other than objective detachment and rational enquiry on the part of audiences.[54] While the debunking agenda made it respectable, the deliberate obfuscation between what was seen (or claimed) and what was actually done regenerated and sustained belief in supernatural abilities. Technology and science encouraged their own belief in invisible powers, audiences not necessarily being told or understanding how magnetic or galvanic displays worked, but merely witnessing their 'magical' effects. In such circumstances audiences did not necessarily receive the intended message from 'experiments' that were meant to popularise scientific rationalism, and these particular aspects of magic shows were as likely to enchant or re-enchant as much as disenchant.[55]

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, magicians had little control over this audience reception. Cook certainly overstates the case for the ability of these shows to promote progressive values through what he refers to as an 'explicitly disenchanted, post-Enlightenment mode of entertainment … specifically catering to the middle class'.[56] Such

[54] See Castle, *Female Thermometer*, pp. 143–44. By the mid nineteenth century the middle classes were buying magic lanterns as home entertainment, recreating 'ghosts' in their parlours. See NRO ref. MC27/2, and *Newspaper Cuttings*, vol. 1, MLA ref. Q942 7389 M79, p. 119.

[55] See J. L. Heilbron, *Electricity in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: A Study of Early Modern Physics*, new edn (Dover Publications, 2000), B. Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment, Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1994), J. Golinski, *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1760–1820* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), and R. Porter, 'Science, Provincial Culture and Public Opinion in Enlightenment England', *British Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 3 (1980), pp. 16–25.

[56] Cook, *Arts of Deception*, p. 193. During takes a more depoliticised view of stage magic, claiming it represented neither a carnivalesque challenge to the social order, nor a 'taming' of that spirit into more acceptable forms. See During, *Modern Enchantments*, p. 67.

an assertion assumes a coherent interpretation of what the intended reception or response was supposed to be on the part of the audience. There was undoubtedly a necessary degree of conformity in the contextual circumstances of the show, attending at set times and sitting in appropriately priced seating, perhaps even feeling collective pressure to respond with nothing more than polite clapping. Stage magic may have become a stolidly bourgeois entertainment by the 1860s but this is a long way from being able to claim that such shows helped foster a sense of 'middle-class' values amongst their audience, particularly when they were segregated by differently priced and located seating within the theatre. As will be considered in more depth in the next chapter, given their lack of consistency it is difficult to determine what actually constitutes 'middle-class values' with regard to 'magic'. In the contradictory spirit of antinomial enchantment, audience members may have attended the theatre with an explicit willingness to be knowingly duped but viewed attending a séance as a completely different cultural activity and context. The belief that could be suspended in the theatre was frequently a requisite at the séance table. While appreciating that a magic show could alternatively reinforce and undermine 'middle-class' values in the same performance, Cook does not pursue the fact that this arose from the heterogeneous constitution of the audience and individuals' contradictory approaches to different facets of the 'magical' as much as anything that was being presented on stage. As such the magic show was always going to be a site of assertion and contentious interpretation.[57] When faced with explicit attempts to assert a 'modern' debunking of magic, neutrality (or ironic ambivalence) was arguably not an option.

Given this, one cannot assume that the self-improving audience that publicity bills hoped to attract matched the demographics or mentalities of those who actually attended. Audiences were as likely to have attended for thrills as much as scientific insight, seeking to briefly escape from a materialistic rationalism as much as conform to it. The deliberate blurring of boundaries between science and the supernatural, appearances and realities, catered for that desire for liberation from such controlling certainties. Nor did audiences passively absorb a clear set of values regarding magic and modernity. Magic shows shared something of the interactivity that defined music hall entertainment, with audience members even being asked to participate in performances, often using (and temporarily losing) their personal possessions. Rare glimpses into audience responses to these shows suggest performers' stated intentions

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[57] Cook, *Arts of Deception*, pp. 28–29.

and audience interpretation did not always align. In his memoir the conjuror Signor Antonio Blitz recounted how some among his London audiences in the 1830s had expressed their credulity in his 'magical' powers whilst one Manchester clergyman went so far as to condemn him as a 'necromancer' and called upon him to renounce magic.[58]

'Faust', a journalist for the *Monitor* who claimed to have 'some knowledge of occult science' including spiritualism and astrology, attended a performance of what was advertised as 'Natural Magic' at St. George's Hall, Portsea in 1879. He reported that 'the stage was gorgeous with paraphernalia', and this encouraged an expectation that he would 'be overwhelmed with wonder and delight'. He described a number of tricks performed by the 'Grand Amateur' and indicated that the audience applauded and 'thumped the floor with sticks and umbrellas'. Yet 'Faust' clearly saw all this as mere conjuration and recorded, 'I began to get anxious for the "Natural Magic" to commence and yawned visibly, I fear.' Eventually he lost patience with 'waiting for the mystery to begin', ordered a carriage, and left early.[59] He went to be enchanted, or at least to learn of the magic that the poster had promised, and came away disappointed. In this case the 'Grand Amateur' clearly failed to possess an exclusive power to direct the agenda.

Finally, the evolution of the magic show was also driven by the audience's constant desire for novelty and the attendant risk of their over-familiarity with certain tricks. The 'Wizard of Wizards' poster indicated there was a game to be played between magician and audience. It declared that his improved 'style of performing his illusions has considerably added to the difficulty of detecting them by the vigilance of the eye', as a result of which he was able to hold 'perfect sway over the senses of his deceived audiences'.[60] Prior to Mr Sutton performances in Manchester in October 1840 the *Manchester Times*, quoting from an article in the London press, advertised the fact that many of his experiments 'have the charm of novelty'.[61] Suggestive of the power of audience responses, Sutton altered the balance within his act even during his relatively short run in Manchester. His show was divided into three acts. The first section was initially 'one hour of witchcraft' (actually illusions, conjuring and 'novel and amusing experiments'), the second, demonstrations of ventriloquism and a musical interlude, and the third, 'Egyptian Sorcery', which involved Sutton using 'his

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[58] Blitz, *Fifty Years in the Magic Circle*, pp. 38 and 85.
[59] *The Monitor*, 7 December 1878.
[60] See PCL ref. 401, '*Queen's Room, Portsea*'.
[61] *Manchester Times*, 3 October 1840.

science to excite the imagination of the audience'. While the format remained the same, by the third week of his run the section on 'witch-craft' as an 'introductory of the Black Art' had been expanded to ninety minutes, presumably at the expense of other elements within the two-hour show.[62] The eighteenth-century desire for novelty had reflected an expansive willingness for progressive enlightenment and the embracing of 'modernity'. Yet by the 1860s the constant demand for novelty and sensationalism had soured so that even stage 'magic' could retain some vestigial threat; sensationalism, be it in journalism, novels, or on stage, had itself become disreputable.[63]

The challenges of novelty and deception continued to alter the style and content of stage 'magic' into the latter part of the nineteenth century. The conjuration that had dominated magic shows of the 1840s–1850s was gradually rivalled by demonstrations that alluded less to a western magical tradition and more to eastern mysticism, to Theosophy, and the late nineteenth-century fascination (both popular and scholarly) with hypnotism and thought-reading. The 'white mahatmas', as Mr and Mrs Baldwin were known, visited the Albert Hall, Landport in December 1893. Mrs Baldwin was placed in a hypnotic trance which enabled her to 'divine the inmost thoughts of others, predict future events, relate past facts, and give any information that curious inquirers may desire'.[64] While the means of 'accessing' such 'powers' may have altered, the content of the entertainment was not radically different from J. H. Anderson's displays of clairvoyance. What had become stronger was an explanatory shift away from the supernatural to contemporary 'scientific' discourses about the hidden capacities of the human mind, its latent abilities now being presented not as 'magical' but 'natural'. A 'psychic evening' involving thought transference and mind-reading experiments in Portsmouth in 1896 claimed such abilities were 'com-mon to ordinary experience' and that there was 'absolutely nothing occult or mysterious about them'.[65] Therefore while magic's theatrical

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[62] *Manchester Times*, 24 October 1840.

[63] See N. Daly, *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), and Diamond, *Victorian Sensation*, p. 3.

[64] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 16 December 1893. For the proposed commercialisation of early twentieth-century forms of the occult such as telepathy and precognition see Schiller, 'A Commercial View of the Occult', pp. 16–18.

[65] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 19 December 1896. Even as 'modernity' placed greater emphasis on the supposedly isolated individual so minds were rendered increasingly porous via thought transmission and hypnosis. See Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, J. Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), R. Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy* (Oxford University Press, 2002), Daniel Pick, *Svengali's Web: The Alien*

commercialisation may have encouraged the appropriation of supernatural tropes and ideas into the service of a 'progressive' modernity these developments could not and did not exclude the possibility of sustaining genuine magical beliefs. This not only undermines the view that magic shows were merely some compensatory, manufactured replacement for the loss of the supernatural in a post-Enlightenment world; it also raises questions about the extent to which an ironic detachment could be consistently sustained by audiences who were open to, and perhaps yearning for 'genuine' enchantment.[66]

Cheap literature

Like the stage, literature has also been presented as a tamed cultural locale in which genuine beliefs could be displaced into a safe fictional realm. Dating this back to the late seventeenth century Nicholas Paige has emphasised the late eighteenth-century emergence of Gothic fantasy as a particularly significant development, although he stresses such literature should not be read in the context of genuine supernatural beliefs.[67] This toying with the supernatural is posited on an interpretation which takes post-Enlightenment assertions of certainty in a rational worldview at face value, a view summed up by William Hone's 1833 pronouncement: 'In all ages, when earthly objects have ceased to terrify, men have conjured up phantoms for their mind's excitation.'[68] In such interpretations supernatural fiction was a mark of security, not anxiety, transformed into a source of thrilling but safe entertainment rather than an expression of genuine fears or beliefs. Through imaginatively playing with a past, supernatural 'other' the 'modern' world could position itself as both disenchanted and re-enchanted.[69] These

    Enchanter in Modern Culture (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000), and Winter, *Mesmerized.*

[66] During, *Modern Enchantments*, pp. 62–63. For this compensatory argument see Max Milner, *La Fantasmagorie* (Paris, Jose Corti, 1982).

[67] See Paige, 'Permanent Re-Enchantments'.

[68] Hone, *The Everyday Book*, p. 685.

[69] See Paige, 'Permanent Re-Enchantments', pp. 165 and 166. For a view of the Gothic as titillation in a rational world see Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings*, pp. 30–31. The Gothic has been more frequently interpreted as an expression of contemporary anxieties. See for example A. Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Manchester University Press, 2004), K. Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), H. L. Malchow's *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford University Press, 1996), C. Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992), and P. Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830–1914* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 227–54.

modern re-enchantments are perceived as superior to the supposedly 'superstitious' past which they depict because they are self-knowing and self-aware. Implicit within their portrayals was not simply a return to what had been 'lost' but rather that the reader would appreciate having advanced away from such a past.

However, as with magic shows, 'supernatural' literature simultaneously diminished, sustained and altered magical thinking and these dynamics prevented it from being simply a playground for the supernatural past. When one relocates such texts back into the context of contemporary belief rather than as a study of aesthetics the knowing irony of antinomial approaches becomes challenged by the inability to ensure such an interpretation. These literary 'enchantments' were a product of developments that supposedly helped make nineteenth-century English society more rational, including cheaper forms of print production, the expansion of distribution networks, and the increase in popular literacy.[70] In particular contemporary elites hoped the last would prove itself a force for 'progress' though many appreciated it as a double-edged sword. Despite literacy's potential for encouraging rational and moral self-improvement, the application of literacy skills could not be controlled nor directed any more than audiences' reception to stage magic. As will be considered in more depth in the next chapter, once such skills were acquired there was an inability to determine both what readers read and how they interpreted it. As such, not all contemporaries agreed with a view of the Gothic as playful engagement with an imagined past. In 1798 Dr Nathan Drake claimed that 'of all the various kinds of superstition which have in any age influenced the human mind, none appear to have operated with so much effect as the Gothic ... even the most enlightened mind, the mind free from all taint of superstition, involuntarily acknowledges its power'.[71] Whereas theatrical ghosts had undergone a transformation from the vengeful figures of sixteenth-century tragedy to the comedic misinterpretations of the eighteenth-century stage, the ghost of late eighteenth-century Gothic literature was intended to provoke a physical response in the reader, its supernatural tropes still possessing the capacity to evoke fear and horror.[72]

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[70] For more on this see Robin Walz, 'The Rocambolesque and the Modern Enchantment of Popular Fiction', in Landy and Saler, *Re-enchantment of the World*, pp. 130–48.

[71] Haining, *Gothic Stories*, vol. 1, pp. 1–2.

[72] For changing stage representations see Davies, *Haunted*, pp. 216–40. For the appropriation of ghosts into political and religious satire in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*. This reader response was even encouraged, at least initially, in what could be termed debunking Gothic texts

Literacy fed the magical imagination from an early age or as soon as the skill was acquired. Much to the chagrin of those seeking to 'improve' the masses, newly obtained literacy skills were more likely to be applied to the more accessible broadside ballads, chapbooks, and penny serials than any weightier material. It has been claimed that the fantastical rather than the factual offered the greatest profits for the numerous small printers in the nineteenth-century city, a view borne out by the Lancastrian writer Ben Brierley's account of his 'library' of penny books as a youth.[73] Appearing to be fairly typical in showing how pervasive fantastical literature was for young readers, it included *Tom Thumb*, *Jack the Giant Killer*, *The Adventures of Tom Hickathrift*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *The Lambton Worm*. Perhaps tellingly, he added, 'The rest I have forgotten.'[74] Fairy and folktale chapbooks published in Manchester by A. and J. Swindells, and purchased on second-hand (and more) bookstalls in Smithfield Market provided a reservoir of magical tropes.[75] When investigating the city for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1849 Angus Reach was keen to discover which forms of cheap literature were most popular with Mancunians. To facilitate this he visited Abel Heywood in Oldham Street, one of Manchester's key publishers and distributors of cheap literature to the city's smaller booksellers. There he found that the local population 'devour with equal gusto dubious "Memoirs of Lady Hamilton", and authentic narratives of the "Third Appearance of John Wesley's Ghost"'.[76] He noted that penny novels, published in weekly serials, were the most popular, with Heywood purportedly selling a thousand copies of G. W. M Reynolds' urban Gothic *The Mysteries of London* a week.

Up to the mid nineteenth century broadsides and chapbooks were the principal 'literature' owned by most plebeian readers. Despite a change in typeface the essential function of broadsides changed little between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, remaining a cheap, popular form of news, political, social and religious views, and entertainment. Yet as urbanisation became a more pronounced feature of nineteenth-century life so the subject matter of broadside ballads transformed to voice the concerns and experiences of plebeian urban dwellers. The

which later offered rational explanations for their 'ghosts', a key example being Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794).

[73] Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, p. 197. For details of developing literacy levels in England in this period see *ibid*., pp. 2–29.

[74] Brierley, *Home Memories*, p. 32.

[75] For examples of the Swindells' publications see MLA ref. BR 398.5 C24. See also Wright Procter, *Memorials of Manchester Streets*, pp. 51 and 60.

[76] Ginswick (ed.), *Labour and the Poor*, pp. 61–62. See also Cass and Garrett (eds.), *Printing and the Book*, p. 119.

Lancastrian folklorist John Harland recognised an attendant decline in legendary ballads, believing a contemporary pragmatism and concern with material struggles meant 'old legendary marvels and ballads of the imagination and the fancy have become "few and far between"'.[77] Yet while 'traditional' legends went into decline accounts of ghosts, prophecies, trance journeys to heaven and hell, prognosticative dreams, and fortune-tellers remained frequent topics in nineteenth-century urban ballad literature. Unlike earlier ballads, these supernatural tropes were interwoven into the urban environment, making the mundane magical by locating its ghosts and fortune-tellers in relation to specific street names or districts known to their readers. While the context was updated ballad ghosts witnessed very little transformation themselves, determined by their portrayal still needing to equate to popular perceptions (still largely derived from a strong oral culture) of what a ghost was or did.

Eighteenth-century chapbooks had long drawn the fire of critics who disapproved of their accounts of witches, ghosts, demons, and prophetic dreams, their opponents morally condemning such works as 'promoters of perilous delusions'.[78] Despite this opposition, in 1882 John Ashton declared that eighteenth-century chapbooks with a supernatural theme had accounted for 'a far larger assortment' than those relating to religion, while similar levels of popularity had been achieved by fortune-telling and dream-interpretation chapbooks.[79] While chapbooks had been numerically the greatest element of printed popular literature in the eighteenth century, they were gradually eclipsed by the rise of the penny-issue novel in the early-mid nineteenth century. While supernatural folklore initially informed these replacements, including penny blood classics such as *Wagner the Wehr-wolf* (1845) and *Varney the Vampyre* (1847), the 'penny dreadful' of the 1860s onwards mirrored the shifting cultural concerns of the period. This meant an increasing tendency towards sensationalism over the explicitly supernatural.

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[77] Harland (ed.), *Ballads and Songs of Lancashire*, p. 209. For examples of London's supernatural ballads see Hindley, *Curiosities of Street Literature*, pp. 19 and 24–29.

[78] Jackson, *Engines of Instruction, Mischief, and Magic*, pp. 66–67. See also Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, pp. 120–66, J. Simon (ed.), *Guy of Warwick and Other Chapbook Romances* (University of Exeter Press, 1998), and L. James (ed.), *Print and the People* (London, Allen Lane, 1976). For the influence of early-modern literature on the popular imagination see J. Friedman, *Miracles and the Pulp Press during the English Revolution* (London, UCL Press, 1993), T. Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), and B. Capp, 'Popular Literature' in B. Reay (ed.), *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, Routledge, 1988), pp. 198–243.

[79] Ashton, *Chapbooks*, pp. x–xi.

A fascination with urban criminality, the urban Gothic, and, later in the century, highwaymen, soldiers, and imperial adventurers, suggests the desire for literary fantasy was not flagging, only that phantoms and witches no longer possessed the centrality in the popular imagination that they once had.[80]

In the contradictory fashion of antinomial enchantments, cheap literature both tamed and sustained key tropes of the magical imagination. Chapbook fictions took such tropes from the communal (oral) cultural context to be reinvented as knowing, literary entertainment. As had long been the case, fictional ghosts were not permitted to act with the same elusiveness as 'real' ghosts but had a clear narrative function to drive or further the plot, one that often granted them far greater exposure than those that were alleged to haunt real buildings.[81] Samuel Bamford's *Tim Bobbin's Grave* reflects a transformation in 'popular' ghost literature, especially in the north-west of England. Despite involving the necromantic raising of the dead, this ballad treated the supernatural with robust humour, with Bobbin returning from the grave to have a drink of ale. From Gothic novels to local ballads, ghosts became literary devices intended to elicit shock or laughter from the reader, their portrayals becoming increasingly removed from the supernatural 'realities' of ethnographic beliefs, pandering to thrills rather than the deeper, lingering fears such beliefs could generate.[82] At the same time the shift to print arguably drained supernatural accounts of much of their previous power and theatrics since oral tales had fed upon the visual gestures and direct synergy between storytellers and listeners. Reading such tales, especially if done so alone, offered a more passive experience.

The portrayal of witches in cheap literature helped detach them from contemporary realities. These transformations were not new to the nineteenth century, having early modern precedents in chapbook tales and woodcut frontispieces which had been shaping the stereotype of old, ugly women wearing black hats and shawls long before it solidified in Victorian children's literature.[83] Rather than simply narrowing the

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[80] For the popularity of the folkloric supernatural in early penny-issue novels see appendix 3 in James, *Fiction for the Working Man*, pp. 184–90. For later shifts in story types see Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*, and M. Anglo, *Penny Dreadfuls and other Victorian Horrors* (London, Jupiter, 1977).

[81] See Crosby, *Lancashire Dictionary of Dialect*, p. xi.

[82] See 'Tim Bobbin's Grave' in Axon, *Folk Songs*, p. 39 and, for the humorous purpose of nineteenth-century ghost ballads, p.43.

[83] For examples of eighteenth-century woodcut images of witches see Ashton, *Chapbooks of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 36, and 'The Conjuror', Madden Ballad Collection, microfilm vol. 7, no. 271.

witch to a stereotype these tales actually encouraged further transform-ations by inverting traditional perceptions. *The Witch of the Woodlands* (*c*.1750) and *The History of the Lancashire Witches* (1785) continued to be reprinted well into the nineteenth century, both going some way to rehabilitating the witch as a force for moral good. The former is very much in the vein of the moral folktale. Robin, a philandering cob-bler who has abandoned a girl he has got pregnant in Kent, heads for London but is forced to seek shelter in a cottage when he becomes lost in a wood. Unfortunately for him its inhabitant and her companions are witches. While retaining many folkloric associations with witchcraft, including the old hag image and the ability to transform into animal form, they use their magic as enforcers of morality. Robin is punished for three days by being transformed into various animals which they torment until they feel he has 'done penance for his "wenching tricks"' and eventually release him.[84] Disconnected from the historical reality of the Pendle witches of 1612 *The History of the Lancashire Witches* simi-larly offered a more appealing, sympathetic portrayal of witches as pun-ishers of immoral behaviour. Rather than reinforcing their usual social threat the very fictionality of these literary witches removed them from genuine contemporary anxieties about witchcraft and rendered them more palatable.[85]

Conversely, while cunning folk had usually been perceived by their clients as 'doing God's work', in literature they were more frequently portrayed as being in league with Satan.[86] This was certainly the case in James Bowker's short story *The Unbidden Guest*. This tells the tale of Jeremiah, a cunning man who lived near Clitheroe, a 'student of the Black Art' and a deceitful conman. One night he is visited in his cot-tage by the Devil, who threatens to expose him as a charlatan, declaring he has 'trespassed upon the rightful trade of my faithful servants long enough', again reinforcing the diabolic associations. The Devil offers Jeremiah a pact: twenty-two years of unequalled success in exchange for his signature on a 'suspicious-looking document'. At first the cun-ning man understandably rejects the offer. Then he hears that a stran-ger (presumably the Devil) with magical powers that eclipse his own

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[84] *The Witch of the Woodlands; or The Cobler's New Translation* (London, Howard and Evans, n.d.), p. 16.
[85] See Poole (ed.), *The Lancashire Witches – Histories and Stories*. For the shifting image of witches since the early modern period see C. Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft* (London, Routledge, 2009), Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England*, pp. 107–113, and D. Purkiss, *The Witch in History – Early Modern and 20th Century Interpretations* (London, Routledge, 1996).
[86] See Davies, *Popular Magic*, pp. 61–62, and 'The Unbidden Guest' in Bowker, *Goblin Tales*, pp. 37–49, at p. 37.

has stolen all his clients. Whilst on this visit into town the children do not flee in fear as usual and people treat him as 'only an ordinary mortal'. Unsettled by this loss of power and influence he is compelled to sign the Devil's pact the next time he appears at his cottage. True to the agreement, Jeremiah experiences fame and fortune for twenty-two years until one night he dramatically pays for the deal with his soul; the next morning labourers find only the burnt-out ruins of his cottage.[87] These inversions were arguably linked, both being derived from a sense that while witches had seemingly disappeared cunning folk, their previous antagonists, were still clearly in existence. While the promoted decline in witchcraft safely allowed their appropriation and re-creation into fictional form, the more real threat to modern progress was the lingering magical practitioners who had once offered defence against witches. Having been made redundant, they were left looking like archaic frauds.

Literary portrayals of magical practitioners could also condense several magical roles into one character, encouraging ambiguity between what folklorists and anthropologists termed 'black' and 'white' magic. The elderly 'sorceress' in Ben Brierley's Lancashire tale 'Our Old Nook' can detect and translate malevolent spells and read palms but when she is threatened by one of the men in whose house she has taken shelter during a storm another restrains him, warning 'if a hair of the old woman's head was injured no more good would ever come to the house or family'. This supposed potential for malevolent magic is indicated by her reply: '"Thou says reet, thou says reet, young man!" exclaimed the hag, raising her hand and extending her forefinger in a significant manner.'[88]

Despite being a master of the literary ghost story Charles Dickens was sufficiently astute to appreciate the potentially corrosive influence that literature had on traditional folkloric tropes, particularly fairy tales. He declared that 'in a utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected'. Arguing that fairy tale books were 'nurseries of fancy' which enabled readers to escape the cynicism and knowing irony of the adult world, he declared they 'should be preserved … in their simplicity, and purity, and innocent extravagance as if they were actual fact'. Undoubtedly romanticising such tales, he also indicated something of the transformation they were undergoing in the mid nineteenth century. Employed as moral vehicles for promoted temperance or popular education, Dickens feared

[87] Bowker, *Goblin Tales*. For the quotes see pp. 44 and 46.
[88] See 'Our Old Nook' in Brierley, *Tales and Sketches*, vol. 6, pp. 182–227, 220.

such manipulation would cause readers to 'soon become disgusted with the old stories into which modern personages so obtruded themselves, and the stories themselves must soon be lost'.[89]

Yet while literary forms may constrain, cheapen, invert, and effectively dislocate supernatural tropes from their broader historical and cultural context there were various ways in which it simultaneously sustained or revived such ideas. As people acquired literacy skills they found reflections of many of their supernatural beliefs awaiting them in print, be it fiction or divinatory manuals. Taking literary form did not mean ghosts and magic automatically lost their credibility and power. *The Oldham Chronicle* suggested that even as literary tropes they still possessed influence over the imagination. Writing about the Lancastrian writer Ben Brierley, it noted how 'boggarts and witches came in and out of these tales investing them with the dread of the occult'.[90] While it has been argued that fictionalisation was more detrimental to witchcraft belief than attempts to suppress it, encouraging as it did the unreality of witches, the counter-arguments which suggest witchcraft beliefs were perpetuated by stories rather than actual practices seem more convincing.[91] However much fictions corseted witches within a rigid stereotype, part of their persistent narrative appeal was the emanation of threat, even in tales such as *The Witch of the Woodlands*. Literary accounts arguably became the dominant realm in which witchcraft beliefs were sustained and transmitted, the trope maintaining sufficient power in the imagination to perpetuate witchcraft beliefs long after public accusations declined.[92] In one admittedly extreme example a woman was known to have 'dipped so deeply into a history of witches that she became convinced of her having … been initiated into their mysteries, and officiated at their Sabbath ceremonies'.[93]

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[89] *Household Words*, 1 October 1853, pp. 97 and 100. See also C. Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2008), and C. G. Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness*, new edn (Oxford University Press, New York, 2000).

[90] *Oldham Chronicle*, 27 June 1925.

[91] See Gijswijt-Hofstra *et al.*, *Athlone History of Witchcraft*, vol. v, p. x, and Blecourt and Davies (eds.), *Witchcraft Continued*, p. 11. See also A. Smith, *The Ghost Story, 1840–1920* (Manchester University Press, 2010), Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic*, Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*, S. Hoyle, 'The Witch and the Detective: Mid-Victorian Stories and Beliefs' in Blecourt and Davies, *Witchcraft Continued*, pp. 46–68, and Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, pp. 280–93.

[92] See Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, p. 110. For example, it was popularly believed that witches were burnt though hanging had been the statutory punishment. This fiction was perpetuated in the popular children's game 'The Witch'. See A. B. Gomme, *Traditional Games*, vol. 2, pp. 391–96.

[93] Dipose, *Omens and Superstitions*, p. 53.

This raises interesting questions regarding authorship and authority and how to define 'genuine' and 'constructed', be it in oral or literary form. With a dearth of evidence regarding the internalisation of literary tales it is extremely difficult to know if the ghost tale of an individual writer automatically had more or less validity or impact than the oral accounts exchanged in and by local urban communities. It has been argued that printed material had a 'magical quality … for the newly literate'.[94] This is not just a flippant use of the word 'magical'. Both Owen Davies and David Vincent have emphasised the power of the written word in the mind of the illiterate or barely literate, the cunning man's authority stemming, in part, from his ability to write out charms. Books, particularly the Bible, had been granted a totemic power ever since the Protestant Reformation's emphasis on the written word, whilst the ability to read granted access to new realms of knowledge and power, including the magical. Therefore while it was hoped that developing popular literacy would dispel 'superstitions' and encourage self-improvement, the written word retained an aura of magical authority for those newly empowered by their ability to read. As Vincent observes, 'books were themselves a form of magic' and this sense of reverence was itself as powerful as it was irrational.[95] If all forms of literature were prized then in terms of value, supernatural chapbook fictions were indistinguishable from more 'rational' works, devoid of the ideological judgements informing categories of 'utility' and 'superstition'. For others the taking of literary form may have made little difference at all, merely being another means of accessing similar ideas. The poet John Clare, comparing his illiterate mother and more literate father, the latter being more directly influenced by popular literature than his mother, who was informed by gossip, declared there was 'little difference in the essential context of their stories … the one no less "superstitious" than the other'.[96]

There remain unknowns in the relationship between magical beliefs and their commercialised forms. It is near impossible to identify let alone quantify the extent to which the balance between genuine belief and knowing playfulness oscillated back and forth when people chose to engage with such entertainments. Equally hard to gauge is the extent to which these stage and literary fictions could reignite genuine beliefs.[97] However, what can be proposed is that antinomial suggestions

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[94] Hindley, *Curiosities of Street Literature*, p. 5.
[95] Vincent, *Literacy*, p. 177. See also Davies, *Popular Magic*, pp. 160–61.
[96] Fox and Woolf (eds.), *The Spoken Word*, p. 32.
[97] For more on these texts see Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, pp. 142–44.

of a terse stasis arising from contradictory tensions between enchanted engagement and self-knowing detachment are misjudged, that the relationship between the two was a far more fluid, perpetual series of negotiations and renegotiations that traversed back and forth along a broader spectrum which embodied belief, the suspension of disbelief, and scepticism.

The democratisation of magic

Popular magic's commercialised transformations informed its democratisation in terms of developing modes of information transference. Of greatest importance and prevalence was divinatory literature. With fortune-telling books being the third most widely disseminated publications among the nineteenth-century reading population (after the Bible and almanacs) there was some truth behind Charles Leland's 1891 declaration that there were actually 'many millions more' who believed in 'such small sorcery' at the end of the nineteenth century compared with previous ages.[98] It has even been suggested that the huge nineteenth-century sales of 'Books of Fate' may have helped offset a decline in orally transmitted divinatory knowledge in urban communities.[99] The

[98] Leland, *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune-Telling*, p. xvi. Almanacs had been transforming since the mid eighteenth century, gradually accommodating a growing scepticism towards their astrological element. This had led publishers to increase their 'scientific' content, a trend that culminated in the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge's launch of *The British Almanac* in 1828. Despite this the old-style astrological almanac continued to be popularised through the likes of Raphael's *Prophetic Messenger* and *Zadkiel's Almanac*, especially after the repeal of the stamp duty in 1834, meant they became available to a wider readership. See M. Bruine Cotsworth, *The Rational Almanac: Tracing the Evolution of the Modern Almanac* (Acomb, M. B. Cotsworth, 1904), and Vincent, *Literacy*, pp. 192–93. See also L. Hill Curth, *English Almanacs, Astrology and Popular Medicine, 1550–1700* (Manchester University Press, 2007), P. Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, Polity, 1989), and, although dated, B. Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500–1800* (London, Faber, 1979). For nineteenth-century almanacs see Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, pp. 153–57, M. Perkins, *Visions of the Future: Almanacs, Time and Cultural Change, 1775–1870* (Oxford University Press, 1996), and P. Curry, *A Confusion of Prophets: Victorian and Edwardian Astrology* (London, Collins & Brown, 1992).

[99] See Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, pp. 141–42. While fortune-telling books had been an established chapbook genre since the early modern period the nineteenth century witnessed attempts to incorporate new trends. The signification of moles owed more to a contemporary fascination with physiognomy than ethnographic magical practices. When *Napoleon Bonaparte's Celebrated Book of Fate* began to circulate in northern England in the 1820s its predictive table, 'the Oraculum', promised answers to the standard inquiries into marriage, wealth, and health but its grid system of letters and numbers relating to answers to such questions encouraged an impression of 'technical' calculation. See *Napoleon Bonaparte's Celebrated Book of Fate*, p. 2.

Norwich dream book, *The Dreamer's Casket, or Oneiromancy Made Easy*, was typical of the genre. While principally an A–Z of dream interpretations, it also contained a compendium of information on fortunate and unfortunate days of the month (linked vaguely to lunar influences), a predictive 'magic square', the divinatory 'Uranian alphabet', and the signification of moles and marks upon the body as indicators of a person's character.[100]

Principally intended for private reading, divinatory books continued the tradition of secretive consultation (now with oneself) that had surrounded magic. Like magic shows and literature these texts could be consumed as simply entertainment but many readers undoubtedly approached them in a similar manner to magical consultations, namely with the hope of asserting a sense of agency over their desires and fears for the future.[101] There were distinct attractions to purchasing such easily available literature compared to consultations with magical practitioners. It offered a means of circumventing the continuous expense and possible awkwardness of discussing personal concerns with a stranger, and also avoided the risk of entanglement with the law when the police (and press) conducted intermittent campaigns against fortune-tellers. Critics' concerns about divinatory literature may have been inspired in part by the private consumption of texts, which encouraged the hidden transmission and perpetuation of magical beliefs in a format that could not be policed with the same vigilance as individual practitioners.

The printed mode of knowledge transference transformed the location of magical authority from the knowledge and abilities of an individual practitioner to the power of the printed word itself. Yet despite this democratising shift, chapbook publishers still attempted to tap into and appropriate the reputation and antiquity of certain practitioners through their titular references to known sages such as the prophets Robert Nixon, Mother Bunch, or Mother Shipton. Such names became a familiar hook by which to promote the book and give its divination methods an associated credibility.[102] That this was little more than a

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[100] Gooch, *The Dreamer's Casket*. The content and nature of these books was fairly standardised across various cities. See for example *A Groatsworth of Wit* (London), *The Ladies New Dream Book* (Manchester), and *The Universal Dreambook* (Leeds). However, the evidence of folklore collectors suggest this did not necessarily encourage a narrowing of the broader range of divinatory techniques retained in oral culture.

[101] Perkins, *Reform of Time*, p. 83.

[102] Mother Shipton's prophecies had been in print since 1641, Robert Nixon's since 1714, and both continued to circulate in cities until the 1850s, their names remaining well known until the end of the century. See Valenze 'Prophecy and Popular Literature', p. 77. For chapbook examples see *Life, Death, and the whole of the Wonderful Prophecies*

commercial gloss is illustrated by the fact that *The Gipsy's Oracle by the Celebrated Mother Shipton* is about fortune-telling by cards, something not traditionally associated with the prophetess.[103] Others alluded to more current authorities, the frontispiece to *A New and Well-Experienced Card Fortune Book* proudly announcing that it was 'delivered to the world from the Astrologer's office in Greenwich Park'.[104] As such, divinatory guides had not completely dispensed with the authority of specific magical practitioners.

Despite this, setting out of divinatory techniques in print for all to purchase and read in the comfort of their homes robbed magical practices of their mystique, their rigour, and perhaps even the risqué thrill of accessing unconventional wisdom through a face-to-face consultation with a magical practitioner. One of the most enduringly popular Books of Fate, *Mother Bunch's Closet Newly Broke Open* promised its readers that there was no danger in dabbling in such 'magic' as 'No harm at all is in this set, but teaching maids husbands to get'.[105] The very fact that such a statement needed to be made suggests magic still possessed some potency in this period. Similarly 'Shipton's Prophecy and Sibley's Astrological Aphorisms' in the chapbook *Tales of Wonder* stripped away the mystique of astrology to set out its principles for the layman. While providing a basic knowledge of the art it notably eschewed the mathematical calculation that informed the practice and which granted professional astrologers a sense of intellectual rigour and superiority over common fortune-tellers.[106]

More damaging was the fact that these democratising works made magic mundane. While it had long been a part of popular culture, recourse to magic had usually been perceived as stepping away from the 'normal' and the natural, be it in terms of remedy, revenge, or explanation. In

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of *Mother Shipton*, *Life and Prophecies of Robert Nixon*, and also Ashton, *Chapbooks*, pp. 84–94.

[103] Even pseudo-scientific investigations into the occult exploited the sensational appeal of the supernatural to attract readers. See for example Mayo, *On the Truth*, p. i.

[104] See *A New and Well-Experienced Card Fortune Book*, and also *Partridge and Flamstead's New and Well Experienced Fortune Book*, and Anon., *The Gipsy Fortune Teller* (London, T. Goode, 1850).

[105] *Mother Bunch's Closet Newly Broke Open*, part 1, p. 2. This book's divination methods are imparted through a fictional conversation between Mother Bunch and a maid, mimicking the sense of intimate consultation within a mass-produced literary form.

[106] See 'Shipton's Prophecy and Sibley's Astrological Aphorisms' in *Tales of Wonder*, pp. 8–13, at p. 13. This book suggests some confusion over the supposed authorship of these aphorisms, the title page claiming them as those of the eighteenth-century astrologer Ebenezer Sibly, and the text referring to the seventeenth-century astrologer William Lilly.

some texts magical practices were being sandwiched between information on how to heal various illnesses and perform household chores. Whatever the task, the information given promoted an urge towards knowledge, control, empowerment, and self-sufficiency, and in places all resonate with a sense of a 'magical' solution. Thomas Boreman's *Love's True Oracle* offered ways of divining the future through pricking randomly at a 'magic' table covered with a blank piece of paper. It also provided the standard sections on dream interpretations yet it generally reads like any other example of the popular nineteenth-century genre of self-help guides. It gave strict instructions on how to prevent witchcraft by gathering pimpernel and sewing it up in a yellow silk rag which should be placed under the threshold, and advised that a quill of quicksilver, stopped up with yellow wax, should be placed under a bewitched person to end the enchantment. Yet this text also catered to more prosaic concerns, offering cures for toothache, and advice on how to remove corns.[107] The scope of these books was diverse; the magical and the mundane sat alongside one another without jarring the very context in which the author addressed witchcraft, thereby reducing it to merely another domestic concern.

Another book presented amateur fortune-telling as just one among twenty-five activities of 'fun and instruction' to occupy 'dull winter evenings', the function of such 'magic' having merely become to keep boredom at bay. That such actions were not meant to be taken too seriously is indicated by the encouragement that the teacup used for divination could also provide 'light refreshment to the family'. Emphasising the potentially democratic employment of these skills, the *Hampshire Telegraph* argued that through reading fortune-telling books 'the apparently wonderful feat … becomes a very simple scheme'.[108] While these various prognosticative guides arguably lessened the status of divinatory practices by making them more accessible and therefore publicly acceptable (as frivolous entertainment), such literature still fostered divinatory instincts which fed upon magical thinking. Despite their common disclaimers that prognosticative literature was merely harmless fun, some authors seemed to intend that their contents should be believed.[109] One way this was achieved was through possessing a contemporary relevance. One of the many prophetic chapbooks attributed to Mother Shipton cited a long list of her prophecies that supposedly came true before it concludes with future predictions that 'we shall

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[107] Boreman, *Love's True Oracle*, pp. 15–19.
[108] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 4 January 1896.
[109] For an example of this authorial distancing see *The Golden Dreamer*.

leave to the interpretation of the reader'.[110] The prophecies are all suitably vague but after twenty pages of 'accurate' predictions a reader would have been inclined to believe in their authority and to look for their future manifestation.

Yet the shift of magic away from the monopoly (and attendant authority) of skilled practitioners meant the democratisation of magic also necessarily represented its diffusion and dilution, a trend best illustrated by what I will term democratised witchcraft. Several things enabled this development. Firstly, etymological transformations meant terms such as 'witch' and 'witchcraft' were losing something of their specificity by the nineteenth century. Court reporters evocatively and inappropriately employed the terms to describe fortune-telling cases in the press. In Manchester the term 'Lancashire Witches', traditionally associated with events at Pendle in 1612, had been appropriated as a positive expression for beautiful women in the region. Still alluding to feminine power, one local ballad declared, 'You are seized with love's sudden twitches, which nought could create but the spells from the eyes of the Lancashire witches.'[111] These etymological shifts had roots as far back as the 1660s when, in ideological terms, witchcraft had been employed as a polemic weapon by various political and religious factions, encouraging what Malcolm Gaskill has called the 'diversification of the power of witchcraft as a symbol'.[112] The more benign these words became, the more their previous meaning was trivialised, distancing them from the realities of the past. Some historians have even claimed this conceptual flexibility led to the idea of witchcraft becoming abstracted away from particular individuals, a case only rarely supported by my own researches.[113] A contributor to *Manchester City News Notes and Queries* suggested it had become abstracted when he declared that 'the witches' were 'frequently blamed' when there were problems churning butter and such views may help account for the *Manchester Times*' observation that while witchcraft beliefs remained into the 1890s they did so 'in a passive rather than an active and aggressive form'.[114] Such abstracted perceptions clearly co-existed with the

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[110] *Life, Death, and the Whole of the Wonderful Prophecies of Mother Shipton*, p. 31.

[111] See 'Lancashire Witches', *Pearson Ballad Collection*, vol. 2, p. 162, and Harland (ed.), *Ballads and Songs*, pp. 205–06. For a similar usage in Norfolk see 'The Brown Witch' in Rye, *Rubbish and Nonsense*, pp. 145–46.

[112] Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities*, p. 97.

[113] See Gijswijt-Hofstra *et al.*, *Athlone History of Witchcraft*, vol. v, p. xi.

[114] *Manchester City News Notes and Queries*, 21 February 1880, p. 40, and *Manchester Times*, 29 March 1895. In some cases, the more durable ghost took over the responsibility for mishaps formerly attributed to witchcraft. See *Heywood Notes and Queries*, vol. 2 (1906), p. 189.

seemingly contradictory yet evidentially proven continuation of belief in real witchcraft wielded by specific individuals. Yet these degrees of conceptual shift and abstraction seem to have been sufficient to enable the credible diffusion of powers of maleficium into the general populace. Just as dream books and divinatory guides made their readers amateur fortune-tellers, so magical belief in its lowest, broadest expression – good and bad luck – democratised the potential to inflict harm on others. With the reduction of the written component of curses to the mere initials of the 'victim' even the barely literate could create their own malicious 'spells'.[115]

This was facilitated by a second do-it-yourself development which obviated the need to consult cunning folk to conduct magic. With some vague awareness of the alternative uses, Victorian pharmacists sold products that the knowledgeable customer could employ as spell components themselves. Despite its official use in staining wooden furniture a Cambridge chemist noted that customers purchased 'dragon's blood' or red gum resin so as to burn it as part of a charm to maintain a partner's fidelity 'or when far away to bring them home again'. Other chemists confirmed that it was sold 'mostly to girls, who, jealous, sought to win back waning affections by burning it, and using certain words of incantation'. Another chemist in North Shields recognised that it was used 'for a kind of witchcraft' which involved women burning it in a fire 'while wishing for their affection to be returned by some one of the opposite sex' or to regain the affections of a husband or boyfriend after a quarrel. Yet just as it could supposedly heal emotional relationships, so too could it be used to harm. A Bristol chemist sold two-pennyworth to a man who wished to use it to avenge himself against a person who had cheated him out of three sovereigns. The man intended to burn the dragon's blood on a fire with the belief that his 'ill wishes' would then have an 'influence on the person who was being thought of at the time of burning'.[116] Others were willing to manipulate popular superstitions to ill effect. One was that no bills should be sent or received on New Year's Day. A Manchester journalist declared, 'I have known a bill sent in on that day with the object of causing ill-luck during the year for the person who owed the money.'[117] Misfortune could therefore be invoked without explicit resort to witchcraft and if luck was the most ubiquitous form of magical thinking then such petty acts became the lowest

[115] Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual*, pp. 154–55.
[116] *Manchester Times*, 22 May 1891. For a Norfolk case see Roper, 'On Witchcraft Superstition', pp. 795–96.
[117] *News Cuttings*, MLA ref. 942.72.M6, p. 37.

expressions of maleficium.[118] Although it represented an extreme dissemination of witchcraft such acts nevertheless contained similar malevolent intent, or at least feared intent by the 'victim'.[119]

These democratised 'magical' practices were also evident in spiritualism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ever since arriving in Britain from the United States in the early 1850s, spiritualism had promoted the notion that potentially anyone could communicate with spirits.[120] Writing in 1867, one commentator noted how previously humanity's interaction with the supernatural had been 'rare and exceptional' but 'a different era has begun'. Now it only required a few people 'endowed with faith and susceptibility' to gather together and they would soon be communicating with 'supernatural beings', 'Providence [having] for the first time conferred upon man a power of ever-ready communication with the unseen world'.[121] Another journalist argued that in his youth there had not been the ease of 'ghost-raising' found in contemporary séances and, intriguingly, he had had to resort to 'the pages of the elder necromancers' to obtain similar results. He added 'without any meddling with the black art … ghosts are now being raised all over … the country'.[122] Alex Owen has even argued that the occult practices of latter nineteenth-century ritualistic magic societies represented a self-consciously elitist response to the democratic nature of spiritualist practices, emphasising as they did scholarly learning and arcane knowledge available only to the few.[123]

Nineteenth-century popular divinatory literature, ill-wishing, and spiritualist séances all suggest ways in which magical practices became a more democratised province. These transformations suggest that historians' focus on the gradual decline of authoritative professional practitioners such as cunning folk and witches has led them to greatly

[118] Although degenerated from traditional expressions of witchcraft, ill-wishing was still sufficient to surround an individual with an aura of magical power. See Jessop, 'Superstition in Arcady', pp. 747–48, and Vincent, *Literacy*, p. 160. See also Pocs, 'Curse, Maleficium, Divination'.

[119] See for example Roper, 'On Witchcraft Superstition', pp. 793–94. In 1849 a Norfolk farmer engaged the expensive services of a wise man to stop him 'suffering from the malign influence of bad wishes'. The only reference made to 'witchcraft' came from the correspondent of the *Norfolk News*, not the farmer himself. See 'Witchcraft in Norfolk', *Manchester Times*, 3 May 1851, and also Dew, *Dyshe of Norfolke Dumplings*, p. 27. Some Norfolk fishermen seem to have even perceived bad luck as a physical force. One skipper was known to have cut and knotted the ends of his fishing lines to 'prevent the bad luck running up the lines into the boat'. See Taylor, 'Norfolk Folklore', p. 121.

[120] Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, p. 18.

[121] T. F. E., *Discourse on Table Rapping*, p. 4.

[122] *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper*, 2 January 1864, p. 93.

[123] Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, p. 5.

underestimate the significance of the amateur, the dilettante, or simply the spiteful neighbour. Beyond the press' sensational accounts of witchcraft was the quieter, less dramatic background drone of magic perpetuated by such democratised practitioners. More than the other transformations examined in this chapter the trend towards a democratisation of magic represented an obvious diminution of its power, even though the intentions behind such practices remained broadly similar to 'traditional' practices. Within divination books magic became trite and mundane, alloying elements of entertainment with an urge towards self-empowerment. Similarly, the democratised witch, in the form of the aggrieved acquaintance, was a rather pathetic, impotent individual driven by petty resentments. Their resort to ill-wishing represented the reduction of magic to intention without ability and as with many a case of witchcraft it was only retrospectively reconstructed and recognised as 'magic' if an angry or frustrated curse happened to precede some subsequent misfortune. When magical power was disseminated through the general population its essence became so diluted as to appear ordinary. As such these particular transformations suggest one can talk of a qualitative rather than quantitative decline in magic as it lost that supernatural dimension and exclusivity that had distinguished it from the mundane.

Conclusion

This chapter's examination of the transformative aspects of the magical imagination shares the antinomial rejection of magic and modernity as binary opposites, but equally it has questioned antinomial approaches themselves, especially their reading of modern enchantments as deliberately constructed, knowing, frequently ironic, and 'contained' within their particular cultural form. Magical mentalities were certainly not the rigid but gradually eroding survivals that contemporary folklorists envisaged. Rather they possessed a more mercurial quality which enabled them to adopt and be absorbed into broader cultural trends of the period. Mimicking contemporary developments, magic became infused in commercialised public forms of entertainment in a maturing consumer society, and echoed the period's groping towards political and social democracy. At the same time it resonated with modernity's supposed shift towards a focus on interiority so that the struggle between belief and self-knowing detachment was increasingly conducted within the individual mind as opposed to the wider community. As such, these transformations do embody something of the contradictory nature of antinomial interpretations of modern enchantment, an engagement

between greater externalisation (in stage show and 'magical' literature) and increasing internalisation (apparition theories, and the effects of private reading on sustaining belief in supernatural tropes) which frequently informed and reinforced the magical imagination.

However, in offering a means of breaking from long-established dichotomies of magic and modernity the antinomial approach is itself a beguiling enchantment of which we must be wary. Its emphasis on contradictory tensions actually makes it a more static formulation than its binary predecessor, which at least registers a cultural dynamism rather than a sustained stasis between engagement and detachment. Nor is the 'also/and' formulation of magic and modernity equally balanced, for antinomial interpretations clearly promote detached knowingness and self-conscious engagement over persistent magical mentalities. While it works well for secular magical entertainments, this chapter has probed the validity of its broader application when it is constrained, defined by, and explicitly in service to 'the modern'. Ethnographical magical beliefs and practices were not necessarily approached from nor conformed to the post-Enlightenment diktats outlined in Landy and Saler's definition of the antinomial. In particular the 'deliberate' nature of its strategies of re-enchantment seems highly problematic, suggesting as it does a false degree of agency on the part of its creators and implementers (and an unclear sense of whom or where this deliberateness is derived from). As repeatedly suggested here, responses and interpretations to such enchantments could neither be determined, contained, nor controlled.

That the magical imagination was not left unchanged by these developments should not lead us to simply equate transformation with decline. In cases such as divinatory literature modes of communication were altered without greatly transforming the practices' essential purpose. Even in areas where magic's former power may have become diluted, particularly when its tropes were co-opted into knowing entertainment, or cheap sensation, this did not guarantee an end to genuine belief. These transformations were not *transitions*, which simply suggest movement from one state or locale to another, but *translations* with their attendant alterations, distortions, and lacunas, all of which helped sustain the magical imagination even within forms that appeared to tout their secular disenchantment.

3   Magic, modernity, and the middle classes

On Tuesday evening, 1 April 1890, the Portsmouth Literary and Scientific Society convened in the Guildhall, Portsmouth to listen to a lecture on witches and witchcraft delivered by Dr. David Nicholson. Perhaps given the intriguing topic, the lecture encouraged larger attendance than normal, although the audience was its usual stolid composition of the town's social elite, including generals and captains from the military services, doctors, and reverends. Nicholson sketched out the changing nature of witchcraft across four broad time periods, describing the modern witch as 'an outcome of superstition, credulity, and ignorance', differing from previous eras in the fact that it had 'no legal or ecclesiastical sanction'. Despite this, and the 'tremendous advances made during the last 150 years in physical science and the education of the people', Nicholson declared it 'an undoubted fact that the belief in witchcraft still existed in the present day'. Time did not permit him to develop this point but he concluded by advising his audience not to dwell on the supernatural, for it had been 'the wreck of many an otherwise excellent intellect'.[1]

Such counsel seemed to have fallen on deaf ears with regard to Arthur Conan Doyle, a local doctor, short-story writer and budding novelist, amateur enthusiast of the psychical and the supernatural, and one of the Society's two honorary secretaries who was present that night. In response to Nicholson's paper the creator of Sherlock Holmes went on to state that 'modern science, far from having destroyed the original idea underlying this topic, had gone a long way to confirm it.' Citing 'the investigations of Charcot and other eminent continental scientists into the phenomena of mesmerism and clairvoyance', Doyle asserted that science seemed to provide evidence of what he termed preternatural rather than supernatural powers that had formerly been associated with witchcraft. Rather unhelpfully a fellow member, Mr H. S. Maclauchlan, added,

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[1] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 5 April 1890.

'we [are] all superstitious more or less, and we would be rather dull and unimaginative creatures if we were not.' This encouraged the Society's other Honorary Secretary, Dr J. Ward Cousins, to reject Doyle's association between mesmerism, clairvoyance, and 'what was called witchcraft' on the grounds that while science was examining humans' extraordinary mental abilities 'popular explanations of mesmerism and clairvoyance was absolute nonsense'. For Cousins, older notions of witchcraft had declined in proportion to the advancement of science's 'heaven-born truths' and it was only the latter which 'the members of that Society would alone entertain'.[2]

This meeting and these exchanges encapsulate the key concerns of this chapter. Engaging with witchcraft as part of a learned discourse which articulated divisions between elite and popular thinking, it also hints at the heterodox nature of elitist responses to the magical imagination. Some promoted 'modern' psychical explanations for supposedly supernatural abilities whereas others maintained a more blunt scientific dismissal that advanced a direct correlation between the development of modernity and the decline of magic. While historians are increasingly rejecting the reality of this over-simplistic and misconceived formulation it still has to be appreciated as a consciously constructed ideological discourse which was influential in informing concepts of self and otherness.

The promotion of magical beliefs as both separate and inferior to modern rationalism had been an increasing feature of elite discourse since at least the seventeenth century, and magic's marginalisation had been aided by its increasing association with perceived inferiors, be it class, gender, or race.[3] This was also informed by what Gauri Viswanathan has argued was a post-Reformation attempt by mainstream religion to distance itself from more heterodox forms of belief, constructing dichotomies of elite and popular expressions of religion by diminishing the latter into residual 'superstitious' traits derived from a pre-Christian past. She also suggests similar urges existed within the developing secular state, claiming that as 'an engine of demystification' it could not comprehend beliefs that fell outside mainstream definitions of religion.[4] The role of 'the state' in this is questionable, but this chapter will certainly consider specific agencies

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[2] *Ibid*. Conan Doyle had a medical practice in Southsea between 1882 and 1890.

[3] Landy and Saler, *Re-enchantment*, p. 3. See also Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, and Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress*. For the oppositional nature of modernity see Benavides, 'Modernity', pp. 187–88.

[4] G. Viswanathan, 'Secularism in the Framework of Heterodoxy', p. 475.

who simultaneously marginalised heterodox popular beliefs while promoting the mythification of the modern. At the same time there was a change from the eighteenth-century elite's conscious withdrawal from popular culture to the nineteenth century's increasingly interventionist approaches. The initial justification for this was located in a desire to break customary traditions to ensure improved worker efficiency and to tame and rationalise popular cultures in line with bourgeois 'norms'. In the second half of the century intervention was increasingly urged by fears about the degenerative environmental impact of the city on the body, mind, and morality of its denizens, concerns laced with growing anxieties about racial and imperial decline by the fin de siècle.[5]

In contrast to subsequent chapters this one focuses on how the popular magical imagination was viewed and used by educated elites. Beginning with an examination of the way magical mentalities informed a sense of social and temporal 'otherness', this chapter then considers certain missionaries of modernity – schoolteachers, journalists, and folklorists – who incorporated such ideas into their efforts to encourage consent for a 'progressive' modernising vision.[6] Discussing and recording expressions of popular magical mentalities formed part of a politicised discourse in which some amongst the educated elites sought to shape their own identity as the vanguard of modernity. However, it is a key contention of this chapter that the need for a magical 'other' in the construction of that vision, and the uncertain outcome of such manipulations, created ambiguity which undermined their efforts. This was made all the more difficult by a significant element within the middle classes who did not merely theorise about the magical imagination but actively participated in its practices as debunkers, believers, and inquiring seekers, particularly its more 'modern' manifestations in the second half of the nineteenth century. As such this chapter explores the flawed implementation of a magical/modern dichotomy that was more an ideological formulation than a reality.

[5] For more on this see B. Wilson, *The Making of Victorian Values: Decency and Dissent in Britain: 1789–1837* (London, Penguin, 2007), B. Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men* (Manchester University Press, 2005), M. Huggins and J. A. Mangan (eds.), *Disreputable Pleasures: Less Virtuous Victorians at Play* (London, Cass, 2004), P. Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), Golby and Purdue, *Civilisation of the Crowd*, Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*, Thompson, *Customs in Common*, M. Baer, *Theatre and Disorder in Late Victorian London* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992), Bushaway, *By Rite*, and R. D. Storch (ed.), *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, Croom Helm, 1982).

[6] See Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, especially p. 12.

Constructing the modern 'self' and 'otherness'

Christopher Lehrich has argued that magic possesses 'an unusual power to manifest … division' and it proved a highly adaptable tool for constructing 'otherness' in this period.[7] The eighteenth-century elite's public disavowal of the reality of witchcraft had been a means of both disassociating themselves from, and defining themselves against, the lower orders. In a series of sermons delivered in the early-mid 1790s M. J. Naylor enhanced the sense of difference when he declared that those 'who have moved only in a superior sphere, and whose minds have been cultivated by a more refined education, must undoubtedly deem it almost impossible for rational beings to believe and defend such absurdities' but a 'strong predilection for the marvellous … formed a distinguished and striking feature in every rude, uncultivated mind'.[8] Such comments defined how the educated should think of themselves as much as how they should perceive the lower classes.

These views were repeated throughout the nineteenth century, reiterating simplistic dichotomous notions of intelligence and ignorance, progress and backwardness, superiority and inferiority, which conveniently bifurcated into crudely perceived elite/plebeian divides. In 1827 J. S. Forsyth claimed that 'superstition' was 'principally confined to the uneducated portion of the community' who, 'even in the most enlightened periods, are not entirely exempt from belief in powers of sorcery and magic'.[9] Similarly, in 1853 S. S. Madders asserted that superstition lurked 'in the darkest corners of the darkest alleys of poverty and ignorance' in mid-century Norwich.[10] Propagated in works that addressed a predominantly educated readership, such notions reinforced and even helped justify an imagined social order. Viewing magical beliefs as symptomatic of inherent inferiority and weakness contributed to broader contemporary debates which tended to associate intellect and morality with social position. This found its most blatant expression amongst those members of Manchester's bourgeois elite who believed that the physical separation of the town's middle and working classes helped explain a perceived decline in proletarian morals and an attendant increase in urban social unrest.[11]

Closer to home, 'superstition' informed middle-class perceptions of their household employees, especially (female) domestic staff who were

[7] Lehrich, *The Occult Mind*, p. 159.
[8] Naylor, *Inanity and Mischief*, pp. ii, iii, iv and 33.
[9] Forsyth, *Demonologia*, pp. 1 and 7. See also Jones, *Credulities Past and Present*, p. x.
[10] Madders, *Rambles in an Old City*, p. 310.
[11] See Gunn, *Public Culture*, p. 13, and Kidd, *Manchester*, pp. 56–59.

seen as particularly attracted to magical divinations. The efforts of itinerant fortune-tellers seeking magical trade at the kitchen door or servants' entrance of prosperous households prompted middle-class fears of their homes being assailed by irrationalism and ignorance. Importantly, this anxiety stemmed not so much from the external nuisance as concern for the internal rot, from lower-class servants who were complicit in enabling magical ideas to penetrate the domestic domain. These servants could have a powerful impact on the minds of children in the middle-class household. George Goodwin was not unique in blaming nurses and servants for an early belief in magic or ghosts when he later condemned his 'ignorant servant-maid' for pointing out an old woman who possessed the 'evil eye', and thus inflicted him with her beliefs.[12]

In one unusual account this influence went beyond mere belief. In May 1800 the home of Mr Rood, a wealthy wine merchant who lived in the High Street, Old Portsmouth, was disrupted by apparent poltergeist activities. On the morning of Sunday 4 May the bells used to summon servants within his house started ringing 'without any perceptible agency whatever' and continued every fifteen minutes throughout the rest of the day. After falling silent for the night, the commotion began again at nine o'clock the next morning, this time louder and 'with much greater violence' than before. Mr Rood, perturbed by the seeming loss of control over his own household, took the wires from the bells and muffled the clappers. Yet the cacophony continued, becoming so violent that the bracket upon which one bell had hung was pulled 'at least half a foot' out of the wall and 'would have required more strength than any inhabitant of the place is said to possess'. Suspicion finally fell upon one of his servants as 'the cause of this supernatural event'. The girl had a reputation. When previously employed by Mr Binstead, a shoemaker, in Lombard Street, his residence had been filled with 'the most tremendous noises', as if the building was 'being wrenched … from [its] foundations'. She had been described as often appearing to be 'combating with Spectres or Demons' which tipped her into 'the greatest state of terrifick agitation'. Binstead had discharged her from his service and two days after the disturbance in Rood's household a local newspaper recorded that he had done the same despite her having been a good servant. The extent to which prejudices against the girl's supposed supernatural powers were located in her class, gender, or a powerful combination of both obviously remains open to interpretation.[13]

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[12] Goodwin, *Lives of the Necromancers*, p. 463.
[13] *Hants Newspaper Cuttings*, vol. 2 (1800–1828) (local collection ref. 942.27), p. 1.

The stereotype of the superstitious servant enabled employers to reassert a sense of separation within the shared domestic sphere.[14] Domestic servants were a necessity for the maintenance of both household and public status, but the nature of their work required them to traverse the boundaries between public and private, being of the household but not of the family. This could have potential risks for the reputation of their employer. On 28 May 1887, Dr Royston Pike was horrified to find that not only had his home in Elm Grove, Southsea, been associated with one of the numerous local cases of fortune-telling but also that its mention in the *Hampshire Telegraph* had been picked up by the metropolitan press too. In an effort to clear his household's association with the taint of magical beliefs Pike immediately sent a letter to the editor of the *Hampshire Telegraph*, requesting that the paper should contradict the fortune-teller's statement that he had paid her twenty pounds for her services. Pike's printed statement declared, 'It is absolutely false, as I have never, in any way, encouraged such a vile system of imposition.'[15] The servants who had supposedly granted the fortune-teller access were not mentioned, though, as we will see in the next chapter, they were most likely the origin of this public embarrassment.

These impressions of the lower classes had wider political implications, particularly after the 1832 Reform Act. With the working class having to pursue their campaign for widening the franchise alone, the issue of popular 'superstitions' became entangled in discourses about the perceived 'dangers' of expanding democratic participation. Such ideas seemed to have been particularly forthcoming during the 1850s. In *The Education of the People* (1858) James Augustus St. John envisioned the massed gathering of 'the ignorant' in one place, pessimistically declaring that such a sight would drive home 'the prodigious difficulty of enlightening their minds'. Equating ignorance with the lower classes he evoked a stereotypically squalid sketch of men, women, and children 'in rags, ignorant, hungry, and discontented', remorselessly labouring all day before they 'sink into wretched hovels to sleep, or repair to some den of low and degrading debauchery … brutalising themselves still more completely'. He declared their minds to be 'inhabited by monstrous forms of superstition', for

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[14] For Victorian domestic servants as ghost-like figures in the middle-class household see Lynch, 'Spectral Politics: The Victorian Ghost Story and the Domestic Servant'. For more on this relationship in Portsmouth see Field, 'Wealth, Style of Life and Social Tone', pp. 94–95.
[15] See *Hampshire Telegraph*, 28 May and 4 June 1887.

'civilisation does very little towards extirpating such chimeras from the imagination'.[16]

'Civilisation' was a key term in this debate, fusing magical beliefs with both class and racial prejudices. On 7 April 1857, *The Times* printed a report from a Norfolk magistrate about a local case of witchcraft. Clearly aware of the newspaper's metropolitan readership, he reported that the supposed beliefs of 'savages' were also 'true of my own neighbourhood'. These associations were reiterated in a speech made before 'a metropolitan constituency' later that month by a Major Reed. Using *The Times*' 'frightful exposure' of witchcraft beliefs to emphasise 'the abyss of ignorance upon which we were standing', he declared that London contained 'heathens as degraded as could be found in any nation in the world'. Reed went on to argue that while New Zealand's Maoris were considered to be a '"poor benighted savage" … he was in intellect and the quickness of his faculties far superior to our own countrymen'. Linking this to calls for democratic representation by the working classes Reed expressed the basic fear of the social elites, namely that it was this superstitious mass who 'by the organic changes alluded to, would be entrusted with the choice of their representatives in Parliament'.[17] Such opinions suggest that the seeming perpetuation of popular magical mentalities was apparent justification for disbarring the masses from the democratic parliamentary process.[18]

This rhetoric flies in the face of a historiographical instinct that has been rightly suspicious of thinking in terms of homogenous social identities. The middle classes were obviously riven by internal divisions, particularly religious, political, and regional affiliations but also their views on the supernatural.[19] For all the attempts to construct a rhetoric of rational self and magical other the middle classes no more shared a consensual view of supernatural beliefs and practices than those lower

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16 St. John, *Education of the People*, pp. 21–23. These prejudices were voiced again prior to the Second Reform Act. See Strickland Constable, *Observations suggested by the Cattle Plague*, pp. 65–66. In political debate witchcraft beliefs become symbolic shorthand for ignorance. See for example *Manchester Times*, 18 November 1843, 16 March 1844, and 23 March 1844.

17 *Hampshire Telegraph*, 25 April 1857. See also 'Superstition in the Nineteenth Century', *Hampshire Telegraph*, 28 March 1857, St. John, *Education of the People*, p. 22, and H. Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

18 These associations persisted after working-class male enfranchisement. See the report on the continuing belief in the 'evil eye' in *Manchester Times*, 16 August 1895.

19 For studies of middle-class divisions see A. Kidd and D. Nicholls (eds.), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle-Class Identity in Britain 1800–1940* (Manchester University Press, 1999), Kidd and Nicholls (eds.), *The Making of the British Middle Class?*, and Morris, *Class, Sect and Party*.

down the social stratum. As William Jones observed in 1880, 'It is amazing how common are the private superstitions entertained by many who smile at the superstitions of the ignorant.'[20] Examples of middle-class 'superstitions' were not widely recorded or publicised. While this self-censorship can be read as an indicator of the successful internalising of a magic/modern dichotomy among the diverse ranks of the middle classes, sufficient evidence exists to illustrate that they were equally prone to superstitious behaviours, reminding us that interpretations of 'popular' magical mentalities have to allow for a degree of porosity that encompasses those beyond the lower classes.[21] In 1836 Mr Bignold, one of the proprietors of the Norwich Yarn Company, deposited coins into the foundation hole of its new factory, demonstrating superstitious impulse when confronted with the uncertainty of financial ventures.[22] A contributor to *Manchester City News Notes and Queries* told of a schoolmaster of his acquaintance who wore 'a gold chain round his neck as a charm against sore-throat', and who insisted on being at home at the start of the new year for fear that 'if he omitted to do so some calamity would take place in his family'.[23]

Regardless of these realities, a simplified elite/plebeian divide resonate with aspects of Dror Wahrman's concept of the middle class as a product of an expedient political discourse rather than a socio-economic actuality, with a 'middle-class' rhetoric serving to construct an imagined social contingent in need of inclusion in parliamentary reform by the 1830s.[24] Although the second half of the century was marked by the growing plurality of the middle classes it also saw them increasingly aligning with existing elites as they came to dominate local urban institutions and politics.[25] Given this, and despite the reality of a variegated and complex class system, educated views of the magical imagination helped encourage a discourse founded on a more simplistic, dichotomous view of society. Eschewing the terminology and socio-economic implications of 'middle' and 'labouring' classes, and placing little emphasis on differences of wealth and property, it promoted more

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[20] Jones, *Credulities Past and Present*, p. 480.
[21] See Hester Thale's comments in Porter, *Enlightenment*, p. 229.
[22] *Norfolk Chronicle*, 3 December 1836.
[23] *Manchester City News Notes and Queries*, vol. 5, 10 March 1883. See also *Manchester City News Notes and Queries*, vol. 2, 3 May 1879.
[24] For Wahrman's engaging thesis see his *Imagining the Middle Class*. See also P. Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge University Press, 1994). For criticisms of class as a discursive construct see Gunn, *Public Culture*, p. 4.
[25] See D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998), p. 121.

encompassing cultural aspects such as education, morality, intellect, and 'civilised' behaviours. These qualities helped define a crude opposition between a 'right-thinking, morally upright' element in English society and an ignorant, 'superstitious' other.[26]

Such formulations need not necessarily imply rigid patrician/plebeian dichotomies. Whilst largely defined by a hegemonic elite, such qualities were open to adoption by all and this rhetorical construction arguably sought to encourage inter-class consensus rather than forming impenetrable boundaries.[27] These potentially more inclusive identifications enabled all from wealthy manufacturers down to lowly white-collar clerks (and beyond) to find a sense of common ground on the basis of their supposed mental outlook and moral attributes. While this dichotomous formulation did not conceal the fractures that ran through the middling ranks, it helped encourage a choice as to how people wished to perceive themselves, and association with the 'progressive' elements of this formulation helped provide a loose ideological unity prior to the maturing of a more cohesive urban civic culture in the post-1870s. Ultimately the educated elite's discursive construction of itself as defined by its superior cultural values rather than rigid social-economic criteria informed their self-presentation as the product of 'unprecedented and discontinuous social transformations'; in effect, they were their own best advertisement for the advent of modernity.[28]

An ideological emphasis on modernity's forward progress also involved magical mentalities being appropriated into constructing temporal boundaries. Keen to foster a sense of modernity's epistemological break, its advocates repeatedly attempted to banish magical beliefs to the past, an intention that may partly account for the reason why nineteenth-century folklorists seem to have been principally concerned with the origin of folk beliefs rather than their contemporary function. This displacement was a distancing technique which enabled modernisers to declare the present a more rational and enlightened period of history. As a contributor to *Manchester City News Notes and Queries* put it

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[26] See Crossick, 'From Gentlemen to the Residuum', p. 158.

[27] For bourgeois hegemony see Perkins, *Reform of Time*, p. 5, and also M. D. Boden, 'The Formation of Bourgeois Hegemony in England, 179–1850' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 2006), H. Berry and J. Gregory (eds.), *Creating and Consuming Culture in North-East England, 1660–1830* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004), especially pp. 120–51, Lewis, *The Middlemost and the Milltowns*, Gunn, *Public Culture*, and R. Gray, 'Bourgeois Hegemony in Victorian England' in T. Bennett, G. Martin, C. Mercer, and J. Woolacott (eds.), *Culture, Ideology and Social Process: A Reader* (London, Batford Academic, 1981), pp. 235–50.

[28] Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*, p. 226. For the development of middle-class civic cultures see Gunn, *Public Culture*.

after reading a newspaper account of a man in the southern counties who believed his cows had been 'overlooked' by a witch and had sought magical aid from a wise man, 'one seems, when reading such a statement, to be back in Shakespeare's days'.[29]

This distancing from a 'superstitious' past was constantly reasserted throughout the nineteenth century. In 1827 J. S. Forsyth was pleased 'to contrast the present times, in which there is almost an extinction of these delusions with ages not very remote'.[30] In the 1880s the *Middleton Guardian* published a series of articles on superstition in the town, then being merged into Manchester. It noted that 'very many of those [omens] I have mentioned are rarely to be heard of now as real belief; they are simply recalled by older people as former popular notions'.[31] In 1899 William Axon confidently declared that 'during the present age the rapid diffusion of knowledge has happily driven forth much antiquated superstition'.[32] It seems as if educated commentators wanted to make plebeian magical 'superstitions' disappear simply by stating that they had. Yet the inaccuracy of this crude sample of declarations is illustrated by their necessary repetition throughout the century. A sense of modernity was having to be perpetually recreated, the dark 'superstitious' past always being perceived as only ever just having been left behind. H. Strickland Constable clearly appreciated this self-deception. Writing in 1866, he noted that people always felt their age was more enlightened than their forefathers, with most being unwilling to accept that 'the knowledge of one age is the ignorance of the next'.[33]

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[29] *Manchester City News Notes and Queries*, vol. 1, 9 March 1878. Such statements also enabled predominantly urban-based commentators to use 'superstition' to exacerbate perceptions of dichotomous urban and rural cultures. The Norwich-based *Norfolk Chronicle* lamented that quarrels that had their origins in witchcraft beliefs were 'unfortunately too prevalent in most of [Norfolk's] villages'. See *Norfolk Chronicle*, 27 April 1857. Mancunians were willing to engineer an image of lingering superstition in rural Lancashire to enhance Manchester's image as a magical void within the county. See for example *Manchester City News Notes and Queries*, vol. 2, 16 August 1879. One of this series' most protracted debates related to the legend of the Boggart Ho' Ghost, located closer to Manchester than any other example discussed. Becoming quite vitriolic at times, the running argument eventually collapsed into etymological disagreement. See *ibid*., vol. 1: 5, 12, and 26 January, 2 and 9 February 1878. See also Dentith, *Society and Cultural Forms*, pp. 76–127, and Bennett, 'Folklore Studies', pp. 77–91.
[30] Forsyth, *Demonologia*, p. 8. See also Religious Tract Society, *Remarkable Delusions*, p. 189. For the ideology of radical temporal rupture see J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1987).
[31] *News Cuttings,* MLA ref. 942.72.M6, p. 37.
[32] Axon, *Echoes of Old Lancashire*, p. 201.
[33] Strickland Constable, *Observations*, p. 59.

'Modernity' was far from being a neutral temporal descriptor to encapsulate the fruition of long-term trends such as scientific and technological innovations, industrialisation, increasingly integrated national economies, and growing urbanisation. It possessed influential (socio-)psychological and ideological connotations, not least in its assertion of an intense present, positioning the nineteenth century as a gateway from a burdensome past of tradition to a lighter, brighter future. 'Superstition' was conceived as a symbolic marker which had been left in the wake of historical progress. Attempts to banish magical beliefs to the past (usually a gap of two generations) set down the standards of acceptability, reinforcing a demarcation between 'superstition' and reason, tradition and progress. Through constructing these ideological binaries, advocates of modernity hoped to suggest both the nineteenth century's dynamic volition and unprecedented character, viewing it as a time and a society creating and living to its own values, visions, and ideals rather than being beholden to those from the past.[34]

As was the convention with regard to the educated elites' disapproval of nineteenth-century popular cultural practices, magical thinking tended to be both moralised and pathologised as vice and disease. Early in the century the moralisation of magical practices and beliefs had placed them firmly in the sights of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, who had particularly targeted London's fortune-telling and astrological fraternities in the 1810s. These moralised interpretations continued to inform the efforts of the relatively more moderate Religious Tract Society in the mid-nineteenth century.[35] Yet moralised and pathologised interpretations of magical beliefs did not necessarily proceed in a linear progression from one to the other. Writing in 1858, Augustus St. John conflated the two, perceiving 'superstition' as 'a vice, and the well-spring of other vices' but also claimed it was 'as much a disease of the mind as fever or small-pox is a disease of the body'.[36] He particularly condemned oneiromancy, predicting the future through dreams, for it 'weakens the mental powers' whilst causing believers to

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[34] O'Giollain, *Locating Irish Folklore*, p. 11.

[35] For the metropolitan focus of the Society for the Suppression of Vice see Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, pp. 55–57. For examples of the Religious Tract Society's publications see their *Magic, Pretended Miracles, and Remarkable Natural Phenomena*, and *Remarkable Delusions*.

[36] St. John, *Education of the People*, p. 30. See also the language of 'ailment and remedies' in an account of a lecture on popular superstitions in *Hampshire Telegraph*, 16 October 1852. For the perception of ignorance as a social evil endemic within the lower classes and education as a preventative of disease and immorality see Buckingham, *National Evils*, chapter 2.

surrender to fatalism, thus preventing them from striving for better futures for themselves'.[37]

This hints at the way magical mentalities were not just a passive foil employed by advocates of modernisation to shape temporal distinctions. Rather the persistence of magical beliefs appeared to stand in (tacit) opposition to the claimed newness of a rhetorically constructed modernity. 'Superstition' was seen to promote a generally pessimistic worldview from which magical solutions offered only brief respite. By contrast, the Victorian middle classes envisioned a future defined by potential and shaped by a free will alloyed to hard work. As such, the struggle was less about perception of the past or present than about hegemonic interpretations of the future, the seeds of which were sown in contemporary conflict over popular temporal perceptions. Although time was in the process of becoming standardised through the development of watches, clocks, and factory whistles in this period, it remained an uneven concept among those who adhered to beliefs in unlucky days for starting new ventures or fortuitous days for making predictions. The condemnation of magical divinatory practices resonated with broader efforts by employers to construct a more uniform, disciplined approach to time on the part of their workforce. As Maureen Perkins has suggested, the regularity of routine became a form of secular forecasting which effectively challenged, or at least overlaid notions of temporal unevenness fostered by the magical imagination.[38] By branding magical prediction as 'superstition' alternative means of envisioning and calculating futures could be marginalised as out of step with both bourgeois virtues of self-reliance and more 'modern' conceptions of homogenous time.

These muted struggles over temporal perceptions indicate how the magical imagination represented an alternative way of understanding the world that inherently challenged competing epistemologies of the period. In 1830 Robert Forby declared that the lower classes' 'deeply rooted superstition … appears to bid defiance to the "march of intellect"'.[39] As late as 1908 the folklorist, George Laurence Gomme noted that a continued commitment to magical thinking, what he termed 'the primitive way', encouraged 'forms of thought inconsistent with the knowledge and ideas of the age'. Given that people were

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[37] St. John, *ibid.*, p. 35.
[38] See Perkins, *Reform of Time*, pp. 12–39, and also her *Visions of the Future: Almanacs, Time and Cultural Change 1775–1870* (Oxford University Press, 1996). For struggles over conceptions of time see Thompson, *Customs in Common*, pp. 352–403, and Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, pp. 180–95.
[39] Forby, *Vocabulary of East Anglia*, p. 397. See also Axon, *Old Lancashire*, p. 202.

living 'in the age of railways and schools and inventions' he confessed to being flummoxed by its persistence.[40] For these commentators the continuation of magical mentalities seemed to expose the fragile veneer of a progressive modernity, revealing it to be composed more of ideological rhetoric than reality, dependent upon reference to totemic symbols such as the steam engine, the penny post, the newspaper, and the school house to signify its forward momentum away from a 'superstitious past'.[41]

Disseminating 'modernity'

Presenting nineteenth-century English society in terms of forward- and backward-thinking elements enabled the drivers of an ideological modernity to conceal themselves within a broader demographic. As such, one cannot identify a fixed core of 'modernising' ideologues let alone a modernising class but rather a diffused range of agents who, operating through predominantly urban-based newspapers, journals, schools, and pulpits, sought to promote their views as the 'norm'. These agencies reflect the second of what Stuart Hall has termed 'the people' versus the 'power-bloc', two broadly defined but constantly unstable entities, the latter consisting of 'a shifting alliance of the forces of domination, expressed in and through institutions such as the media, the culture industries … [and] the educational system'.[42] Focusing on education and the press this section explores the efforts to promote modernity versus magical 'superstition' but also the reasons why these particular vehicles of apparent 'domination' were flawed by their potential for ambiguity. It will then focus more closely on the complex relationship between folklorists and their informants as illustrative of a contested site between elite and plebeian conceptions of the magical imagination.

Education

Encouraging a consensus for the idea of a progressive modernity was a worryingly democratic issue for its promoters, a vocal minority who struggled to articulate a far from collective vision of advancement that the masses found difficult to materially gauge. Education was potentially a key means by which the values and vision of 'modernity' could

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[40] Gomme, *Folklore as an Historical Science*, pp. 180–81.
[41] PCL ref. 942.2792 – Saunders, *Tales of Old Portsmouth*, p. 19.
[42] See Storey, *Cultural Studies*, p. 89, and also S. Hall, 'Notes on De-constructing "The Popular"', in J. Storey (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 2nd edn (London, Prentice Hall, 1998), pp. 442–53.

be instilled within the lower classes. Thomas Madge, a proponent of just such an initiative, was not purely altruistic in his promotion of this idea, recognising that 'the welfare of civil society depends ultimately upon the conduct of the poor'. His belief that education and reason would prevent them from being misguided by 'deadly superstition' alloyed plebeian self-improvement to middle-class self-interest and state security.[43] Others saw it as the best way of preventing fraudulent fortune-tellers from preying on popular credulity. Whereas fines, prison sentences, and hard labour repeatedly failed to deter practitioners who calculated such risks against potential profits, the *Manchester Times* argued that it was the clients that had to be targeted through education. Until people were aware of 'the laws which regulate … the world they inhabit … it is but reasonable to expect they will continue to form the most erroneous and grotesque ideas upon matters beyond their comprehension, and fall victim to every delusion which strongly appeals to either their hopes or fears'.[44]

It is generally accepted that literacy levels had long been higher in urban than rural environments although there were different levels of literacy between towns, with older cities such as Norwich tending to have higher literacy rates than new industrial centres. The pace of urbanisation itself may have been a factor, especially in the faster-growing cities of Manchester, Bradford, Leeds, and Birmingham where population growth could periodically overwhelm or outstrip educational provision. The resultant detrimental effects on literacy levels would, according to the thinking of some contemporaries, hinder education's impact on eradicating superstition.[45] Norwich had had a strong charity school

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[43] Madge, *Importance of Education*, pp. 22 and 24. See also Goodwin, *Town Swamps*, p. 1, and A. Rauch, *Useful Knowledge: The Victorians, Morality and the March of Intellect* (Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2001).

[44] *Manchester Times*, 11 September 1858. When John Hartwell, 'The Birmingham Seer', appeared before the Birmingham magistrates in 1883 it was revealed that he had already served two prison sentences for practising palmistry in 1879 and 1882. Earlier yet he had been sentenced to eighteen months hard labour for fortune-telling and selling pornography in London. His compulsion to continue breaking the law was suggested by a Detective Ashby who testified that when Hartwell was arrested the police found over 200 letters containing money from clients. See *Manchester Times*, 3 February 1883.

[45] See Freeman, *What Hinders the Progress*, p. 12. For more on popular literacy see J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 2nd edn (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2010), J. Raven, H. Small and N. Tadmor (eds.), *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), Jordan and Patten (eds.), *Literature in the Marketplace*, R. D. Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 2nd edn (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1998), P. Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson*, Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*, pp. 38–97, K. Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837–1914* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), McAleer, *Popular*

movement since the early eighteenth century. From 1812 the Norfolk and Norwich National Society was established to set up new Anglican charity schools and was soon rivalled by the development of nonconformist schools, with the latter's Sunday schools attracting around 4,000 children by 1854. A Ragged School was established for the city's poorest children in 1848 and by 1854 Norwich Charity Schools ran nine institutions with a combined roll of 750 boys and 500 girls. A non-sectarian school was also set up in 1856 by James Jeremiah Colman, one of the city's dominant manufacturers, for the children of his employees. Despite the city's relatively modest growth when The Norwich School Board was set up after the 1870 Education Act, it was estimated that there was provision for just 8,674 children. These findings instigated a school-building programme in the late nineteenth century to address Norwich's need for 5,000 extra school places.[46]

Manchester's manufacturers were said to be 'the most zealous and earnest advocates for the education of the people' and this paternalism may have helped temper the worst effects of the town's rapid early nineteenth-century growth on educational provision.[47] At the elementary level it had both Lancastrian schools (named after the nonconformist Joseph Lancaster) and Anglican Bluecoat schools by the early 1800s. There were evening schools for workers and G. N. Wright claimed Manchester's young had plenty of opportunity to acquire literacy skills as most churches and chapels had Sunday schools attached to them. The issue was whether people had the time, energy, or inclination to attend.[48] One's location within the town could also prove a significant factor, the absence of schools in Ashton being associated with increased class tensions in the 1830s. The riots of 1842 prompted a new school-building programme in working-class districts from the mid 1840s, and subsequently there was an improvement in school attendance in poorer parts of Manchester.[49] Portsmouth was first and foremost a military town and therefore despite being established longer than Manchester it was slower to develop the educational provision found in eighteenth-

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Reading, T. Bennett, *Popular Fiction – Technology, Ideology, Production, Reading* (London, Routledge, 1990), and Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*.

[46] For educational provision in Norwich see Sanderson, 'Education since 1750', pp. 295–321, Meeres, *History of Norwich*, pp. 119–20, and 170–72, and Wade Martins, *A History of Norfolk*, pp. 100 and 102.

[47] Morse, *Education, Secular and Religious*, p. 8.

[48] Wright and Allen, *Lancashire – Its History*, vol. 2, pp. 212–13. See also Snell, 'The Sunday-School Movement in England and Wales', pp. 122–68, and Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, pp. 171–75. Not everyone learned to read in these more formal institutions. See Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, pp. 54–72.

[49] See Gadian, 'Class Formation and Class Action', p. 57.

century Norwich. The Beneficial Society's Hall in Kent Street, Portsea, included a schoolroom for elementary education from January 1786. A Bell School was opened in Pembroke Street in 1812 and was rivalled by the simultaneous creation of a non-denominational school. Following the Napoleonic Wars John Pound, a local cobbler, had provided the poorest children in his neighbourhood with a basic education, attracting them to his shop with hot potatoes, his efforts often credited with inspiring the Ragged Schools movement. The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed expanded educational provision with most of Portsmouth's Anglican churches being associated with National Schools. From 1837 Portsmouth's Beneficial Schools began providing education for girls as well as boys and by the time of the 1851 census 9,514 children were attending a variety of day schools in the town. By 1871 12,180 children were officially receiving elementary education, and subsequent provision by local authority schools and the National Schools enabled them to cater for Portsmouth's notable surge in population between 1860 and 1914.[50]

The gradually increasing quantity of urban educational provision should not be confused with quality and contemporaries frequently used the perceived strength of 'superstition' to judge the success of school teachers' endeavours. Opinion was mixed. In *Narratives of Sorcery and Magic* (1851) Thomas Wright claimed that witchcraft was merely 'a vulgar superstition in some rude localities where the schoolmaster had not yet penetrated', suggesting the inevitability of its demise once a school was established. Augustus St. John was similarly optimistic that better education meant people 'do not in these days mistake mice, or flies, or spiders for so many imps of Satan'.[51] In 1880 William Jones boldly claimed that 'steam, electricity, and other achievements of science are dissipating many popular delusions; ghosts, goblins, and fairies are loosening their hold on the imaginations of even children'.[52] By 1906 *Heywood Notes and Queries* could announce that Lancashire had witnessed 'a complete exodus of boggarts' as a result of their inability to tolerate the forces of rationalism that 'Board Schools and schools in general were raising against them'.[53] Yet critics were equally forthcoming. Many foresaw a long war of attrition between magical mentalities and modern rationalism. In 1863 the *Saturday Review* claimed, 'great public instructors may congratulate themselves on the spread of

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[50] Webb *et al.*, *The Spirit of Portsmouth*, pp. 92–95.
[51] Wright, *Narratives of Sorcery*, p. 328. St. John, *Education of the People*, p. 31.
[52] Jones, *Credulities*, p. xi.
[53] *Heywood Notes and Queries*, vol. 2 (1906), pp. 188–89.

intellectual light, and on the march of mind' compared with 'the abject superstition of the past', but it feared much of that light was just 'a sham reflection', given that '[w]hole villages with schools, and clergy, and railways, and electric telegraphs believe in witchcraft, and act on their belief'.[54] *The Times* echoed this in 1866, lamenting the fact that despite laudable attempts to educate the masses 'there yet remains many strong proofs of the extensive hold which superstition and credulity have on their minds'.[55] If the decline of such ideas was to be a gauge for the efficiency of educational provision then the continued reporting of such beliefs showed that the masses were not consenting to the rational, improving ideology that schoolmasters implicitly promoted.

Perhaps worse still was the fact that expressions of continuing magical beliefs were found in the very institutions that were expected to banish them. An article in the *Norfolk Chronicle* in 1857 recorded how a friend of the contributor had asked a class of boys for their meaning of a witch and virtually all could name where one could be found. Like their elders school children learned to keep their beliefs to themselves so as to avoid ridicule or chastisement, but the beliefs lived on nevertheless. By contrast grammar schools were a popular locale for invoking the Devil. Joseph Hunter recorded how pupils tried to summon the Devil by placing a hat in the centre of a chalked circle with a black halfpenny under it and then repeating the Lord's Prayer backwards. He added that in his youth he had believed that every old grammar school in the country had witnessed similar practices.[56]

For adults information was often accessed in other ways than private reading. Mid nineteenth-century artisans and factory workers frequently obtained their understanding of mesmerism from attending lectures and demonstrations at mechanics institutes.[57] Manchester had been among the first to establish such institutions in 1824. Taking its lead from London and other 'principal towns', and responding to a swell of support from skilled workers and artisans in the Royal Dockyard, Portsmouth founded its own mechanic's institute in 1825. Located in Bishop Street, in predominantly working-class Portsea, it had a library,

[54] See *Hampshire Telegraph*, 17 October 1863.
[55] *The Times*, 27 October 1866.
[56] See *Norfolk Chronicle*, 2 May 1857, and BL ref. Add. 24545, pp. 362 and 411. In numerous folkloric tales when grammar school children summoned the Devil it was usually a schoolmaster who possessed the wit or knowledge to trick him back into Hell and restore order, thereby reinforcing the teacher's image as a scourge of superstition. See Bamford, *Early Days*, p. 45, and 'The Sands of Cocker' in Bowker, *Goblin Tales*, pp. 120–28.
[57] Melechi, *Servants of the Supernatural*, p. 100.

reading rooms, and regular lectures held every Monday evening.[58] Such institutions were important in creating a space in which skilled workers could conceive of themselves as consciously self-improving, even modern, a notion that was often reflected back to them in flattering newspaper reports on their lecture programmes.[59] These were progressive institutions where respected modes of thinking and acting could be learned and reinforced, at least for a minority among the working classes. Norwich was amongst the first English cities to adopt William Ewart's Public Libraries Act in 1850, the costs being met from local council taxes. At the opening ceremony of Manchester Free Library in 1852 no less a figure than Charles Dickens declared his hopes that it would 'prove a source of pleasure and improvement in the cottages, the garrets, and the cellars of the poorest of our people'.[60] This potential for broader engagement with learning and self-improvement could be slow to actualise, for members of the urban working classes were sometimes slow to overcome the sense that due to a lack of education, wealth, or even appropriately smart clothing, such institutions were for them.[61]

Beyond this combination of secular and religious, elementary and adult institutional provision was the ubiquitous presence of religious tracts. These frequently attacked 'superstition', and called for a remedial system of popular education that promoted morality and Christian values alongside progressive rational instruction. This had found rather belligerent expression in a sermon by M. J. Naylor in 1795. Railing against superstition as 'the daemon which can rob us of our reason', he urged his congregation (and subsequent readers) to 'exert all [their] powers to chase this dire destroyer from the face of the earth'.[62] The debunking pamphlets issued by the Religious Tract Society in the first half of the nineteenth century were less combative, but no less earnest. These cheap publications, adopting a similar format to the chapbooks with which they competed, employed rational and scientific explanations to highlight the gullibility of those who believed in magic.[63] In the 1810s the Religious Tract Society, the Church Tract Association and the Ladies' Bible Society were all highly active in Manchester, placing tracts in public houses and systematically distributing their literature

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[58] Slight, *History of Portsmouth*, p. 12.
[59] See for example the reports on lectures about the history of magic and witchcraft at the Assembly Room, Blackburn, in *Manchester Times*, 28 January 1852, and a lecture on popular superstition at the Chichester Literary Society and Mechanics Institute in *Hampshire Telegraph*, 16 October 1852.
[60] Messinger, *Manchester*, p. 136.
[61] See Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, p. 212.
[62] Naylor, *Inanity and Mischief*, p. 94.
[63] See, for example, Religious Tract Society, *Magic, Pretended Miracles*.

through the streets.[64] While magical beliefs could be sustained by popular literature one must not underestimate the powerful indoctrinating drive towards self-improvement that this form of street literature promoted, at least if one was inclined to absorb its message.

However, as a means of promoting an ideological modernity education was hampered in several ways. Most basically, prior to the 1870 Education Act provision for formally obtaining literacy skills remained piecemeal and uncoordinated. As suggested in previous chapters, there were other inherent problems arising from this. Many commentators were wary of the uses to which the newly literate may apply their skills, choosing to indulge their imaginations rather than expand their intellect, hungrily consuming cheap, sensational fictions rather than self-improving works. Where such efforts were led by ecclesiastical institutions there remained the issue of dissonance between what the clergy taught (or preached) and the role of religion in feeding the magical imagination. In terms of the sermon as an educational forum, even when the clergy consciously intended to dispel magical beliefs their efforts were prone to backfiring. Reverend Phayre preached a powerful sermon against astrology in his parish of Raynham, Norfolk, in 1849, setting himself up as a pious champion against 'this way of error which is eating into this small community like a canker'.[65] Yet in attempting to warn his parishioners against astrology he actually informed more people about it than the local astrologer could have hoped for, reading the details of his advertisement out in church. The deadly earnestness with which the clergy struggled against 'superstition' only seemed to grant it greater credibility. Certainly in England's industrial cities the audience for such a sermon were statistically more likely to be of the middling sort than the working classes, and thus in terms of cultivating 'respectable' beliefs or attitudes the clergy merely tended to preach to the converted.[66]

Newspapers

Although the relatively high cost of newspapers prior to the abolition of stamp and paper taxes in 1855 had initially limited their impact on lower-class communities, from the mid nineteenth century provincial and national newspapers proliferated. Towards the end of century there

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[64] James (ed.), *Print and the People*, p. 29. See also L. Howsam, *Cheap Bibles: Nineteenth-century Publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[65] Phayre, *A Sermon Preached in this Parish*, p. 17.

[66] Gunn, *Public Culture*, pp. 106–07.

was the emergence of the cheaper and therefore more widely accessible penny newspaper. Informed by increasingly high literacy rates, certainly after the influence of the 1870 Education Act started to impact on elementary reading, the newspaper was potentially a powerful vehicle for shaping opinions and encouraging a sense of both collective 'norms' and imagined communities.[67] Yet, as with the lack of control over literacy, so too was the press an unstable means of promoting an ideological divide between magic and modernity.[68]

A rhetoric of progressive modernity was certainly entwined in most articles that considered contemporary 'superstition'. The following statement from the *Hampshire Telegraph* was fairly typical: 'This is the 24th March 1857: Men can go to New York in ten days, and communicate with Constantinople in twenty minutes … we pass for a very civilized and enlightened people, rather too "go-a-head", perhaps in our notions, but decidedly exempt from any incubus of superstition or credulity.' This bold assertion was something of a foil for the article's subsequent focus on the trial of James Tunnicliff, a cunning man, the incident being used as proof that the modern world remained haunted by its failure to eradicate witchcraft beliefs.[69] Reports of urban magic were usually accompanied by a note of surprise that such ideas could occur in the modern age, the *Manchester Times* lamenting in 1858 that 'with all our printing presses, and railways, and steam engines, and electric telegraph, and all our other conquests in material knowledge, there still remains, by the side of all our science, so vast a mass of superstition'.[70] Although the contemporary city was often presented as a tangible node of modernisation more astute journalists recognised that both magical practitioners and their clients actually favoured the relative anonymity of cities over rural areas. The sheer size of London during its accelerated expansion in the second half of the nineteenth

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[67] The value of newspapers in the formation of attitudes and 'imagined communities' has been dated back to the eighteenth century. See B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, Verso, 2006), and K. Wilson, 'Citizenship, Empire, and Modernity in the English Provinces', pp. 71–75.

[68] See M. Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers: Victorian Fiction after the Invention of the News* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 3–21, M. Hampton, *Visions of the Press in Britain, 1850–1950* (Urbana, Ill., University of Illinois Press, 2005), L. Brake and J. F. Codell (eds.), *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2004), L. P. Curtis, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 48–108, and L. Brake, A. Jones, and L. Madden (eds.), *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1990).

[69] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 28 March 1857.

[70] *Manchester Times*, 2 October 1858. See also *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 August 1869.

century guaranteed that such activities were far harder to detect. As a result it was well known that in the capital's 'outlying districts' there were fortune-tellers who were frequented by middle-class clients and even those from 'the higher ranks'. Exposing the hypocrisy of those who were so ready to condemn the lower classes the *Manchester Times* declared, 'It is very easy to write edifying homilies to maid servants, and agricultural labourers … but I strongly suspect that there is hardly any class which has not a little operation to perform upon its own eye before proceeding to the extraction of the mote from its neighbours.'[71] Despite the press repeatedly drawing attention to identifiable symbols of 'modernity' in the nineteenth-century city it frequently tended to strike a rather self-defeating tone in the face of a persistent and seemingly subversive body of urban magical beliefs.

Added to this was the press' inability to guarantee that readers would formulate the intended interpretation of such matters. Newspapers were firstly consumed for their information rather than their opinions and reports could just as easily confirm the beliefs of some readers who may choose to simply ignore the journalistic condemnation. Efforts to expose magical practitioners as con artists frequently fell on deaf ears, a fact illustrated by their continued practices even after their public exposure and possible trial. It was not unknown for some cunning folk to actually receive an increased trade once their name had come to the attention of newspaper readers.[72] Believers in magic possessed a certain cantankerousness that limited the press' influence when exposing fraudulent practitioners. According to Thomas Laqueur this arose from believers' pleasure that not everything in the modern world could be explained (away) by scientific observation, an observation that was as applicable to elite occultists as to plebeian believers in fortune-telling. Part of the power of magical beliefs had always been their ability to defy or exceed reason. As such, press articles, like any other texts, were not passively internalised; ideologically loaded assertions had to contend with pre-existing views which could obviously be modified but were far harder to overturn.[73] In such circumstances the greater quantity and

[71] *Manchester Times*, 2 October 1858.
[72] See Davies, 'Newspapers', p. 152. See pp. 148–53.
[73] Laqueur, 'Why the Margins Matter', p. 133. John Fiske's argument that the 'top-down flow' of the press is necessarily disciplinary seems to overstate newspapers' ability to construct or enforce 'dominant' ideologies favourable to the existing power structures. While hard to explicitly challenge these ideologies it was considerably easier to circumvent them. See Fiske, 'Popularity and the Politics of Information', p. 49. For more on the way readers' responses are governed by their preconceptions see Storey, *Cultural Studies*, pp. 41–49.

availability of nineteenth-century newspapers was no guarantee of the commensurate effectiveness of a persuasive modernising discourse.

The potential impact of the press' message was frequently flawed from within. While the standard editorial response was to present contemporary magical beliefs as expressions of lamentable ignorance, their public exposure intended to promote their folly, the intended message was not always clear. The journalist who attended a demonstration of spiritualism at the Portland Hall, Southsea in January 1865 reported that the audience was 'less sceptical at the close of the performances than at the beginning'. He suggested that even if they were all 'mere tricks of the conjuror's art, they … closely resembling the preternatural as one might suppose the resemblance to be possible'. Suggestive of a strong middle-class interest in such phenomena, a dark séance was then held in a private room in the Portland Hotel for a more select clientele. The admission price of ten shillings and sixpence each was one that few of the town's labourers could easily afford to pay.[74] Similarly, following a performance of mesmerism in Southsea in 1885 a writer calling himself 'Common Sense' initially claimed mesmerism worked via an individual's credulity rather than any 'supernatural power on the part of the professed mesmeriser'. Having gone with the express purpose of looking for deception, a suspicion that was apparently confirmed when the mesmerist used the same planted individuals over several evenings, he then admitted that 'the mesmeric performances made me very much disposed to believe that [the mesmerist] had some great mental or fascinating power over her victims, and I did not encourage the flashes from those "piercers" to be concentrated upon myself'.[75] Such reports invited contradiction and ambiguity, not disenchantment.

Given its broad engagement across the lower and middling classes spiritualism appears to have divided opinion more than any other contemporary expression of supernatural beliefs. These divisions did not simply follow class lines and diverse opinions amongst the middle classes were publicly articulated through the 'Letters to the Editor' sections of the press. The supposed charlatanry of the period's most famous medium, Daniel Dunglas Home, made headlines and encouraged debate in the late 1860s and 1870s.[76] The various arguments for and against spiritualism were expressed at length in the *Hampshire Telegraph* in 1875 though given the public forum, most contributors resorted to anonymous monikers. On 16 January 1875 'An Unbeliever'

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[74] 'A Night with the "Sperrits"', *Hampshire Telegraph*, 28 January 1865.
[75] *Manchester Times*, 13 June 1885.
[76] See Proctor, *Reminiscences of Old Portsmouth*, p. 34. See also Melechi, *Servants of the Supernatural*, especially pp. 180–206.

stated that spiritualism was 'an attempt to delude the ignorant and weak-minded'. By contrast Mark Raymond, one of the few to give his name and address in Portsmouth, fully accepted that 'there are a very large number of highly intelligent persons who are strong believers in this matter'. His main concern was whether the spirits summoned to séances were angels or demons. 'Spiritualist' went further, suggesting that spiritualism was not 'the last device of hell' but actually encouraged 'many hundreds of thousands' towards a more moral life in a way that the church was no longer able to. He added that the fact that the debate was occurring openly in the pages of the newspaper was indicative of the fact that spiritualism was no longer being denied: 'Incredulity and ridicule first greeted it; now it is largely accepted, and theorised upon … In the end, and at no distant date, it will be recognised as a matter of course.' The opinions of 'One in his Right Mind' and 'Anti-Spiritualist' obviously failed to concur with this optimistic prediction. These lengthy attacks and defences left no clear message to readers and yet for those like 'Spiritualist' the newspapers' willingness to print the debate granted it credibility.[77] This was most obviously the case when respected journalist W. T. Stead staked his reputation on promoting psychical research in *Borderland*, his occult journal which ran between 1893 and 1897.[78]

This conflicted message was further muddled by editors who were compromised by having to offset their desire to promote a progressive message against financial pressures to seek readers and maintain sales. One suspects they were not wholly unaware of the way exposing fraudulent fortune-tellers and reporting on the details of their trials nicely fused the supernatural and the criminal, two topics guaranteed to attract reader interest.[79] Newspapers also had a vested commercial interest in advertising and some showed few qualms about promoting magical services. In 1822 Dr Hallett was openly advertising for trade in the *Hampshire Telegraph*. Offering to cure numerous physical ailments and maladies, Hallett, a resident of Portsea, could also turn his hand to magical practices, casting nativities 'for the cure of Witchcraft and those troubled with Evil Spirits'.[80] In November 1850 the *Manchester*

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[77] See *Hampshire Telegraph*, 16 and 23 January 1875. A similar debate ran in *The Monitor*. See 13, 20, and 27 September, and 4 October 1879.

[78] See Ledger and Luckhurst, *Fin de Siècle*, p. 270 and 280–86.

[79] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 18 April 1825. Press reports of 'witchcraft' were not necessarily presented as spectacular. For example, the trial of Fred Peter Hatton, a cunning man charged at the Bodmin assize court in 1843, was presented next to reports on Nelson's monument, the case of an elopement, and the national debt. See *Manchester Times*, 15 April 1843.

[80] See *Hampshire Telegraph*, 21 January 1822. Based in Portsea, Hallett conducted an itinerant practice between towns including Chichester, Havant, Portchester, and

Times even reprinted a circular from 1842 that had been 'addressed to respectable persons' by Stellarius, an astrologer based in nearby Bury. Openly touting for magical trade, and with a seemingly middle-class client base in mind, he offered consultation on 'business, money matters, courtship, marriage, sickness, travelling, speculations, gaming, sports, pregnancy, lawsuits, [and] legacies'.[81]

Finally, if provincial papers were often reluctant to promote cases of 'superstition' in their own locality, they were more than happy to report on such occurrences from almost anywhere else, especially remote areas of rural England and Scotland.[82] Magic and ghost beliefs were usually somewhere 'other' but the underlying and probably unintentional conclusion readers would derive from this was that such ideas were both persistent and fairly ubiquitous. This obviously included urban examples. With seemingly prophetic powers of his own, a journalist for the *Manchester Times* wrote, 'The cases [of witchcraft] which … are called extraordinary, are but the occasional bubbles which rise to the surface and indicate what is passing in the undercurrent of society. The historian who undertakes to write the social history of the latter half of the nineteenth century, will learn from [daily newspapers] that witchcraft was an article of popular faith in the British metropolis in 1858.'[83] Like urban police forces, newspapers' periodic campaigns to promote an awareness of fraudulent fortune-tellers and astrologers distorted perceptions of magical practices. The publication of one incident

Southampton. For a printed request for the un-bewitching services of a gentleman 'in the neighbourhood of Manchester' who had claimed he could heal a man whose illness had supposedly been induced by 'an evil-minded person' see *Manchester Guardian*, 28 July 1832.

[81] *Manchester Times*, 2 November 1850. By the late 1880s and 1890s newspapers were increasingly printing information about magical practices in the past tense. See for example *Hampshire Telegraph*, 27 August 1887, 29 April 1893, 2 November 1895, and 23 June 1900.

[82] For more on the importance of nineteenth-century regional newspapers and the reporting of witchcraft cases see Davies 'Newspapers and the Popular Belief in Witchcraft', p. 144. For examples in the *Manchester Times* see 19 October 1850 (Somerset), 3 May 1851 (Norfolk), and 7 January 1852 (Scottish Highlands). For examples in the *Hampshire Telegraph* see 27 November 1880 (Devon), and 18 February 1888 (Somerset, Cornwall, the Scottish Highlands).

[83] *Manchester Times*, 11 September 1858. For other urban cases see *Hampshire Telegraph*, 4 January 1845 (London), and 11 September 1858 (Stepney, London), *Manchester Times*, 2 October 1858 (London), 26 March 1859 (Durham), 22 February 1862 (London), 12 March 1864 (Chelmsford), and 3 February 1883 (Birmingham). In the 1860s the *Birmingham Daily Post* suggested witchcraft beliefs remained strong in Birmingham, Warwick, Stratford-upon-Avon, and other towns in the Midlands. Waters has suggested that only in London 'was witchcraft seldom invoked as an explanation for misfortunes' though he offers no explanation for this exception. See Waters, 'Belief in Witchcraft', pp. 115–16.

of 'witchcraft' or fortune-telling tended to encourage the reporting of others, generating artificial spikes in reports when there was little to suggest an actual increase in such practices in real terms.[84] At the same time the press promotion of witchcraft cases arguably meant local communities no longer needed to produce their own 'witch' figure to maintain the possibility of belief. While this may have resulted in a sense of witches becoming more remote, with people gradually losing, if not their fear of the reality of witches, at least their fear of necessarily having one as a neighbour, newspapers continually sustained the idea in the popular imagination.

Folklorists

If education and the press represented conflicted means of disseminating an ideological modernity, then folklorists appear to represent the best example of its conflicted agents. The relationship between predominantly lower-class informants and better-educated recorders was a complex one, a contested site of struggle over authorial ownership, a mental dance encompassing attempted acquisitions and evasions. For their part, folklorists demonstrated an antinomial dynamic of inquisitiveness and rejection, both desiring to record information indicative of 'traditional' magical mentalities, while also demonstrating contempt or incredulity at the information documented.[85] In response storytellers often employed a range of evasive narrative techniques, indicative of a tension between a need to outwardly acknowledge rational 'norms' while maintaining personal beliefs in the supernatural.

Many nineteenth-century folklorists implicitly promoted an ideological emphasis on a temporal divide by claiming that their inquisitiveness arose from their desire to gather some record of a rapidly disappearing world, under threat from technological innovations and modern urban growth which was increasingly distancing their experiences from the past. In 1883 the editor of *Hampshire Notes and Queries* felt that 'traditions' that had been orally transmitted across generations of lower-class town and village dwellers 'are gradually becoming lost' due to contemporary trends towards urban migration.[86] These assertions were not new. Antiquarians such as John Aubrey had been

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[84] *Manchester Times*, 2 October 1858.
[85] For a good example of this contradictory attitude see Axon, *Folk Songs*, p. 90. See also R. M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (University of Chicago Press, 1968).
[86] *Hampshire Notes and Queries*, vol. 1 (1883), p. 3, and also vol. 3 (1887), p. 21.

voicing similar concerns since the late seventeenth century, accusing the printing press of having 'frightened away Robin-good-fellowe and the Fayries' and 'putt all the old Fables out of dores'.[87]

This inquisitiveness was also prompted by the fact that Folklore, as an emerging social science, aspired towards more scientific methodologies than previous antiquarianism. Part of this involved the meticulous gathering of 'empirical' data via oral testimonies from which to formulate theories and deduce conclusions. This sense of scientific rigour was usually sincere, but it was also self-serving. Whilst aiding the construction of folklore as a credible scholarly discipline, its 'scientific' approach appeared to suggest verifiable 'proof' for pre-existing prejudices relating to social, cultural, and intellectual hierarchies between different classes.[88] Such views constructed a socio-cultural distance between informants and recorders (and, by extension, their intended audience). The recorder tended to be socially, culturally and, often, geographically external to the oral culture they were recording, making them many times removed from the context in which such ideas and accounts originally thrived. Folklorists' engagement with supernatural beliefs typically assumed a simultaneous movement from the urban to the rural, and down through the social stratum. John Houseman, writing an account of Middleton, Manchester in 1890, suggested that to truly gain information one 'must not be content with surveying men in the lower walks of life from his own more lofty station'. To discover their genuine beliefs one had to 'descend' amongst them, 'mingle with them in everything, and act as one of their own body'.[89]

Folklorists' repulsion likewise arose from several converging factors. Firstly, there was a contemporary distrust of oral cultures based on what R. J. Gales called in 1914 'the preposterous delusion that the sole fount of authenticity and veracity is print'.[90] Secondly there was disdain for the supernatural subject matter that such a culture supposedly maintained, with many folklorists expressing frustration or dismay at the tenacity of such ethnographic beliefs.[91] Folkloric collections only seemed to reiterate the fact that a supposedly 'traditional' world was not passing as fast as folklorists claimed. Yet presumably if informants had

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[87] Wood, 'The Pedlar of Swaffham', p. 184.
[88] See O'Giollain, *Locating Irish Folklore*, p. 50.
[89] *News Cuttings* (MLA ref. 942.72.M6), p. 39.
[90] Gales, *Vanished Country Folk*, p. 51.
[91] Charles Roper's article demonstrates how the sceptical bias of recorders could skew the accuracy of their accounts. See Roper, 'On Witchcraft Superstition', p. 797, and *Eastern Daily Press*, 13 October 1891, to compare accounts of a fortune-telling case before the Swaffham Petty Sessions in October 1891.

presented folklorists with tales of ghosts explained in terms of optical delusions or psychical phenomena then it would have been simultaneously more acceptable and also cause for lament that 'traditional' views had become extinct.

This contradictory dynamic was clearly demonstrated by Reverend Gunn, a Norfolk clergyman in the parish of Irstead. When submitting his article to *Norfolk Archaeology* in 1849, based on an account of popular local superstitions from Mrs Lubbock, one of his parishioners, he highlighted that it was 'only the dicta of an old washerwoman' and that he hoped it would amuse the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society. Gunn clearly had his audience's potential reaction in mind and his comment can be read as a pre-emptive attempt to protect himself from ridicule by starting his article in this manner. At the same time he was obviously attracted by what he perceived as Mrs Lubbock's authenticity, trying to commit her comments to writing 'as they fell from her mouth, as nearly as possible in her own racy language'.[92] In doing so Gunn felt himself to be traversing a socio-cultural divide, one reinforced by its own speech idioms and mentalities which rendered him an outsider. While presenting the article to its educated audience with a tone of condescension, he could not help but reveal an inherent respect toward Mrs Lubbock, representing her as a good source of information, admiring her intellect despite her lack of education, claiming 'her memory and imagination have been exercised the more on that account'.[93] This stands in stark contrast to more familiar depictions of ignorant rural dwellers. He closed the article by firstly dismissing Mrs Lubbock's 'trifling' remarks as 'unworthy of a place in the Transactions of the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society', but then concludes that her supernatural beliefs were 'as much within the province of philosophical inquiry as the deductions of exact science'. Clearly then, Gunn's relationship to his source was not a detached exercise.[94] It sprung neither wholly from an altruistic desire to record information for its own sake nor to simply ridicule its believers.

Whatever their aspirations towards detached, empirical approaches, the chronicling of supernatural 'folk' beliefs was a powerful ideological tool through which folklorists promoted, and their predominantly educated readership consumed biases, stereotypes, and assumptions. As indicated by Gunn, readers' responses were guided in this by authorial

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[92] Gunn, 'Proverbs, Adages and Popular Superstitions', p. 292.
[93] *Ibid.*, p. 294 and p. 293.
[94] *Ibid.*, p. 308. For an example of a Norfolk antiquarian transgressing the boundary of recorder to actually involve himself in 'conflict' with a local witch see Taylor, 'Norfolk Folklore', pp. 132–33.

expressions of mockery and dismay which helped formulate and reinforce the 'acceptable' view on such matters. In an 1893 article on Norfolk witchcraft Charles Roper prepared his 'incredulous readers' for his revelations, telegraphing their expected response to his supposed revelation as to 'how utterly out of reckoning those people are who think that Hodge has risen superior to ignorance and superstition'.[95] This tone was typical of nineteenth-century folklorists who littered their works with loaded terms such as 'folk', 'peasant', 'rustic', 'Hodge', and 'yokel'. In this way folklorists implicitly and sometimes explicitly constructed and maintained clusters of ideological dichotomies that proved mutually reinforcing. On the one hand was the oral, rural, uneducated, plebeian, traditional, supernatural 'other'; on the other the literate, urban, educated, bourgeois, modern, rational 'self'. These obviously bore little direct relation to the complexity of contemporary realities but their simplicity was both the appeal and point of such formulations, helping readers gain a sense of their component cultural definitions, appreciating who they were by knowing who they were not.[96] In doing so the idea of modernity, and particularly urbanisation as corrosive to supernatural beliefs, developed its own familiar narrative, becoming a form of progressive folklore that was to be absorbed and believed by its educated audience.

Whether it was ideological expediency or merely that the attitude became lost in translation between spoken and written accounts, there was a manipulative element to this formulation of a folk 'other'. This derived in part from the transition from what Lauri Honko has called 'the first life of folklore', where it is an imperceptible part of the local community and there is no concept of folklore as folklore, to the 'second life of folklore', where communal folklore is given a self-consciousness by 'external discoverers', changing the way the local community perceives its own culture while simultaneously being used by those discoverers in a different context.[97] Not all the supernatural beliefs recorded by folklorists would have been treated with the solemnity that they subsequently subscribed to them. Given the sheer quantity of folkloric works which promote such a view one has to remain mindful of the fact that the persuasive idea of communal unanimity that recorders sought to encourage through their portrayal of supernatural folk beliefs was undoubtedly shot through with conflicting voices of scepticism and disbelief. Local ghost stories could be told as leg-pulling entertainment,

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[95] Roper, 'On Witchcraft Superstition', pp. 793–94.
[96] See Boyes, *The Imagined Village*, p. ix, and Wood, *Politics of Social Conflict*, pp. 196–97.
[97] See O'Giollain, *Locating Irish Folklore*, p. 174.

to make fun of individuals or occupations or, indeed, of a propensity towards superstition, but folklorists' construction of an imaginary folk 'other' tended to occlude the diverse spectrum of local intentions, moods, and applications in which supernatural tropes were transmitted and received within communal cultures.[98]

When recorders sought access into the popular magical imagination they frequently found their informants to be far from naïve, passive vessels of information. While informants like Mrs Lubbock may have been fairly garrulous and happy to share their supernatural folklore many others showed themselves cannily aware of the sceptical context in which the knowledge they imparted would be disseminated by recorders. In response informers employed a range of narrative strategies to protect themselves from direct admissions of belief, granting themselves caveats in which their magical mentalities could be sustained. The most basic technique was simple reluctance on the part of some informants to speak. Collecting supernatural stories that had not been previously recorded in print and were mostly garnered 'from the lips of entirely illiterate people' (this more a qualifier of their authenticity than a means of social distancing), M. H. James noted that when the storytellers became aware that the tales were to be published, 'they became silent know-noughts, or else deliberately refused to tell any more tales, though previously they had revelled in finding an attentive listener'. This suggests a preference for the oral transmission of tales as their 'natural' vehicle for dissemination, and concerns that a printed story would uproot it from the oral culture in which it had circulated and expose personal supernatural beliefs to the ridicule of anonymous readers. Some of James' storytellers even declared, 'It was not lucky to print such tales; "they" did not like to have it done.' 'They', according to James, were the stories' phantoms. This concern for angering the ghosts indicates that they were not perceived as remote story characters but a constant and very real presence that would be aware of their transition from an oral account to a literary tale. Demonstrating an awareness of what educated opinions on such matters were, the formerly gregarious storyteller told James, 'That's all a pack o' nonsense …You don't want to hear all that rubbish; you don't believe a word of it.' Despite this show of rejection, James sensed these storytellers still believed in the truth of their accounts.[99]

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[98] Working-class radicals were often disapproving of the way popular 'superstitions' were misrepresented as facts in literary accounts. See Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 21.

[99] See James, *Bogie Tales*, p. v and vi. To accommodate this hesitancy some recorders blanked out names of people and places, protecting the innocent and concealing the supernatural. This literary trick suggests recorders could be complicit in maintaining a tale's mystique. For examples see James, *Bogie Tales*.

Others, especially rural labourers, often avoided an overt stance on the beliefs arising from their testimony.[100] When Charles Roper eventually guided a Norfolk tenant farmer onto the topic of witchcraft his response was typically guarded, stating, 'As for witches, I aren't a-going to say for certain, 'cause I don't know; but the Bible tells us about 'em, and we ought to believe that.' Abstaining from certain commitment to his beliefs by projecting the issue into an imaginary future, he added, 'If I had to vote one way or t'other, I should vote on witchcraft.'[101] This tactic avoided a statement of belief in explicit examples while enabling the maintenance of faith in the potential of witchcraft's existence. When collecting folklore from Moston, near Manchester, Charles Roeder encountered a similar taciturn quality among his informants, who would only 'confide to the privileged' their knowledge of local beliefs and customs. Informants were naturally reluctant to share their communal beliefs with recorders who were perceived (and who usually perceived themselves) as 'above' and 'outside' the milieu they sought to investigate, and Roeder had to befriend the elderly Thomas Lancashire before he would 'pour forth his youthful reminiscences of folk-lore'.[102]

Another avoidance tactic which prevented informants from being pinned down with regard to their supernatural beliefs was to relocate genuine belief back to an earlier period, effectively endorsing folklorists' assertions that the modern world had eroded such ideas. Citing the incident as having happened in the past, usually by situating the story as having happened to an informant's father or 'someone else's father', storytellers were able to create a temporal gap that allowed them the possibility of expressing a different view in the present. Walton Dew also noted that the Norfolk 'yokel' would not entertain any cross-questioning during his account, suggestive of yet another way in which informants strived to maintain some control over the narrative and its exposition.[103] An additional distancing narrative tactic was to reconstruct the account through an imaginary conversation. The frequent use of 'I said to him' took the immediacy out of the statement by directing it towards a third party who was not present, reducing the force of any comment (and

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[100] See Evans, *Where Beards Wag All*, pp. 179–81.
[101] Roper, 'On Witchcraft Superstition', pp. 792–93. Roper's literary attempts to give an impression of the farmer's colloquial speech patterns provided another common way of reinforcing a sense of social difference between recorder and informant.
[102] Roeder, 'Some Moston Folk-lore', pp. 65–66. Roeder's article was largely based on 'a lively correspondence' with Thomas Lancashire, and derived from his 'bulky letters'. As such, Lancashire had already translated some of this body of local folklore into written form before Roeder subsequently used it for his article.
[103] Dew, *Dyshe of Norfolk Dumplings*, p. 8. See also R. Bauman, *Story, Performance and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

commitment) made. This is not to suggest such efforts were explicitly oppositional.

Despite the muted struggle between recorders' probing and their informants' counter-feigns the power dynamics of this relationship favoured the former over the latter. While informants may have given guarded responses, the manner in which their words and, more importantly, their beliefs reached a wider audience was determined by the writer's agenda, for the authority granted to print culture by readers meant storytellers could do little to prevent their manipulation or exploitation. Written folkloric collections largely excluded the poor and less literate from a site in which the educated could construct perceptions of themselves and others, the 'modern' present and the 'traditional' past. The acquisition of supernatural folklore into literary form allowed the writer to trump the authority of oral tradition and stamp their interpretation upon a tale, the written word granting an illusion of it having become immutable.[104] In relating accounts of supernatural beliefs informants often found themselves transformed into literary 'characters' whom the recorder, also present as a reliable narrator, interacted with. This further distanced them from reality, their literary portrayal usually conforming to stereotypically ignorant rustics. As their oral accounts passed into the literary realm, their words often presented in a mangled impersonation of dialect, informants became fictionalised ghosts whose tales, whether accurate or not, could only be relayed through the author acting as spirit medium.

That said, while folklorists could control the manner in which popular supernatural beliefs were presented, informants' narrative manoeuvres could leave recorders with a discomforting sense of duality between what was said and what was believed. S. S. Madders expressed such a view in 1853 when she claimed people in Norwich continued to secretly consult the city's cunning folk even though they 'would shrink from openly acknowledging faith in their revelations or predictions'.[105] Another author believed that while people had become mute about their beliefs in witchcraft, 'when the doors are closed and the lamps are low and no stranger is present in the family circle gathered round the fire, then will it raise up its dark head through the thin skin of modern civilisation'.[106] This self-censorship could be read as indicative of the internalising of what was and was not acceptable in a 'modern' age,

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[104] Printed 'folklore' was not necessarily any more reliable than oral narratives. John Roby's *Traditions of Lancashire* (1831) clearly blended regional folklore with the author's aspirations towards writing fiction.
[105] Madders, *Rambles in an Old City*, p. 285.
[106] NRO ref. HMN 6/216. See also Dew, *Dyshe of Norfolke Dumplings*, p. 27.

but such comments hint at a concern that there was a virile but hidden world of belief among the lower classes from which the better educated were excluded or with which they had lost touch. This tenacious body of beliefs did not simply represent difference or backwardness; it suggested an alternative epistemological understanding of the world.[107] Useful in formulating social, temporal and, in its rural emphasis, geographical divides, folkloric investigations magnified the spectre of the superstitious 'other', its unfathomed depths laying beyond the awareness and certainly the manipulation of those seeking to encourage consensus for the idea of a progressive modernity. Such a situation left a seemingly unanswerable question: just how deeply had belief in a rational ideological modernity sunk its roots into nineteenth-century plebeian society? Folklorists' endeavours were ultimately founded on seemingly incompatible antinomies that presented a worldview that was paradoxically eroding and persisting, being both nostalgically remote and threateningly present.

As seen with educators and journalists, the folklorist-informant relationship reiterates the fact that efforts to foster a cultural hegemonic consensus around a progressive ideological modernity were not simply a 'top down' imposition but a contested site of ongoing negotiation. Notions of rationalism and science may have limited or co-opted alternative possibilities such as the magical but rather than positive support for an ideological modernity this merely discouraged other avenues of thought. As Antonio Gramsci argued in *Observations on Folklore*, folklore offered tacit resistance to more 'official' conceptions of the world, requiring progressive agents to uproot and replace it with 'superior' conceptions.[108] This did not mean a crudely entrenched clash between oppressors and oppressed nor the competing sledgehammer blows of seemingly incompatible epistemologies. As Andy Wood has recently put it, hegemony requires, in part, 'the constant, though partial, incorporation of counterhegemony' rather than its complete destruction. It was the ongoing 'play of subordinations and resistance' indicated above which encouraged 'passive consent to the hegemonic order'.[109] Just as religion was an intrinsic part of secularisation's self-definition so magic can be seen as part of modernity's, though in both situations the 'other' was not being so much rejected as incorporated.[110] In such

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[107] O'Giollain, *Locating Irish Folklore*, p. 165.
[108] Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology*, pp. 106 and 109.
[109] See Wood, 'The Pedlar of Swaffham', pp. 168–69. See also T. J. Jackson Lears, 'The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities', *American Historical Review*, vol. 90 (1985), pp. 567–93.
[110] See Viswanathan, 'Secularism', pp. 471–76.

circumstances it was important that the spectre of magical thinking remained present in the nineteenth century, even if it dressed itself in more 'modern', pseudo-scientific attire. There is certainly evidence to suggest the middle classes' complicity in the perceived perpetuation of the plebeian magical imagination. In the light of contemporary events in revolutionary France, in 1795 M. J. Naylor preached that supernatural beliefs 'awe the ignorant, and frighten them into their duty' and the swift eradication of such ideas would 'entirely deprive them of this restraint'. As such he advocated the ending of supernatural beliefs by what he termed 'gradual culture'.[111] In Portsmouth in 1822 Reverend Russell Scott had roundly condemned those who did not genuinely believe in the Devil themselves but who felt he was vital for keeping the lower classes under control.[112] Both accounts indicate how certain members of the middle classes were not above sustaining supernatural tropes to ensure the stability of their 'modern' society.

The bourgeois magical imagination

The falsity of a magic/modernity dichotomy, especially one roughly equated to plebeian/patrician divides, was most clearly exposed by those amongst the middle class who engaged with contemporary aspects of the magical imagination. This bourgeois magical imagination, only intermittently alluded to so far, has received far greater historiographical attention than the plebeian dimensions that are central to this study, to the point where Victorian expressions of the magical imagination tend to be readily equated with middle-class spiritualists, mesmerists, psychical researchers, and occultist societies.[113] Rather than seeking to reiterate this skewed view these activities are used here to illustrate the conflicted, antinomial nature of bourgeois engagement with the supernatural in this period.[114]

This intra-class discord was clearly evident between respectable seekers, believers, and sceptics. A night of table-turning experiments at Manchester's Athenaeum on 2 June 1853 was very much an elitist affair. The experiment was chaired by Reverend H. H. Jones, the

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[111] Naylor, *Inanity and Mischief*, pp. 94–95.
[112] Scott, *An Analytical Investigation*, p. 612.
[113] For a summary of the rich secondary literature on middle-class engagement with 'modern' expressions of magic and occultism see note 5 in the Introduction.
[114] This intra-class divide was also evident in contemporary discourses on modern urbanisation which expressed seemingly contradictory responses of awe and repulsion. See Gunn, *Public Culture*, p. 36, Sweet, *The English Town*, pp. 220–24 and 227–28, Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, pp. 96–97, Punter, *Literature of Terror*, pp. 159–61, and Tropp, *Images of Fear*, pp. 74–87.

Manchester Corporation's astronomer, and he was aided by a committee of six other men including a surgeon and Dr James Braid, a Manchester doctor known for his investigations into hypnotism. Noting the public interest the phenomena had roused, Jones roundly dismissed the theory that it was some form of hoax on the grounds that 'too many respectable and intelligent persons were ready to vouch for the facts' and such people, certainly in such numbers, would not participate in such a rouse. Bourgeois respectability seemed sufficient in itself to dismiss such claims whilst also granting the phenomenon credibility. The participants, a 'large company of ladies and gentlemen', then took their seats at seven tables of varying size and weights. Four tables were eventually sent rotating through no detectable means of volition. Dr James Braid claimed the motion was produced by 'a very remarkable psychological or physiological phenomenon' whereby the focused mind unconsciously acted 'upon the muscular system' with 'a prodigious power'. Declaring he had entered into the experiment without prejudice, Jones seems to have accepted Braid's interpretation. It had the twin benefits of lacking 'any occult quality' whilst not challenging Newtonian laws of matter and motion by having to lay claim to a 'new and mysterious force' like that alluded to by mesmerists. Braid confidently concluded, 'if the reciprocal action of mind upon matter, and matter upon mind, were considered, a key would be obtained to the solution of the whole mystery'. Yet Braid's statement, while alluding to much actually explained very little and it is interesting to note that even after Jones and his committee had left one table of men were still earnestly discussing what they had experienced. Unconvinced by Braid's explanation of 'unconscious muscular action' some fervently continued to claim 'the table had moved without any even unconscious assistance from them'. Despite all bearing witness to the same phenomena, there was no singularly conclusive position adopted by those present.[115]

As indicated in this event, middle-class interaction with the magical imagination was largely facilitated through an interpretive paradigm shift that altered the terms of engagement. People did not stop seeing ghosts or witnessing evidence of spirit manifestations but explanations changed from an ethnographic or folkloric interpretation to a more acceptable psychical or 'scientific' discourse. This attempt to transfer 'magical' beliefs and practices from a popular to a more elite context was clearly evident in Harriet Martineau's attempt in 1845 to argue that mesmerism's credibility as a medical practice was damaged by itinerant performers who exploited it as form of popular entertainment

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[115] 'Table turning at the Athenaeum', *Manchester Times*, 4 June 1853.

for '[s]chool children, apprentices, thoughtless women ... and base men'. By addressing her series of letters to the *Athenaeum* she blatantly attempted to conduct the debate above the heads of the working classes. As Martineau openly stated, '*The Athenaeum* is not likely to reach the ignorant classes of our towns; and if it did, the [medical] cases I have related would be less striking to them than numbers they have learned by the means of itinerant Mesmerists. *The Athenaeum* does reach large numbers of educated and professional men; and I trust some of them may possibly be aroused to consideration of the part it behoves them to take.'[116] A letter to the editor of the *Manchester Times* in 1852 similarly argued that mesmerism was 'too powerful an agency to be trifled with ... by those who are ignorant of the proper mode of managing such a power' though it was to be considered 'perfectly safe' when employed by middle-class doctors.[117] The principles and practices were essentially the same but the difference in context and application potentially enabled its appropriation as an aspect of modern, progressive medicine.

In a similar vein Srdjan Smajic has suggested that the development of apparition theories in the first half of the nineteenth century arose as a result of ghost beliefs being viewed as 'more widespread than belief in ... demons or witches'.[118] They certainly seemed to transcend perceived social divides more freely than magical ideas. Whether it was through a local folktale delivered in the pub or a séance held in the respectable surrounds of the bourgeois drawing room, ghosts were still evoked and invoked up and down the length of the social hierarchy in the nineteenth century. Indicative of their relative acceptance compared with witchcraft beliefs, when the learned antiquarian Walter Rye described the 'Grey Lady of Raynham' as 'the Norfolk ghost story par excellence', he could openly admit, 'It is a pity to have to disbelieve the story.'[119] However, if it was hoped that by banishing ghosts and spirit manifestations through psychological or physiological explanations that a major stanchion within the magical imagination would be removed such efforts were undermined from the 1850s by the broad inter-class popularity of spiritualism. Between learned discourses on apparitions and

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[116] Martineau, *Letters on Mesmerism*, pp. 49 and 62.
[117] *Manchester Times*, 23 June 1852. See also Winter, *Mesmerized*, and A. Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1994).
[118] For more on bourgeois engagement with spiritualism see Melechi, *Servants of the Supernatural*, pp. 179–206, P. Lamont, 'Spiritualism and a mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 47 (2004), pp. 897–920, Owen, *Darkened Room*, and Smajic, Ghost-Seers, p. 30.
[119] Rye, *Songs, Stories and Sayings*, pp. 59–60. See also Forby, *Vocabulary of East Anglia*, vol. 2, p. 411, and Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic*, pp. 13–16.

the proliferation of spiritualist séances ghosts became 'the most culturally pervasive and ontologically unstable of all supernatural figures' in this period.[120] Worse yet, those learned discourses seemed incapable of explaining away the supernatural. As seen in the last chapter, the inability to offer a consensual theory about the nature of apparitions only served to undermine the supposed objectivity to which various theorists laid claim.

This potential for discord meant the various missionaries of modernity considered in this chapter were not seamlessly interlocking forces. While sharing instincts towards modern progress their interpretation of what that might entail could lead to wildly conflicting narratives and stances. In 1850 the physician Robert Hull penned a pamphlet to rebuke Reverend Dr Maitland's seeming support for the idea of clairvoyance and mesmerism. He stated that physicians 'deny the facts' but 'the theologians must decide, if *they* admit the facts, whether, being supernatural, [acts of clairvoyance] are illustrations of evil or holy agency'. With reference to mesmerism, Hull concluded that 'Every friend of the church of England, and every respecter of orthodox dissent must view with terror their divines coquetting with the agents of this (it has been called black) art.'[121]

These middle-class antinomies were evident in the efforts of and responses to the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) which was founded in 1882. Consisting of highly respectable scientific scholars, its stated aims of objectively exploring the validity of ghosts and psychic phenomena were thwarted by what Shane McCorristine has recently called 'the spiritual impulses' of the investigators.[122] While this was indicative of antinomial tensions that existed within the Society, some middle-class critics were quick to attack the whole endeavour. A leader comment in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1882 lamented that Western society, having escaped from a supernatural worldview through disciplined adherence to scientific explanations, was now threatened with 'relapse' into those previous mentalities, encouraged by psychical researchers who 'still cherish an evident hankering after the visibly supernatural'. Regardless of their scientific aims or reinterpretations, the 'supernatural' phenomena they were examining was to be treated as a toxic

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[120] Smajic, *Ghost-Seers*, p. 31.
[121] See Hull, *Clairvoyance and the Clergy*, p. 6 and 16, and also Rev. S. R. Maitland, *Illustrations and Enquiries Relating to Mesmerism* (London, William Stephenson, 1849).
[122] See McCorristine, *Spectres*, p. 23. For more on the SPR see McCorristine, *Spectres*, pp. 103–217, Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, pp. 36–91, Thurschwell, *Literature*, pp. 12–36, and Ledger and Luckhurst (eds.), *The Fin de Siècle*, pp. 271–75.

contaminant liable to encourage 'dangerous trains of thought' amongst 'the ablest and most scientific observers'.[123]

Differences also arose from the fact that educated opinion on magic's more 'modern' formulations such as mesmerism, spiritualism, and thought transference were informed by conflicting views of modernity itself. While many were ready to condemn such beliefs and practices as deluded or irrational, others sought to incorporate them into a more optimistic vision of the future. By appropriating hypnotism and clairvoyance into the realm of science what had mistakenly been viewed as supernatural could now be reconceived as inherent (and thereby natural) untapped mental capacities which held the promise of evolutionary progress. As the *Manchester Times* put it in 1864, scientific investigations had revealed 'forces before undreamt of working throughout nature … and to the medieval stories of magic, witchcraft, or the miracles of saints we are thus placed in a new relation'.[124] The magical imagination was not anathema to ideological notions of progressive modernity; indeed, its reformulated (pseudo-)scientification retained the phenomena whilst maintaining a sense of rupture and progress from former, ethnographic formulations of magic. Therefore the extent of one's investment in a magic-modernity dichotomy was conditional upon one's interpretive position of what was understood by both 'magic' and 'modernity'.

A progressive modernity need not necessarily be interpreted as a disenchanted one. There were certainly those among the educated elite who questioned western modernity's materialistic and secularising trends which left it with an inability to imagine larger realities beyond the diminutive scope of the human senses.[125] Gauri Viswanathan has argued that 'secular culture provides a vital impetus to alternative knowledge systems that contest received doctrine without necessarily endorsing scientific materialism'.[126] Though this can arguably apply to the plebeian magical imagination perhaps the best examples of these 'alternative knowledge systems' were the vogue for Theosophy from the 1870s and elite occultist societies such as the Hermetic Order of

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[123] 'Psychical Research', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 October 1882.

[124] 'The Influence of Science in Modifying Ideas relating to the Marvellous', *Manchester Times*, 27 February 1864. See also *The Norfolk and Norwich Monitor*, 1 September 1843. For the natural/supernatural debate see Noakes, 'Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural', pp. 23–43.

[125] For a clear rebut to mid nineteenth-century scientific positivism as a narrowing of one's interpretation of the world see Catherine Crowe, *The Night-Side of Nature; or, Ghosts and Ghost-Seers* (1848). See also Smajic, *Ghost-Seers*, pp. 38–40.

[126] Viswanathan, 'Secularism', p. 471.

the Golden Dawn in the 1890s.[127] As Alex Owen convincingly demonstrates, occultism was linked to both avant-garde sciences such as psychiatry and psychoanalysis and to a contemporary search for the numinous, blending secular rationality with dimension-spanning mysticism to bring about 'a rationalized understanding of the irrational'.[128] At a fundamental level late nineteenth-century occultism shared the plebeian magic imagination's 'will to both know and control the natural world'.[129] However, its drawing upon various hermetical traditions of elite magic and wisdom, its incorporation of progressive psychiatric influences from the fin de siècle, and its embodying of values of self-improvement and self-mastery which chimed with contemporary bourgeois individualism, all ensured it was sufficiently modern as to avoid being tarred with the same brush as plebeian magic. As such it was an elitist engagement with magic but one which observed rhetorical divisions between 'traditional' ethnographic magical practices and a 'progressive' psychologised occultism.

Conclusion

Modernity, particularly as expressed in the form of urbanisation, has been associated with the fragmentation of relations, traditions, and identities. This chapter has suggested that this fragmentation was not solely a product of chance and the urban experience itself but an ideological assertion that emphasised certain social divisions and temporal breaks. As a learned discourse aspects of the magical imagination may have helped construct a satisfyingly simplistic worldview but it proved a highly problematic tool. The efforts of journalists and clergymen to dispel people's magical beliefs risked perpetuating them, giving such ideas at least a hint of credence by deeming to write about or preach against them so vociferously. William Jones' declaration that 'it is only by exposing fallacies that we can hope for their extinction' seems to have repeatedly backfired.[130] These more blatant efforts may have sufficiently succeeded in driving popular beliefs inwards, to the privacy of the home and the individual mind, but in so doing the extent of their

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[127] For more on theosophy see N. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 21–28, J. Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (State University of New York Press, 1994), P. Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: Theosophy and the Emergence of the Western Guru* (London, Secker and Warburg, 1993), and H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Masterkey to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (New York, J. W. Bouton, 1877).
[128] Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, p. 257.
[129] *Ibid*., p. 14.   [130] Jones, *Credulities*, p. xi.

continuation became unknown and that doubt perpetually gnawed at the roots of the idea of 'modernity' that its advocates sought to plant.

Modernisers' suggestion that it was the magical imagination that threatened to destabilise the 'modern' was itself a piece of ideological legerdemain, for it was the 'modern' which was the new, intrusive element. In their progressive discourse the bugbear of 'superstition' was granted the power to haunt and potentially retard a 'modernity' that was already established, which it was not. Compared with the evolutionary transformations of magical mentalities, modernisers spoke of a more forceful and, if needs be, forced *march* of intellect, talking up an ineluctable modernity that was forever on the verge of arriving. For those who argued it had arrived there was the problem that it appeared weak and anaemic, too texturally thin to be convincingly irrefutable. Instead, the idea of modernity required continuous reinvention and reassertion.

Ultimately magic's construction as modernity's 'other' seemed to be aimed less at the lower orders than at the middle classes themselves. Rather than seeking a broad consensual view for their vision of modernity this was firstly a horizontal discourse through which the educated elite attempted to convince themselves of where the normative boundaries of the modern self lay. Their perception and, through folklorists, construction of ethnographic supernatural beliefs helped provide some crude sense of parameters, a dark reflection against which the middle classes could define *their* modernity as urban, literate, rational, and forward-looking. Yet these boundaries were contested from within the middle classes as much as by the persistence of the plebeian magical imagination, by attendees at séances, the efforts of psychical researchers, and the clever play of elitist occultists who recategorised the 'magical' into unstable combinations of the psychical, the mystical, and the rational. In doing so they conflated pedestrian and ideological modernities in more explicit ways than one finds within the lower classes. For such individuals their engagement with 'magical' practices was firmly bound up in their conception of modernity as inherently 'progressive', albeit with varying and discordant understandings of what that word meant. Their magical imagination was not necessarily orientated towards adapting to the hardships of the urban experience (though spiritualism obviously offered the same comforts for the bereaved) but to more visionary concerns: yearnings to fathom untapped psychical abilities, to see mesmerism incorporated into progressive forms of medicine, and a desire to access astral dimensions or make contact with the numinous.

Therefore, despite the rhetorical dichotomies woven around plebeian magical beliefs, in reality the middle classes' own engagement

with magical thought and practices more often tended towards antinomial positions, the and/also of scepticism and belief, repulsion, and attraction. Rather than oppositions between magic and modernity one sees the educated elites employing new semantic terms and pseudo-scientific modes through which previously supernatural ideas could be approached and accommodated. Given this complicated relationship there was no detached 'outside' from which the popular magical imagination could be viewed for educated commentary was deeply invested with its own subjective agendas and contradictory tensions.

4   Urban orientation: the gendering of magical mentalities

On Saturday 10 January 1857 Clayton Chaffer, a balding, shabby, fifty-one-year-old cunning man from Dukinfield appeared at the County Sessions at Ashton-under-Lyne, Manchester. The court heard how he had promised Sarah Ann Tomlinson that he could make her supposedly adulterous husband into 'one of the best of husbands … without doing him the least harm', claiming 'he had done it to scores'. Her husband's faithfulness was not to come cheap, Chaffer offering to charm him for ten shillings. The charm he brought to her home in Oldham was a sealed piece of paper which she was to wear next to her heart. He gave Tomlinson some green leaves to put in her husband's tea, instructing that she was 'to burn his water in the fire, saying the Lord's Prayer and reading certain chapters in the Bible'. However, Tomlinson, apparently having fears (not doubts) about the use of magic to regain her husband's loyalty, did not do as Chaffer instructed and ultimately confessed all to her husband. Chaffer received three months' hard labour for his actions, the maximum sentence available for fraudulent claims to magical powers.[1]

   The reporting of this incident in the urban press nicely illustrates this chapter's focus on the way magic was used to construct (perceived) gender differences in nineteenth-century cities. In doing so it forms the starting point for the following three chapters' exploration of the ways in which the magical imagination was applied to a plebeian semiotic and social ordering of the urban world. While this chapter emphasises the orientation of the self through defining gendered and generational divides, subsequent chapters will examine more united expressions of urban communality, particularly its means of constructing bonds and boundaries. As seen in the previous chapter, at a discursive level this appears to evoke dichotomous interpretations of magic and modernity. Yet the argument underpinning these chapters is more reminiscent of the paradoxical tensions that inform antinomial approaches. Whilst the

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[1] *Ashton -under-Lyne Reporter*, Saturday 17 January 1857.

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magical imagination was a cultural resource that predated the 'modern', its broader socio-psychological applications served as an empowering means of orientation, adaptation, and protest to nineteenth-century city life, informing identities and expressing power relations between a range of dominant and subaltern groups.[2] Despite the emphasis on boundaries and even degrees of resistance to change, the underlying argument remains that this was not simply magic *versus* modernity but rather a way of accommodating such developments; in short, modernity *via* magic.

The most powerful legacy of histories 'from below' has been to decentralise the dominant narrative of white, bourgeois males as the agents of a monolithic modernity. Increasingly we have come to appreciate a plethora of modernities that were differently conceived and experienced. As we have already seen, this conceptual heterogeneity is not new, harking back to at least the nineteenth century itself. Modernity was never simply patriarchal, nor did men and women merely experience a singular modernity differently, an idea that crudely reworks notions of separate gendered spheres to an altered context. This gendered sphere paradigm has been increasingly discredited, perceived more as a bourgeois masculine ideological discourse that sought to manipulate women through cultural–spatial delineations than a historical reality.[3] For a lower-class family dependent on all potential wage-earners contributing something to its survival confining women to a domestic 'feminine' sphere was an unrealistic ideal that few could uphold even when it became a way

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[2] For the gendered context in which this chapter is situated see Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, T. Hitchcock and M. Cohen (eds.), *English Masculinities 1660–1800* (Harlow, Longman, 1999), and, more broadly, L. Abrams, *The Making of the Modern Woman: Europe 1789–1918* (London, Longman, 2002), and O. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe* (London, HarperCollins, 1995).

[3] For the middle-class origins and applications of the gendered spheres paradigm see Wahrman, '"Middle-Class" Domesticity goes Public', pp. 396–432, C. Hall, 'The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology' in R. Shoemaker and M. Vincent (eds.), *Gender and History in Western Europe* (London, Arnold, 1998), pp. 181–96, M. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680–1780* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996), and L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes – Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London, Hutchinson, 1987). For the porosity between 'public' and middle-class 'private' domains see E. Gordon and G. Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003). For further challenges to the concept see Abrams, 'The Unseamed Picture', Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, L. Klein, 'Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 29 (1995), pp. 92–109, and A. Vickery, 'Golden Ages to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of Women's History', *Historical Journal*, vol. 36 (1993), pp. 383–414.

of reformulating late nineteenth-century working-class respectability.[4] Street ballads may have promoted the home as a sanctuary from the bustle of the world outside but this cosy image was more fantasy than reality for most, one's privacy being compromised by densely built, over-populated lower-class housing and the attendant communal culture it encouraged in many late Georgian and early Victorian cities.[5] The domestic sphere periodically bore the direct brunt of high food prices and unemployment in the 'public' sphere, just as it benefited from eventual improvements in real wages and cheaper consumer goods. Nor with the rise of the nineteenth-century entertainment and consumer culture could the public sphere be realistically conceived as purely masculine.[6]

Rejecting the didactic formulation of gendered spheres, one still has to appreciate the existence of gendered culture in which urban magic was practically employed and ideologically contested. Compared with London, where women often assisted in their husbands' occupation, Manchester and Norwich's factories promoted a sharper gendered division. Despite Anne Clark's study of a more tolerant, cooperative gender culture in Lancashire's textile communities there seems considerable evidence to suggest separate gendered cultures among Manchester's nineteenth-century factory workers.[7] Male and female weavers may have potentially earned similar wages, but most of Manchester's female textile workers were not weavers and were generally employed in lower-paid, less-skilled tasks such as piecing and carding. Inside the mills' loom shops and weaving sheds female workers improvised their own

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[4] See J. Benson, *The Working Class in Britain: 1850–1939* (London, Tauris, 2003), and J. Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890–1960: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity* (London, Routledge, 1994).

[5] Ellis, *The Georgian Town*, p. 113. See also Harding, 'Space, Property, and Propriety in Urban England', pp. 549–69. For examples of 'domestic' ballads see Harland, *Ballads and Songs of Lancashire*, pp. 349–50.

[6] Despite these criticisms, the idea of gendered spheres has proved tenacious. Implicitly working within this model, even feminist historians' attempts to establish an assertive female presence in the public sphere have often served to reiterate reductive stereotypes, suggesting that if women were not confined to the home they were most likely engaged in prostitution, philanthropy, or shopping. See Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, pp. 263–321, Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, D. Williams Elliott, *The Angel Out of the Home: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England* (University of Virginia Press, 2002), E. Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton University Press, 2000), M. Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal – Women, the city and the department store' in M. Nava and A. O'Shea (eds.), *Modern Times – Reflections on a Century of English Modernity* (London, Routledge, 1996), pp. 38–46, J. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight – Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London, Virago, 1992), and E. Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London, Virago, 1991).

[7] See Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*.

system of sign language to communicate amidst the din of the factory and to circumvent rules against talking. There was an element of conscious subversion of male authority here, for via sign language female employees were known to hold 'long bawdy and derisive conversations across the floor of the mill', their managers being the 'objects of scurrilous and slanderous wit'.[8] This gendered divide informed life outside the factory. Writing about Manchester in 1849, the journalist Angus Reach recorded how watching the workers leave Mr Birley's factory 'it was curious to observe how each sex and age clung together. Boys kept with boys, men with men and the girls went gossiping and laughing by, in exclusive parties of their own.'[9]

Gendered divisions continued in leisure time. In Manchester in 1887 Walter Tomlinson recorded that beer was 'the great indoor recreation of the men' and as a result 'they are not out of doors in any great numbers'. Reversing expected notions of masculine public and feminine private space, while the men congregated inside drinking establishments Tomlinson noted how women gathered on their doorsteps and in the street in large numbers, engaging in 'a really downright good "cank," or general overhauling of the concerns of the neighbourhood'.[10] Critics voiced disapproval of factory operatives' wives 'gossiping away the best part of a forenoon' but this was to misread lower-class street culture, for this predominantly female activity formed and reinforced communal bonds that facilitated a sharing of scant resources in times of hardship.[11]

Nineteenth-century urban dwellers therefore possessed an innate sense of gendered cultural distinctions with regard to workplace and leisure activities, the street and the home. This chapter explores the ways magical beliefs and practices furthered the construction and locating of composite selves and others in the urban environment, informed in this case by gender and age. While magical beliefs were a means of conceiving an ideological 'other' to a rational masculine modernity,

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[8] Crosby, *Lancashire Dictionary of Dialect*, pp. 122–23.
[9] Ginswick (ed.), *Labour and the Poor*, p. 17.
[10] Tomlinson, *Bye-ways of Manchester Life*, pp. 65, 66–67. Female involvement in community affairs was believed to help make them more immune to modernity's supposed inclination towards social disintegration and suicide. See Kushner, 'Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity', pp. 461–90.
[11] Love, *Handbook of Manchester*, p. 101. See also p. 109. Urban female friendly societies existed, but were far less numerous than male organisations, with women less likely to have the money to spare on the monthly contribution. A government report of 3 March 1842 found Manchester possessed 219 Friendly Societies. See Love, *Handbook of Manchester*, p. 110. See also Gorsky, 'The Growth and Distribution of English Friendly Societies', pp. 489–511.

women engaged with them as a way of navigating the nineteenth-century urban experience, the latter indicative of an element of female agency, albeit one that was discursively compromised by the magical means it employed. As such, it furthers this study's concern with the gaps, overlaps and divergences between ideological rhetoric and historical experience.

Gendering practitioners and clients

There was a distinct gender (and an attendant class) boundary in contemporary perceptions of urban magical practitioners in the nineteenth century. An emergent inclination towards the professionalisation of magical practitioners tended to exclude women, the respectability of London's (predominantly male) astrologers contrasting sharply with depictions of female fortune-tellers who largely remained concealed in the backstreets of English cities. As Frank Ormerod observed in 1915, 'The wizard in the Bond Street region now wears a frock-coat and a fashionable tie, but one can still find around him the crystal, crucible, and other weird paraphernalia of a former day.'[12] Male practitioners tended to adopt the title of 'doctor' or 'professor', alluding to a more formal capacity and greater scholarly learning than female fortune-tellers, whose wisdom and authority was often encapsulated in the more homely title 'mother'. Reporting on the metropolitan police's efforts to crack down on London's fortune-tellers in June 1871, the *Manchester Examiner* recorded how they had made raids on 'several professors of the cabalistic art'. Amongst the 'gentlemen' arrested was Mr George Shepherd, better known from his promotional handbills as 'Professor Cicero', his residence being found to be 'fitted with all the symbols of his craft, in every branch of which he professed to be an adept'.[13] John Hartwell, the 'Birmingham Seer', adopted even grander self-proclaimed titles such as the 'Great Seer of England, philosopher, astrologer, grand master of the mysteries, and secret of the seals'. Additionally, and rather oddly, he was also known as 'Anna Ross, the Seeress of New York'.[14] However, these levels of affectation contrast sharply with the likes of Joseph Powell, a London fortune-teller of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries whose repeated appearances before London courts

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[12] Ormerod, *Lancashire Life and Character*, pp. 140–41. One finds parallels with the development of male midwifery. See L. Forman Cody, 'The Politics of Reproduction: From Midwives' Alternative Public Sphere to the Public Spectacle of Man-Midwifery', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 32 (1999), pp. 477–95.

[13] See Hardwick, *Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore*, pp. 119–20.

[14] See *Manchester Times*, 3 February 1883.

suggest a far shabbier and more desperate 'practice'.[15] Clearly class and social aspirations differentiated male practitioners from one another.

London may have been the centre of astrological practices in England but astrologers were to be found in towns and cities across the country. Manchester had at least one known male astrologer in the nineteenth century while Edgley, in nearby Stockton, had another called Mr Warren. Emphasising his scholarly credentials, Warren was described as being 'deeply versed in the mysteries of … Cornelius Agrippa, Friar Bacon, and others', this suggested learning enabling him to exert 'a wonderful amount of influence over the unlettered denizens of the world around him', gathering a chosen circle of students around him 'to witness his wonderful magic prowess'.[16] Stellarius, an astrologer in Bury in 1842, charged three shillings sixpence for information on a 'forthcoming destiny', a considerably higher consultancy fee than that levied by most female fortune-tellers.[17] This charge was a mark of male professionalism, bolstered through engagement with, or at least allusion to erudite learning rather than the more intuitive methods of female practitioners. It remains difficult to calculate how far female practitioners may have undercut male rivals, though the divergent fees suggest each catered to a differing client base in social terms, astrologers generally being beyond the funds of most lower-class patrons.

Female practitioners were presented in very different terms, particularly in contemporary journalism, at least until the end of the nineteenth century. In September 1858 the *Manchester Times* highlighted the predominantly urban nature of fortune-telling when it declared that 'recent criminal trials [in London] showed that witches … are by no means rare in urban quarters'. In Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester, and 'all other large towns, they weave their spells in courts and lanes, and thrive upon the credulity of ignorant girls'. These female practitioners were described as 'generally shrewd enough to baffle all attempts of the detective officer to get up a case against them' with the result that 'to convict a witch is not now so easy as in the days of Matthew Hopkins'.[18] Perpetuating the old association between women and witchcraft and blurring the distinction with fortune-telling, in 1885 it was observed that 'the modern witch does not now ride through the air on a broomstick to darksome orgies … she sits at home to receive the confidences

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[15] See Proceedings of the Old Bailey ref. t18141130–110, and also Perkins, 'The Trial of Joseph Powell, Fortune-teller'.

[16] See Clarke, *Life and Labours of Adam Clarke*, pp. 46–47, and *Cheshire Notes and Queries*, vol. 1, pp. 94–95.

[17] *Manchester Times*, 2 November 1850.

[18] *Manchester Times*, 11 September 1858.

of silly shop and servant girls … enrich[ing] her pocket by promising husbands, children, or fortune to those who will cross her hand with a "bit of silver"'.[19]

Given the relative poverty of many urban female fortune-tellers, the Victorian tendency to equate poverty with criminality and risks to public health was compounded by condemnatory associations with 'superstition'.[20] Although described as one of Portsmouth's 'oldest and best known' fortune-tellers in the 1890s, 'old Mother Cooly' lived in 'dark, dirty rooms' in a grimy, smoked-filled alley. An investigative journalist describe the room in which Mother Cooly conducted her practice as being sparsely furnished with 'a big rocking chair … one other seat, a table, a pack of filthy cards, a heap of … clothes, and the dirtiest bed that I ever saw'.[21] Attempting to locate Rosencranz, one of Mother Cooly's rivals, the journalist had to make her way 'through dusty streets and up a long stairway at the back of a house [before] I ran her to ground at last – a sharp-eyed woman, short, square, and muscular, with shrewd blue eyes and a deeply wrinkled face'. Obliged to wait for over ninety minutes while Rosencranz was consulted by two other women, the journalist was left to take in 'a fine view of the smoke that envelopes the dingy, busy flats'.[22] It was only once the older moniker of 'mother' began to fade, replaced by the more sophisticated 'madame', that female practitioners could escape such a grubby legacy of associations. 'Madame', employed by numerous stage clairvoyants in the second half of the nineteenth century, suggested continental elegance and social élan rather than backstreet maternal wisdom.[23]

Regardless of the distinctions between male and female practitioners, the idea of magical consultation as a predominantly female sphere of activity was a staple feature of newspaper reporting. In the raid on Professor Cicero's house in London in 1871 the police found 'thirty or

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[19] Varden, 'Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore', p. 94. For comments on Norwich's lucrative fortune-telling trade in 1893 see Roper, 'On Witchcraft Superstition', p. 797.

[20] See Emsley, *Crime and Society in England*, and Chinn, *Poverty amidst Prosperity*. For a contemporary view see J. Greenwood, *The Seven Curses of London* (London, Stanley Rivers and Co., 1869).

[21] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 26 November 1898. While indicative of the social level of many practitioners, this was not always the case. The reporter's final practitioner, Mrs Gutekunst, demonstrated that 'it is perfectly possible to be a fortune-teller and yet live well and neatly', the consultation taking place in 'a bright, pleasant room'.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] See for example 'Madame Robin' the 'clairvoyante' at Manchester's Free-Trade Hall in *Manchester Times*, 15 November 1851. For several cases involving 'Madame Charles', a high class London fortune-teller, see *The Times*, 9 December 1916, p. 5, and 22 April 1918, p. 5.

forty young women waiting to have their "fortunes told"'.[24] Young, lower-class women, particularly domestic servants, were identified as being most at risk from manipulative fortune-tellers. In 1844, the *Norfolk Chronicle* ran an article entitled 'Fortune Telling – Caution to Servants'. It gave an account of a servant girl in Norwich who had been promised good fortune by a gipsy fortune-teller. When the girl informed the fortune-teller that she had no money to pay for a divination the woman urged her to take some from her employer. Unfortunately the girl followed this advice, the theft was detected and, as the newspaper warned, 'the good fortune that awaits her will probably be prison'.[25] Similarly, in March 1852 Sarah McConnister and Sarah Smith, described as 'two gipsy-looking creatures', were brought before the Bolton Borough Court, charged with fraudulently using a pretence of fortune-telling to obtain money and clothes from a servant girl called Alice Dean. The *Manchester Times* suggested this case was typical in 'evidencing the simplicity of young females in endeavouring … by the agency of fortune tellers, to discover their future fate', Dean being described as 'easily preyed upon by these … two occult ladies'.[26]

Despite the emphasis on gullible servant girls, wealthier women were also known to consult fortune-tellers, astrologers, and cunning folk. Here contemporary accounts tended to highlight gender as an excuse or justification for members of the middle classes engagement with magical beliefs in the modern period. In a well-publicised case involving Sarah MacDonald, a fortune-teller in Bethnal Green, London, in 1858, the 'victim' was described as a 'silly woman [who] comes from, if she does not belong to, the middle class'. At the trial a police officer declared that 'ladies in carriages constantly visit her house', suggesting a fairly steady trade from wealthy women. Given the awkward class associations, it is interesting to note that the magistrate intervened with the suggestion that it was 'Ladies' maids, I should imagine'.[27] In such cases references to male clientele were noticeable by their absence.

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[24] *Manchester Examiner*, 24 June 1871. The police also found lists recording the number of consultations over consecutive weeks, offering a rare glimpse into the profitable extent of such practices. Weekly consultation figures were 662, 250, 502, 380, 512, 513, 430, 89, and 466. The drop to 89 was accounted for by coinciding with a public holiday. Unfortunately these figures did not indicate the gendered constitution of the astrologer's client base.

[25] *Norfolk Chronicle*, 10 February 1844.

[26] *Manchester Times*, 13 March 1852. For nineteenth-century depictions of gypsies and their association with magical practices see Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, p. 258–65, and also D. Mayall, 'The Making of British Gypsy Identities, c.1500–1980', *Immigrants and Minorities*, vol. 11, 1 (1992), pp. 21–41.

[27] See *Manchester Times*, and *Hampshire Telegraph*, 11 September 1858. See also *News Cuttings*, MLA ref. 942.72.M6, p. 75. In 1893 a Norfolk fortune-teller informed

Gendered access to magical resources?

Tacitly informed by a gendered perception of masculine modernity, contemporary emphasis was often placed on the different ways males and females accessed magical knowledge and resources in the urban environment. This applied to both practitioners and clients. Male practitioners often had books clearly displayed as indication or at least suggestion of learning. Claypole, a Norfolk cunning man and blacksmith, seems to have created the desired effect. A rural client reported that 'behind him there was a heap o' grit books, and he put on his glasses and he began to turn 'em over. I ain't no scholar myself, but, bless ye! I could easy see they warn't like other books.'[28] In Worsley, Lancashire, Ow'd Rollison, a foreman at the Bridgewater Trust, had a small library of occult books including Cornelius Agrippa's *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (1651), Lilly's *Christian Astrology* (1659), and more recent works such as Zadkiel's *Grammar of Astrology* (1849). He drew upon such works to create clients' horoscopes, although his crude efforts revealed his amateurishness to John Harland, a folklorist who temporarily took possession of Rollison's materials.[29] Dealings with book-owning cunning folk and particularly astrologers may have represented relatively uncommon plebeian contact with a culture of individual book-collecting. Even where men practised palmistry the emphasis was on an element of 'scientific' calculation. One late nineteenth-century Portsmouth practitioner, described as 'a college-bred man, who has studied palmistry for ten years' approached his divination 'in the scientific way, studying each line in [the] palm through a magnifying glass, measuring distances with a tiny rule, and folding each finger to watch the effect upon the palm'.[30] Rather than scholarly learning and expensive books female practitioners usually relied on cheaper objects such as a pack of cards or some form of 'occult glass'. Such devices were employed by Ann Jane Rogers to divine the future lover of Lucy Dunn, a Bolton factory worker in 1849. Recounting the incident before the Bolton Borough court, Dunn told of how 'After a few "Alla go dabbara baroos" were mystically uttered, the cards were shuffled, and then handed to [her]'. Dunn shuffled the cards too and then '"turned up" what the prisoner did not deem to be a sweetheart'.[31] Mrs Gutekunst,

Charles Roper that on some days she was consulted by 'three or four "carriage" ladies'. See Roper, 'On Witchcraft Superstition', p. 793.
[28] Jessop, 'Superstition in Arcady', p. 745.
[29] Harland, *Lancashire Folk-Lore*, pp. 123–24.
[30] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 26 November 1898.
[31] *Manchester Times*, 6 March 1849.

the famed 'German Seeress' of Portsmouth, simply used 'a little glass of water in whose clear depths [she] sees the past and future of her patrons'.[32]

Many male working-class autobiographies of the period noted that women were the repositories and perpetuators of supernatural tales in the home and at work. Samuel Bamford emphasised a gender division between the nature of stories told, noting after shortly arriving in Manchester that 'the old women would tell me strange stories of ghosts and hobgoblins; the old men narrated shipwrecks and battles'.[33] By contrast with a freer female exposition of the fantastic, men appear to have exchanged such tales in certain places (pubs), at certain times (at night), and, as custom allowed, in the home at Christmas time. However, there is a danger of constructing an over-simplistic dichotomy of knowledge transference that plays into contemporary notions of gender, progress, and backwardness, with men accessing information through literature, women through oral culture. Such a division is spurious since, as seen in previous chapters, magical practices (and beliefs) were commonly promoted and perpetuated through literary as well as oral sources. Maureen Perkins has argued that the growth of nineteenth-century dream book publications was increasingly orientated towards literate young women.[34] While *Mother Bunch's Closet Newly Broken Open* may have been intended to help both 'young men and maids … get good wives and husbands', the predictive methods for finding love and identifying a future partner were imparted in an imagined conversation between Mother Bunch and a young woman that alluded to their origins in an oral culture.[35] Many of the supernatural oral narratives told by old women frequently drew upon bastardised stories from popular printed sources, these oral accounts subsequently finding their way back into printed folkloric collections in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Rather than the either/or of literary and oral cultures, supernatural tales and magical folkloric knowledge shuttled back and forth between the two.

Men were more rarely implicated as clients in court cases and newspaper accounts of fortune-telling, though one is contending with an

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[32] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 26 November 1898.

[33] Bamford, *Early Days*, p. 73. This gendered perception was not new to the nineteenth century. See Fox and Woolf (eds.), *The Spoken Word*, pp. 31–32.

[34] Perkins, *Reform of Time*, p. 72. See also pp. 70–74.

[35] *Mother Bunch's Closet Newly Broken Open*, p. 1. For other examples see also *The Ladies New Dream Book*, *The Universal Dreamer; or The Secrets of Futurity Disclosed*, and *The Universal Dream Book; or, Dreamers' Interpreter*. See also Maureen Perkins, 'The Meaning of Dream Books', pp. 102–13.

evidential record that appears to possess a skewed gender bias. This did not mean they were above resorting to 'magical' practices. When a female journalist investigated the range of Portsmouth's divinatory services in 1898 suggestions about the town's magical practitioners came from male and female acquaintances alike.[36] Given that access to certain practitioners seemed solely dependent upon word of mouth, those oral networks were not exclusively female. Therefore, despite press accounts to the contrary, access to urban magical services and practitioners was frequently common knowledge, though gendered expectations seem to have discouraged men from equal levels of patronage.

At least one Manchester man was willing to employ the services of a mesmerist to aid his relationship difficulties. In 1852 Mr Sowden, the owner of a beerhouse in Back Piccadilly, employed Samuel Bottomley, a worker at a cheese warehouse in Shudehill, to mesmerise one of his female servants. Sowden's wife had recently left him and gone to the countryside and he hoped mesmerising sixteen-year-old Margaret would enable him to learn of his wife's whereabouts through clairvoyance. This was witnessed by Elizabeth Williams, a neighbour from across the road, and, fearing the girl might die, some neighbours intervened, entering Sowden's home and reviving Margaret by fanning her with handkerchiefs. Yet the dangers of dabbling in mesmerism were stressed when it was reported that Margaret first acted wildly when she awoke and was then found the next morning lying on the floor of Sowden's house 'as if lifeless'. She made several attempts at suicide which forced the attending doctor to fetch a strait waistcoat. Bottomley was subsequently brought before the Borough court charged with endangering Margaret's life and warned by the magistrate that he would have been held responsible if she had died.[37]

As such, while there were noticeable differences regarding access to magical services and knowledge, the historian is confronted with having to filter much of the evidence through male-prejudiced material. Rather than just viewing this as some methodological obfuscation, this perceived correspondence between magic and women was actively used to foster gendered boundaries and stereotypes. In particular, resort to

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[36] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 26 November 1898. Their predictions shed interesting light on middle-class female opportunities and life experiences in the late nineteenth century. One claimed her future success lay in writing, another promised success on the stage, a third as an artist. Five predicted marriage but with men ranging wildly from an artist to a bank clerk, a close friend to an elderly gentleman. The journalist concluded that this mixed report should be enough to keep her away from fortune-tellers in the future but notes, 'they say that it is a habit that grows on one'.

[37] *Manchester Times*, 16 June 1852. See also *Manchester Times*, 23 June 1852, and Winter, *Mesmerized*.

fortune-telling often implied a certain fatalistic acceptance of the divination on the part of female clients while the application of mesmerism emphasised female passivity and pliability. Yet these masculine assertions of feminine passivity were not always borne out in reality. Many women seem to have consulted fortune-tellers with certain expectations and did not always accept what they were told. In October 1850 Thomas Kelsall was charged at the Oldham petty sessions with fraudulently obtaining money from two women under the pretence of fortune-telling. Kelsall, an Irish immigrant, told of how 'the women, not satisfied with his showing their future lot in life, had locked the door and taken the money out of his pocket'. He even displayed his 'ragged' pocket to illustrate the force that had been used against him.[38] Similarly when a journalist visited Mrs Gutekunst, Portsmouth's 'German Seeress', she reported that 'from above came sounds which showed that my predecessor had come to gain advice in a love affair, and wasn't at all pleased at the warnings which were being given her concerning the man of her choice'.[39] The sheer range of practitioners and resources available suggests that if one was not content with a proposed fate that it was possible to go elsewhere and get another prediction, shopping for futures until one proved acceptable. Such animated reactions also indicate female clients were far from the passively fatalistic dupes commonly promoted in the press.

Whatever the realities, these distinctions between practitioners, clients, and access to magical services helped inform a crude gendered dichotomy of male rationality versus a 'natural' female inclination towards the supernatural in the nineteenth-century city. Gendering the engagement with magical practices aided the construction of a foil to a progressive modernity, women becoming representative of superstitious 'backwardness'. This not only contributed to perceptions of gender but the gendering of modernity itself as essentially rational and masculine, the past associated with feminine irrationality.

Ideological imposition

To what extent were these gendered perceptions imposed from without, and in what ways can the persistent association between women and magical mentalities be seen as an empowering identity that was nurtured from within? As indicated above, there is considerable evidence that such a view was imposed on women. This could be explicitly

[38] *Manchester Times*, 30 October 1850.
[39] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 26 November 1898.

stated. In 1848 the *Manchester Times* declared ghost hoaxers were feared by 'sick folk, children, women, and cowards, which through weakness of mind and body, are shaken with vain dreams and continual fears'. 'Superstition' was suggested here as an expression of feminine weakness and inferiority.[40] In an article on the history of witchcraft in the *Hampshire Telegraph* in 1892 it was claimed that 'there have always been many more female witches than male, which is explained by women's greater disposition to the occult'.[41] Yet such assertions could also be more implicit. Suggesting a female propensity for presentiments, Proctor records that 'many a mother in Old Portsmouth has had a feeling of impending danger, or that on a particular day a loved one far from home had been lost at sea'.[42] Slow communication with male family members overseas seemed to illustrate a predominantly female need to resort to fortune-tellers for reassurance and as a psychological crutch in their absence.

The imposition of gendered magical associations were also updated to accommodate more 'modern' expressions of 'occult' practice from the mid nineteenth century such as mesmerism, spiritualism, hypnotism, and clairvoyance. Gender issues informed a clash in 1845 between Dr John Elliotson, a principal advocate of mesmerism as a form of medical practice, and Dr James Braid, a Manchester doctor who had conducted research into artificial sleep through such means as hypnotism. While both had worked with female subjects Braid was particularly critical of the way Elliotson had supposedly treated some of his patients. The implication was that women were more susceptible to mesmerism, reinforcing notions of female passivity and a seemingly physiological predisposition towards 'occult' influences. He objected to Elliotson's 'impressing ideas on the mind of the patient during sleep' so that they awoke under a particular delusion until Elliotson released them with a prearranged signal such as a cough. Braid cited cases where one 'lady' was 'intentionally awakened with the idea upon her mind that she was dead', another that she was made of glass, Elliotson allowing her to 'leave her house labouring under the delusive terror of being broken'. A third woman was led to believe she would 'go to the devil' despite previous claims that she did not believe in such an entity, Braid condemning such an act as 'impious and wicked'.[43]

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[40] *Manchester Times*, 29 January 1848.
[41] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 22 October 1892.
[42] Proctor, *Reminiscences of Old Portsmouth*, p. 5.
[43] *Manchester Times*, 15 November 1845. For more on the gendered aspects of spiritualism see Owen, *Darkened Room*.

An 1896 newspaper article on thought transference explicitly gendered the roles of transmitter and receiver. While the 'agent' was required to be 'sufficiently earnest and intelligent to concentrate his mind on the thoughts which are to be transferred', the receiver 'should be sensitive in brain and mind, to be influenced by the thoughts projected'. The newspaper stated, 'as a rule, men make the best agents, because they are more positive in will, and are better able to concentrate their attention to the thought decided upon. And women make the best sensitives, because … they are in general more intuitive and impressionate than men.'[44] With an underlying sexual subtext of females as 'naturally' more open to penetration by projected thoughts, a gendered divide between masculine assertion and feminine receptivity was reiterated through these later nineteenth-century occult vogues.

Police and borough courts, usually located in sizable towns and cities, were an important forum for publicly shaping and reinforcing gendered perceptions which were then disseminated by the press. Having convicted a female fortune-teller for 'practising upon the credulity of young girls' at the Portsmouth Police Court in December 1881, the magistrates then addressed Annie Vincent, her 'victim'. Described as 'a single young woman … employed at Mr Hawkins's, an outfitter of Queen Street, Portsea', she fitted the stereotypical format of the naive and vulnerable female. Despite having resisted the fortune-teller's intimations to take money from the till to pay for the divination the magistrates nevertheless chastised Vincent, stating that 'she had been very weak in listening to the prisoner'.[45] As such, the victim's credulity was often on trial as much as the criminal's fraudulence. Elizabeth Grant's testimony against the 'Birmingham Seer' in 1883 was delivered 'amidst roars of laughter' from the court. Similarly, Emmeline Treagust's testimony against a fortune-teller in the Portsmouth Police Court in 1886 was similarly shot through with endless roars of laughter from those in attendance. Embarrassed, Treagust sometimes joined in with the laughter though the court's mockery was directed at her as a deceived, foolish young woman.[46] Given this response, it is not surprising that witnesses frequently failed to appear in court.

To protect themselves from ridicule clients were inclined to distance themselves from their magical beliefs, even abandoning them as nonsense, particularly before the public arena of the courts. Clients often claimed it was the first time they had engaged in such practices while

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[44] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 19 December 1896.
[45] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 21 December 1881.
[46] See *Manchester Times*, 3 February 1883, and *Hampshire Telegraph*, 6 November 1886.

fortune-tellers dismissed it as a rouse to obtain much-needed money. As the *Manchester Times* noted of a local case in 1843, 'these silly creatures can rarely be induced in public to acknowledge the extent of their own folly by saying that they sought the interview for the purpose of having their fortunes told'.[47] Urban magic operated within this tension between an awareness of the expected 'rational' stance on such practices and the genuine hopes they could fulfil.[48] The courts served to reinforce these expectations, tacitly requiring clients and practitioners to acknowledge dominant 'norms' by renouncing their magical beliefs.

The court was also a place where competing female narratives were played out in a public and, given its constitution of male authorities, masculine space. Charged with three accounts of fraudulently telling fortunes in May 1887, twenty-year-old Eliza Lowe stood with an infant in her arms while offering the defence that the need to support the child through 'a long winter' had urged her to make money through such actions, thus appealing to a portrayal of a desperate mother to justify her crimes. Lowe's spokesman also tried shifting some responsibility onto her credulous female victims, claiming that whatever Lowe had been guilty of doing, they had been complicit by 'foolishly and recklessly parting with their money, believing that they were going to get a return for it'. Court cases involving fortune-telling encouraged the formation of a narrative of women preying on women and Eliza Lowe had been particularly ruthless. When she called at the home of Mr Bridge in Sussex Road, Southsea she told Elizabeth Merchant, one of his domestic servants, that she was to leave her job and would receive a lot of money. In a struggle over limited resources, Lowe charged 6d for the prediction but not having that Merchant gave her 3d. Over a series of visits Lowe became increasingly exploitative of both Merchant and Louisa Rapson, a fellow servant. Having offered to draw up their horoscopes, Lowe repeatedly returned with the excuse that the money given was 'not heavy enough to draw your planet off'. When Elizabeth Merchant claimed to have no more money to give, Lowe asked for her jewellery, then her watch, and eventually her month's wages. The *Hampshire Telegraph* calculated that Louisa Rapson eventually 'parted with 30s and two gold rings, and [Elizabeth Merchant] half a sovereign, two rings, and a pair of gold earrings'. Only after this did Merchant finally contact the police about the scam. This cunning/gullible female narrative enabled the police and magistrates to position themselves as objectively detached, an authoritative patriarchal position from which

[47] *Manchester Times*, 14 January 1843.
[48] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 26 November 1898.

they could restore order. This was made explicit in one magistrate's summary statement about the Lowe case, declaring that 'the Act of Parliament under which [Lowe] was charged was passed to protect young women like the witnesses from the intrigues of women like the prisoner'. At the same time the court repeatedly gave the impression of needing to protect impressionable young girls from their own foolishness as much from conniving fortune-tellers.[49]

While newspapers disseminated numerous reports of misguided female clients brought before magistrates to testify against the deceptive female fortune-tellers who had duped them, similar notions were expressed through more plebeian urban literature such as street ballads prior to their decline in the 1860s and 1870s. One such ballad, 'The Norwich Fortune-teller; or The Trip Discovered', directly addressed young women, giving an account of an incident that that was supposedly 'well known in this city'. A Norwich woman who told fortunes 'to many a silly young maid' fell in love with a bricklayer. Playing on the deceptive nature of fortune-tellers, the ballad told of how she cuckolded her husband when instead of going to visit a supposedly ill relative in Yarmouth, she sneaked off to a village with her lover for a night of illicit passion. Reference to this 'cunning wife' played on her role as a cunning woman both in terms of her magical ability and her duplicity.[50] A Preston ballad, 'The Royal Fortune-Teller', denounced astrology, palmistry, and other fortune-telling practices as 'false and vain', claiming that 'there's none but silly girls and foolish fellows, will spend their money now on fortune tellers'. With a strong self-help message, the balladeer advocated that people would live long, happy lives if they were frugal, industrious, and did not waste money on tobacco, alcohol, or fairs. It urged young women who wanted to get married to be good tempered, for 'no influences of Stars, no Gipsy or Witch, nor yet all the wise men could ever make you rich'.[51]

Unlike fortune-telling, witchcraft was rather muted in the nineteenth-century city, only finding public expression when rare accusations led

[49] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 28 May 1887.
[50] 'The Norwich Fortune-teller; or The Trip Discovered', *Norwich Songs, Ballads, Etc.*, vol. 2 (1816–1852), NHC ref. Colman Collection 59B [XL]. For Manchester ballads that promote female superstition see 'The Factory Girl's Dream', and 'The Young Men and Girls of the Period – Charm Tablet', *Pearson Ballad Collection*, vol. 1, pp. 15 and 30.
[51] 'The Royal Fortune-Teller, or, Good Advice to Maids, Wives and Widows', *Madden Ballad Collection*, vol. 18, no. 994. In an 1803 variation on this ballad the rather misogynistic message was that women do not need to consult fortune-tellers to discover if they will marry; they just need to act with more modesty and less deceptiveness. See 'A Choice Pennyworth of Wit', *Madden Ballad Collection*, vol. 22, no. 133.

to conflict that landed accuser and accused before magistrates, sub-sequently being picked up by local newspapers.[52] Associated almost exclusively with women, urban witchcraft still functioned as an expression of petty jealousies, rivalries, and tensions, but the articulation of these conflicts had virtually ceased to have a communal function. Accusations were now generated and pursued by individuals or couples, the pool of suspects and victims usually having shrunk to family members and known acquaintances.[53] This should not be read as an indication that strong urban communities did not exist, for at the level of the street or small district they most certainly did. Rather, belief in witchcraft was becoming a more private, individual conviction, making it harder for neighbours to know one another's real opinions on the subject and thus less capable of communally generating a reputation of being a witch around particular individuals. Urban migration patterns may have further disrupted the stability of a long-term communal memory from which such a reputation could be forged while the accused could seek legal retaliation against slander if the complainant chose to pursue the issue. As seen in Chapter 2, the absorption of the witch into various forms of popular print arguably diluted or distanced the threat and therefore its credibility as a valid accusation. Such developments tempered official accusations for fear of ridicule, involvement of the police, or resolution of the conflict before the public glare of the court. As a result, the extent of genuine witchcraft beliefs among urban dwellers remains impossible to quantify although Owen Davies' declaration that we should not correlate the lack of accusations with a lack of belief is certainly a sensible one.[54]

Despite a popular awareness of what public claims were or were not credible, on rare occasions those who believed themselves or loved ones to be bewitched seemed to have been driven to make some sort of public statement, even when it was before the less-than-sympathetic ear of local magistrates. Two reported cases in Norwich from

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[52] For an account of a female witch in early nineteenth-century Leeds see Anon., *Extraordinary Life and Character of Mary Bateman, The Yorkshire Witch*. Bateman was executed at York in March 1809. The relative anonymity of city life contributed to limited examples of recorded urban witchcraft. As Mark Taylor noted in the 1920s, 'Witchcraft is still commonly practised … The difficulty is to get any information about it. The witch wont speak, naturally, and those who know of her doings are afraid of her vengeance if they talk about her.' See Taylor, 'Norfolk Folklore', p.125.

[53] Davies, 'Urbanization and the Decline of Witchcraft'. For an exception see Gerish, *Norfolk Folklore Collection*, vol. 6, p. 82 for an 1834 case in which a man in Lowestoft claimed he was being bewitched by a woman living in Yarmouth.

[54] Davies, 'Urbanization and the Decline of Witchcraft', p. 610. For the construction of acceptable supernatural narratives in court testimonies in the early modern period see M. Gaskill in S. Hall (ed.), *Languages of Witchcraft*, chapter 3.

1843 reflect the familiar courtroom narrative of magic being used by women against women. Indicative of the narrowed pool of suspects in the urban environment, the first case involved a Mr Curtis who was supposedly bewitched by his sister-in-law, Mrs Bell, following a family quarrel. Mrs Curtis claimed she saw her sister light a candle and stick pins in it. Mrs Bell then mixed some red dragon's blood with water in an oyster shell and repeated some words over it, adding parings from her nails, and muttered an incantation as she placed these components on the fire. This spell caused Mr Curtis' arms and legs to stiffen so rigidly that he could not get up unaided. This malevolent act against Mr Curtis seems to have been a way of one sister attacking the other, an indirect assault in the tradition of witches attacking livestock (and thus livelihood). A resultant scuffle between the sisters caused the case to be brought before the magistrates who dismissed it, ordering Mr and Mrs Curtis to pay the costs.[55] Mrs Curtis' resort to physical violence appears to have been prompted by anger rather than a belief that drawing her sister's blood might break the spell, but one wonders how many physical attempts at un-bewitching went unnoticed by the law, concealed within nineteenth-century cases of assault. Even those who had acted to defend themselves against witchcraft may have been loath to mention their true motivations in court. As seen here, when they did they were usually met with disbelief and pecuniary punishment. This was also seen in the second case. A woman called Kedge complained that she had been bewitched by Clarke, another woman in the neighbourhood. In return Clarke accused Kedge of 'harbouring her husband'. Kedge admitted in court to giving Clarke a piece of paper with the Lord's Prayer written on it, believing it would act as a charm since putting it into Clarke's hands 'prevented her from doing [Kedge] further injury', and, as a result 'all danger of witchery was over'. Again the magistrates dismissed the case, the accuser being forced to pay the court expenses.[56]

Court hearings and their press reports constructed narratives that anchored women to 'timeless' magical beliefs. This served an ideological function of holding them in stasis, rendering female

[55] *Norfolk Chronicle*, 13 May 1843.
[56] *Norfolk Chronicle*, 22 July 1843. For examples of nineteenth-century urban witchcraft in Middleton, Manchester, and Stockport see *News Cuttings* (MLA ms. ref. 942.72. M6), pp. 35–36 and *Cheshire Notes and Queries*, vol. 1, pp. 51–52 and pp. 94–95. The persistence of urban witchcraft is illustrated by an incident in Norwich in the 1920s. A bewitched couple tried breaking the spell by employing the services of a second Norwich witch to magically attack the commissioner of the first. Into the early twentieth century it would seem that urban witches were not hard to locate, at least in certain cities. See Taylor, 'Norfolk Folklore', p. 128.

temperaments ahistorical and as such denying women the capacity to advance into the modern world. Unlike those that surrounded class, this gendered discourse even seemed to negate the possibility of a narrative of progressive female emancipation from the past. At the same time, the near-exclusive focus on female practitioners and clients helped foster a public perception of rational male withdrawal from magical practices by the nineteenth century.[57] Historians have identified both the early seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries as periods of intensified gendered conflict, even crisis.[58] If we consider the realm of magic as a cultural expression of this it is clear that by the nineteenth century magic was not perceived or at least presented as the subversive threat to male authority that it had been in the early modern period. Rather, in the intervening centuries, a masculine discourse of rational modernity had developed to disarm any gendered challenge derived from magical powers.[59] As concepts rather than practices, magic and witchcraft had been refashioned into foils for a progressive masculine modernity, the shift from threat to ridicule merely altering the terms by which women and magic remained beholden to dominant masculine discourses.

Magic and feminine agency

If the depiction of being superstitious was imposed upon women as part of a public gendered discourse by (some) men, there are indications that women appropriated its potential for empowerment and as a sphere of influence over which they possessed power. The ideas of magical practices as a form of female agency and a means of delineating a gendered identity have obvious precedents in early modern witchcraft, but these issues remained pertinent to nineteenth-century urban

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[57] Eighteenth-century social elites had performed a similar manoeuvre with reference to the lower classes rather than gender. See Gaskill, *Crimes and Mentalities*, pp. 79–122, and Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*, pp. 108–76.

[58] K. Honeyman and J. Goodman, 'Women's Work, Gender Conflict, and Labour Markets in Europe 1500–1900', in R. Shoemaker and M. Vincent (eds.), *Gender and History in Western Europe*, pp. 353–76. See also G. Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), M. J. Braddick and J. Walter (eds.), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 1–43, and A. Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500–1800* (New Haven, Yale, 1999). For the nineteenth century see C. E. Morgan, *Women Workers and Gender Identities, 1835–1913: The Cotton and Metal Industries in England* (London, Routledge, 2001), and Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*.

[59] See Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, pp. 1–78, and Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, pp. 213–75.

dwelling.[60] Rather than some anachronistic practice, a notion easily formulated from one's reading of a biased contemporary press, magical beliefs and practices will be considered as a knowledge resource which was employed to navigate the hardships and pitfalls of employment and relationship difficulties in this period.

As an urban survival strategy magical practices had a slightly different function to those that addressed immediate economic needs. Conventional strategies included a combination of undertaking piecemeal work at home, taking in lodgers and laundry, mutually sharing limited resources through neighbourhood networks, and a fairly common culture of pawning items to get from one payday to the next.[61] While firmly rooted in these mundane needs, magical strategies nevertheless possessed an aspirational dimension, an attempt to get ahead of current circumstances. It is this optimistic striving that contemporary critics dismissed as the foolishness of young girls who were willing to squander their money on having their fortune told. Indeed some predictions could sound like fantasies. Elizabeth Grant stated that the 'Birmingham Seer' had advised her to delay marriage, for if she did 'she would be transformed, with a magic surpassing that exercised in the case of Cinderella, to a very wealthy lady; that she would marry an Adonis, and that all would go happy ever afterwards'.[62] Yet such a dream indicates how people did not merely think of catering for life's necessities, but looked to magical guidance in the hope of long-term improvement.[63]

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[60] The issues of gender, agency, and early modern witchcraft have been extensively analysed and form a body of historiography too large to summarise. Recent works include A. Rowland (ed.), *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2009), J. Van Gent, 'Female Magic and Women's Social Relations in Eighteenth-Century Sweden' in S. Tarbin and S. Broomhill (eds.), *Women, Identities and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, Ashgate 2008), pp. 95–112, J. B. Durrant, *Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Society* (Leiden, Brill, 2007), and A. Rowland, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561–1652* (Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 135–79. See also R. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2002), pp. 224–49, D. Willis, *Malevolent Nurture – Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1995), and L. Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil – Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London, Routledge, 1994).

[61] See Field, 'Survival Strategies in Mid-Nineteenth Century Bolton', p. 44, Gleadle, *British Women*, p. 125, and Green and Parton, 'Slums and Slum Life'. Kathryn Gleadle has argued that the generally low-paid, insecure nature of women's labour in the nineteenth century should encourage us to view it more as a composite of 'varying survival strategies, rather than as … "employment"'. See Gleadle, *British Women*, p. 22. See also Ittman, *Work, Gender and Family in Victorian England*.

[62] *Manchester Times*, 3 February 1883.

[63] Of course for female practitioners magic represented access to a steady secondary (or even primary) occupation that could supplement harder, more mundane labours. As the *Manchester Times* noted, female fortune-tellers 'calculate the almost certain profits

Resort to magical guidance was enhanced in Portsmouth as a result of the town's distinct gender imbalance. Considerable sections of the local male population were frequently away from home for years at a time in the armed services, and the predominance of the naval dockyard as a strongly segregated masculine sphere of occupation meant women frequently suffered from underemployment whilst simultaneously finding themselves left solely responsible for maintaining their families. Marriage to sailors was not an encouraging prospect, wives having to live on their half-pay of 'seven and sixpence or ten shillings a week'. Insufficient as this was, it was only received monthly and usually not before a sailor had been at sea for two months. This arrangement forced wives to accrue burdensome debts before receiving a penny, causing sailors' families to live in 'semi-starvation' and often facing such financial hardship that, as Father Dolling put it in 1903, 'only the most hateful remedy [prostitution] … was possible'.[64] In Portsmouth prostitution was inclined to be viewed as another pragmatic short-term survival strategy to which women may be forced to intermittently resort.[65] The prospect of magical insight into improved circumstances was therefore compelling.

Domestic service remained one of the largest female occupations in Manchester, Portsmouth, and Norwich in the nineteenth century.[66] It was from their positions of relative powerlessness that female domestics consulted fortune-tellers or performed their own divinations. Rather than an indication of foolishly romantic dreams, these practices potentially had a more serious purpose. Tim Meldrum's examination of the sexual exploitation of domestic servants has highlighted the occupation as the site of hugely imbalanced gendered power relations. In such circumstances female servants went to fortune-tellers to see if the promises being made by predatory male employers and household staff were true or whether, consenting to sex, their future prospects of working in the industry would be undone. Working-class mores placed value on a woman's sexual reputation although pre-marital sex was viewed as a symbolic commitment to marry. With employers favouring servant

and possible inconveniences, set one off against the other and find in these hard times, that the balance is in favour of a light and lucrative business'. See *Manchester Times*, 11 September 1858.

[64] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, pp. 108–09.

[65] A similar situation was not unknown among London's needlewomen. See Rogers, 'The Politics of Women's Needlework in Mid-Victorian London', pp. 589–623, and Lane, 'Working on the Margins', pp. 85–99.

[66] While women formed a majority of Manchester's cotton workforce, there were more employed in domestic service and as dressmakers/milliners. See Kidd, *Manchester*, p. 25.

girls who originated from rural areas to more streetwise urban dwellers, the migrant no longer had the support of traditional communal pressures to encourage a man to marry her when pregnant, an assertion made virtually impossible by the likely class divide between employer and employee. In the early nineteenth century one in five first births was illegitimate, and until 1844 the mother had sole responsibility for her illegitimate offspring.[67] Therefore recourse to magic was frequently urged by pragmatic and very real economic concerns, and in this case acted as a response to potential threats to a status level that kept young women just above circumstances that would render them 'incapable of earning their bread in an honest way'.[68] Money spent on magical insights into the future could be justified by genuine believers as a shrewd investment.

Some magical practitioners even offered services to deal with illegitimate pregnancies. In 1885 the Portsmouth Police court heard how Clara Stanley, a gypsy fortune-teller, had called at Nelson Crescent, Victoria Road, Southsea, the home of Lieutenant and Mrs Wilcox. Ostensibly there to sell laces, she told seventeen-year-old Jessie Wells, one of the household's domestic servants, that she 'was in the "family way"'. Wells paid Stanley 'half-a-crown to get some medicine', a sixpence to tell her 'fortune', and a shilling to draw up her horoscope. The herbal medicine was said to be because she was pregnant and suggests that she may have wanted to abort the baby, though after suffering a fit in the kitchen it was claimed in court that it was for a respiratory illness. Wells admitted to the court that she had been frightened by the news, presumably as an illegitimate pregnancy may well result in dismissal from her position.[69]

At the same time, while domestic servitude was often viewed as a respectable occupation which 'tamed' lower-class women, the resort to fortune-tellers indicates many young women had other ambitions. Towards the end of the century female domestics began to express their increasing dislike of such subservience, declaring their aprons 'badges

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[67] Gleadle, *British Women*, p. 40.
[68] See Meldrum 'Domestic Servants', p. 52. This was echoed in the cultural change of the charivari in the eighteenth century, the target of this ritualised popular protest shifting from wives who beat husbands, to husbands who beat wives. Rather than the early modern perception of women as a predatory sexual threat, they were increasingly represented as likely victims of a male predatory sexuality. See Dwyer Amussen, 'The Gendering of Popular Culture in Early Modern England', p. 66.
[69] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 25 April 1885. Mr Feltham, Stanley's lawyer, claimed the herbal medicine was to 'provide for shortness of breath from which [Wells] suffered'. Despite this Stanley was found guilty of obtaining money through a pretence to fortune-telling and sentenced to seven days imprisonment with hard labour.

of slavery'. Fairly regular movement from household to household indicated a lack of lasting loyalty to any one employer.[70] Aware of this discontent, certain fortune-tellers were willing to suggest they could improve a girl's prospects, not merely predict them. On 15 April 1887, Eliza Lowe, an itinerant fortune-teller in Southsea, offered to 'turn great difficulties' for Margaret Conway, a domestic servant employed at Surrey Cottage, Yarborough Road, Southsea. When Conway asked what Lowe meant by this she replied, 'you don't want to be in service all the days of your life?' to which Conway answered 'no'. Lowe then assured her, 'I will get you out.' Conway sensibly asked, 'how much will it take to turn this?' to which Lowe predictably replied, ''ow much have you?' When Conway lied, telling Lowe she only had a shilling, the fortune-teller said, 'you have gold and silver too, my darling', adding, 'don't go against your own', the last more likely an appeal to their shared class than gender.[71] Conway's subsequent financial commitment to improve her fortunes suggests that historians have tended to underestimate how young, lower-class women imagined more for themselves than a life of domestic servitude. Rather than a permanent situation, it was for many merely an early phase of working life; hence fortune-tellers' clients emphasis on marriage as a likely release.

Nor was resort to magical practices to improve job prospects limited to women themselves. Nineteenth-century masculinity was increasingly defined less by physical prowess and more by socio-economic status, and, in line with the mid-century promotion of a male breadwinner norm during the Ten Hour Movement, the patriarchal responsibility to provide for the family.[72] Loss of employment therefore equated to loss of masculinity since much of men's (self-)identity was invested in their occupation. Seeking employment through magical means became a way to restore a partner's masculinity, and if dominant notions of manliness prevented direct resort to magical resources, it seemed more acceptable for a wife to do so on his behalf. In January 1843 Manchester's Borough Court heard how an elderly fortune-teller named Isabella Moody had

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[70] Gleadle, *British Women*, pp. 104 and 105.

[71] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 28 May 1887. Conway was clearly suspicious of Lowe. To placate her Lowe gave Conway her address as 210 Queen Street, Portsea and instructed her to call the next day so that her money could be returned. When she visited Queen-street there was no '210' and it was later revealed that Lowe had lent Conway's money to somebody else. This was an urban variation on what Owen Davies has identified as a gypsy confidence trick known as the *hokkano baro*. See Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, pp. 260–62.

[72] See Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, p. 45, and also Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, S. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, and McClelland, 'Some thoughts on masculinity', pp. 24–31.

charged a female client nine pence to find work for her unemployed husband, a divination she subsequently failed to manifest.[73] Following the arrest of John Rhodes, a Salford fortune-teller, in 1865, detectives searching his home found manuscripts containing invocations to spirits to do the bidding of the invoker. Suggesting he not only offered a means of passively predicting the future but methods of shaping it too, one such invocation read: 'I adjure and command you, ye strong, mighty, and powerful spirits … that ye obey me in this my cause by placing my husband in his former situation under the Trent Brewery Company, and I adjure you to banish all his enemies out of his way and to make them to crouch in humiliation unto him and acknowledge all the wrongs they have done unto him.' Rhodes was said to have hundreds of clients and it can reasonably be assumed that such a spell was not unique.[74]

Despite the nineteenth century's modernising transformations, the perennial desire for insight into the future, especially future partners, remained strong, and was arguably exacerbated in growing urban centres where more transient relationships with strangers was becoming the norm. In affairs of the heart there was no modern technology, system or solution to erode the need for magical insight and love magic had long been 'more an urban than a rural practice'.[75] Women's use of magical practices to identify, control, and even punish a partner promoted acts of assertion not only over their own lives but the lives of men too, tacitly contesting the period's patriarchal or, as some have suggested, fraternal norms.[76] The bulk of love magic's divination methods to determine future partners were known to many beyond magical practitioners, almost forming a body of lore that was orally inherited as each generation passed through adolescence.

Beyond this Books of Fate provided a similar source of knowledge and although the format predated the nineteenth-century self-help guidebook genre, it can be interpreted as part of the contemporary drive for self-improvement. Predictions were not uniformly positive. Potential outcomes of some divinatory exercises in *Love's True Oracle, or a New and Curious Fortune Book, both for Men, Maids, Wives and Widows* included such predictions as 'You'll have but one [husband], and he

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[73] *Manchester Times*, 14 January 1843.
[74] Hardwick, *Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore*, p. 120–21. For a case where magic was invoked by a woman to help her husband obtain the captaincy of a ship in Yarmouth (until the bewitched captain sought the aid of a wise woman in the town and broke the spell) see NRO ref. MS4322, p. 26.
[75] S. Wilson, *Magical Universe*, p. xx.
[76] For the argued shift in the nature of male dominance from patriarchy to fraternal unity see J. F. MacCannell, *The Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy* (London, Routledge, 1991).

but poor, because he'll keep a private whore'. Another stated, 'I'm sorry this sad news to tell, your husband will not please you well.' Reinforcing anxieties about committing oneself to the wrong partner, if one did not wish to leave it to fate the book also gave instructions on how to make 'a True Love Powder, that will work Wonders in case of courtship'.[77] Having paid the price of a book few readers were likely to fatalistically accept their first prediction as the final one, especially if it was unfavourable.[78] In material terms at least, the focus of these texts was very much in keeping with aspirations of social advancement, aimed at making a good marriage and obtaining financial security.

Magical prediction could be used to encourage, control, and break relationships. Writing of his youth in early nineteenth-century Manchester, Samuel Bamford recorded how he was jilted by a lover who had 'given ear to the prophecies of an old fortune-telling woman'. She had supposedly declared they were not fated to remain together and that it was 'no use striving against the decrees of Providence'.[79] Bamford does not seem to have questioned whether this was genuine or a means of the girl extricating herself from the relationship through resort to magical authority. For women who wanted to assert greater control over their relationship there was also controlling spells. A Norfolk example involved thrusting a knife into the post at the foot of the bed and reciting the following:

> It's not this post alone I stick,
> But [lover's name] heart I wish to prick;
> Whether he be asleep or awake,
> I'd have him come to me and speak.

Such a spell was thought to bring 'the sulkiest of lovers' back to their partner.[80] In a case before the Portsmouth Police Court in November 1886, a fortune-teller claimed one of her female clients had asked if

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[77] Boreman, *Love's True Oracle*, p. 6. Historians such as David Vincent have argued that plebeian marriage was predominantly an economic survival strategy which enabled the consolidation of limited finances and resources. See Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, pp. 39–61. See also G. S. Frost, *Promises Broken: Courtship, Class and Gender in Victorian England* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1995).

[78] In the early 1840s *Mother Bridget's Dream-book* and *The Norwood Gipsy*, two of the most popular titles in this genre of predictive literature, annually sold over 11,000 copies each, and had been reprinted in London fifty times in half a century. The purchasers of these works were described as 'servant-girls and imperfectly-educated people'. See Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions*, p. 295.

[79] Bamford, *Early Days*, p. 180.

[80] Varden, 'Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore', p. 99. A Norfolk chemist told of charms that existed which could either punish a faithless lover or draw him back to his original allegiance. See *Norfolk and Norwich Notes and Queries 1899–1904*, 23 February 1901.

she could do anything about her unfaithful partner, who was currently abroad. The servant girl had supposedly offered the fortune-teller a half-crown if she 'could cause him to be true to her'.[81]

For the relationship that had soured there was retributive magic. In Stockport in 1857 workmen working on the road between Grenville street and Lark Hill found two glass jars which, when later analysed, contained dragon's blood, urine, and brass pins. Although similar in design to counter-magic witch bottles it was eventually revealed that such concoctions were 'furnished by fortune tellers to their ignorant and deluded dupes for the purpose of "bewitching" their unfaithful lovers', enabling a 'just retribution'. Nearby a canvas rag stuck with pins was unearthed, the pins of this 'demonological contrivance' being intended 'to penetrate the heart of the individual bewitched'.[82]

Engagement with love magic undoubtedly existed on a spectrum from amusing diversion to genuine belief (with individuals never fixed at one pole or the other), but it can be viewed as an empowering resource that encouraged women to become assertive agents over their own lives. Dismissed as nonsense by many critics, there are indications that others viewed such magical meddling as dangerous. An 1829 Norwich hand-bill warning against the use of divination to discover a future lover suggested an attempt to deter a dangerous female 'superstition'. It gave an account of how three girls, Mary Yates, Jane Scott, and fifteen-year-old Susan James, met at James' house and conducted a magical ritual to summon a vision of their future lovers. Each provided a clean shift, bread, cheese, and ale, and on the striking of midnight they repeated an incantation. Immediately 'three unknown figures presented themselves' but rather than phantom lovers they formed a funeral procession for James, her family and other relations following them into the room. She swooned, and was found in the early hours of the morning by her parents, 'apparently dead'. As a warning against others attempting such a feat, the handbill concludes that Susan James was 'now lying in a state dangerously ill, and not expected to live. She hopes this will be a caution to all foolish women.' Under the guise of patriarchal concern for impressionable female adolescents, this attempt to prevent them dabbling in the supernatural tacitly recognised a dangerous and potentially subversive power with regard to gendered power relations.[83]

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[81] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 6 November 1886.
[82] *Cheshire Notes and Queries*, vol. 1 (1881), p. 51.
[83] 'Most Astonishing and Wonderful Appearance of Three Monsters to Three Young Ladies on Tuesday Night August 18th 1829' in *Broadsides, Ballads and Songs* (NHC ref. Colman Collection C821.04 [OS]), p. 17. This handbill's effect as a deterrent was somewhat undermined by the fact that it provided the details (including the

After marrying, women continued to resort to magical practitioners to navigate familial misfortunes and relationship difficulties. The matriarchal nature of most working-class households granted wives and mothers a circumscribed power over budgets, food, and maintenance of the household.[84] Domestic childbirth remained a virtually exclusive female domain well into the century, an activity that continued to be accompanied by a substantial body of 'superstitious' practices and beliefs, even if the more overt magical aids of the past such as special girdles were no longer so widely used. Maternal responsibilities for the health of the children and cure of the sick enabled the self-styled 'Penny Wizard' to make 'a good bit out of the sale of "charms"' such as 'bits of "lucky coal", crooked sixpences, and a certain small stone with a hole bored through it, which women hang round the necks of their babies to keep away illness'.[85] In one case in Portsmouth it may have even helped deter a violent husband. In July 1848 James Mowett, an ex-naval pensioner, was charged by his wife, Elizabeth with 'violently conducting himself towards her, whereby she was in danger of her life'. Yet the *Hampshire Telegraph* sided with her husband, reporting that Elizabeth Mowett 'deals in the occult science and tells fortunes by the planets and studies the almanac, and at the new or full moon is very flighty'. Since marrying her James Mowett had become scared of talking to other women and on one occasion when he was asleep in bed Elizabeth had opened the bedroom window and ranted to passers-by that he was out cavorting with women. Each partner brought different powers to bear

incantation) as to how to perform the very ritual it warned against. For summaries of divination rituals relating to future partners see Dew, *Dyshe of Norfolke Dumplings*, pp. 82–86, Glyde, *Norfolk Garland*, pp. 9–13, Harland and Wilkinson, *Lancashire Folk-Lore*, pp. 103–04, Porter, *History of the Fylde of Lancashire*, p. 111–12, and NRO ref. Bol 4/123, pp. 94–96.

[84] Historians have noted a corresponding decline in working-class domestic patriarchy in late nineteenth century cities, the custom being for husbands to hand over their pay after extracting money for their own small luxuries. John Tosh has gone so far as to suggest that men sought solace from the matriarchal domestic domain in the pub, although others such as Shani D'Cruze draws attention to lower-class wife-beating as a more authoritarian male response to female domestic power. See Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, p. 41, and D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage*, p. 68. See also L. Delap, B. Griffin and A. Wills (eds.), *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2009), R. Crone, 'Mr and Mrs Punch in Nineteenth-Century England', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 49, 4 (2006), pp. 1055–82, and E. Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870–1918* (New York, 1993). For an interesting challenge to this view see S. Olsen, 'The Authority of Motherhood in Question: Fatherhood and the Moral Education of Children in England, c.1870–1900', *Women's History Review*, vol. 18, 5 (2009), pp. 765–81.

[85] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 26 December 1896. For more on infant mortality see S. Guha, 'The Importance of Social Intervention in England's Mortality Decline: The Evidence Reviewed', *Social History of Medicine*, vol. 7, 1 (1994), pp. 89–113.

in their collapsing marriage, with James resorting to physical violence, Elizabeth to slander. Although the occult association may have helped defame her in the eyes of the court, it also hinted at a certain amount of fear on the husband's part, an unwillingness to provoke her on account of her magical abilities.[86]

There is of course a danger of misrepresenting magical female agency, for such practices did not collectively empower women. Urban magic was embroiled in struggles between relatively powerless individuals, and frequently involved tense relations between women of limited means. Like any historical category, the grouping of 'women' is prone to generalisations and the emphasis has to remain on how magic was employed by these individuals in tackling limitations and difficulties that were nevertheless informed by gender. Although derived from unreliable courtroom and newspaper narratives, the evidential record repeatedly indicates how women who claimed possession of magical powers frequently targeted vulnerable young females with little or no sense of sisterhood. This was particularly the case in Portsmouth and Southsea in the 1880s and 1890s. A number of itinerant fortune-tellers, many from the same extended gypsy family, targeted domestic servants in affluent households. There was some risk involved in this. When Sarah Mann called at the home of Major-General Catty in Elm Grove, Southsea, in January 1894, asking for money owed her by the parlour maid for telling her fortune, she was met by the cook, Alice Mary Tribbeck. Clearly suspicious of Mann, Tribbeck asked her to return in the afternoon and contacted the police. When the fortune-teller came back and subsequently became abusive she was arrested by a Detective Peel who was waiting in the kitchen.[87] However, the risk of entrapment and arrest was offset by the potential profits to be gained from infiltrating a respectable household. In November 1886 the Portsmouth Police Court heard how one fortune-teller, Rose Smith, had attempted to work her way up through the female hierarchy in a Southsea household. The court heard how she had first offered to tell the fortune and then draw up the horoscope of a (female) general servant employed at Braemar House, St. Andrew's Road, Southsea. Smith then offered similar services to the household nurse before rather audaciously asking this second employee 'to go to her mistress and ask her if she would like to have her fortune told'. In sentencing Smith, the magistrate emphasised that she had targeted 'young girls who were very anxious with regard to matrimonial

[86] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 8 July 1848.
[87] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 3 February 1894.

matters, and had imposed upon them, they believing … that she could tell their fortunes. They had, in fact, relied upon her'.[88]

Female shop workers were another favoured target. In December 1893 Alice Stanley had tried to persuade a young Southsea shop girl, Florence Louisa Martin, to take five shillings from her employer's till to pay to have her fortune told. Employing both carrot and stick, Stanley had told Martin that 'her planet was very lucky' but that her relationship with a man was under threat from 'a girl with dark blue eyes trying to cut you out'. Martin resisted stealing money from her employer but consented to the fortune-teller's return the next day. When she did Stanley demanded Martin's watch, money, and rings to pay for the drawing up of her horoscope and 'a true, living photo of your young man, together with that of the dark-eyed girl who is trying to deceive you'. When it became clear that Martin was unwilling to part with her valuables to discover the rival for her partner's affections Stanley, deftly changing tack, promised a photograph of the person Martin would eventually marry, thus drawing upon developing photographic technology as 'empirical' proof of her fortune-telling assertions. Unfortunately for Stanley, Martin had informed her employer of the previous day's encounter and he had two detectives concealed in the premises waiting for the fortune-teller to entrap herself. Stanley, clearly aware of the legal margins she was operating in, declared to the detectives, 'I haven't got anything and haven't taken anything,' to which one replied, 'I know that, but you have had a good try.'[89]

While magical divination may have helped inform lower-class girls' limited life choices and aspirations female fortune-tellers were also engaged in their own desperate schemes to make ends meet. This is seen in their familiar method of collecting money and jewellery, often tied in silk handkerchiefs with the promise of it being returned to the client at a later date. The handkerchiefs were often sold, for in court cases the ones produced as evidence were not those actually belonging to the client. Servant girls' meagre valuables were pawned, the coinage gained from these transactions used to facilitate money-lending services to others.[90] As such, while magic still played a role in lower-class women's lives in the nineteenth-century city it was far more likely to be used to manipulate other females than as a conscious form of assertive proto-feminism. Despite the supernatural aspects of magical mentalities, their empowering applications were often rooted firmly in the petty squabbles and

[88] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 6 November 1886.
[89] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 16 December 1893.
[90] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 28 May 1887.

daily tribulations of individuals seeking to survive and prosper in a callous urban society, often at the expense of one another.

Generational dimensions

Generational differences reiterated the ideological dichotomy between 'superstition' and 'tradition' on the one hand, and rationalism and modernity on the other. Modernity was not just masculine; it was new and young. One Lancastrian commentator believed the passing of the handloom had marked the decline of supernatural beliefs, for the young mill-workers in industrial cities 'cherish few illusions'.[91] An old man from Gorton, Manchester, blamed mechanics institutions and improvement societies for this rational materialism, declaring factory workers cared for neither 'boggarts nur feeorin'. Even if the Devil were to appear before them 'they'd … cut his tail off if he didno' look sharp obout him'.[92] Accounts around Manchester echoed this sense of youthful world-weary scepticism. When the parents of an unruly ten-year-old boy who lived in one of Manchester's satellite industrial towns discovered that he had started sleeping out in the nearby woods, they gave their consent to the keeper of the woods to try to frighten him back home by dressing himself up in a sheet and confronting the boy as a ghost. Rather than being afraid, the boy challenged the 'apparition' by asking, 'now, then, what arti after, lad?'[93] Likewise when visitors to Boggart Clough near Manchester in 1844 asked a boy coming from the other end of the dell if he had seen the famous ghost that dwelt there, he declared, 'there's noa Boggart neaw'.[94] Such a response did not deny the possibility that a ghost had once haunted the locality, but if it had, it had been believed by previous generations, not the boy's.

This perceptual division was enhanced by changing work patterns in the nineteenth century. Where veneration had previously been given to older craftsmen as the most experienced and skilled, factory work inverted this system of generational reverence by placing emphasis on the strength, vitality, and cheapness of young labour. Factory production methods increasingly encouraged the obsolescence of the older generation's skill and knowledge, a situation keenly felt by the handloom weavers of Manchester and Norwich by the 1820s. The relatively late but sudden impact of the factory system in Norwich was particularly

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[91] Ormerod, *Lancashire Life*, p. 153.
[92] 'Gorton Customs, Traditions and Superstitions' in *Newspaper Cuttings 1845–66* (MLA ref. F942.7389.M1), p. 171.
[93] Ormerod, *Lancashire Life*, p. 154.
[94] Hayes (ed.), *Stories and Tales of Old Manchester*, p. 98.

felt by its handloom weavers, for although 3,398 of the city's 4,054 looms were still in the weavers' homes in 1838 the few factories that the city possessed rapidly outstripped handloom production.[95]

This encroaching obsolescence is seen in regard to folkloric knowledge too. While supernatural tales may have held children under the sway of older generations, even those that continued to be enthralled by them as they grew older were likely to seek out printed versions of the genre. This broke the oral link upon which much of veneration had been based. It did not only undermine the performance power of older storytellers; individual storytellers would have been increasingly hard-pressed to compete with the wash of supernatural fiction that was churned out by commercial printers over the course of the nineteenth century. The extensive scope of published supernatural folktale collections from the 1870s and 1880s further eclipsed the quantity of memory-based tales capable of being held by any single individual. As with the formation of gender boundaries, the defining of generational boundaries through magical mentalities was predominantly the younger generation imposing such impressions on the older, using it to distance themselves from the past and define a consciously 'modern' self-identity.[96]

Yet as with gender, these ideological assertions were not necessarily reflected in reality. Claims that supernatural beliefs could delineate the mentality of one generation from the next deny the ways they fostered relations across generations; shaping and populating young imaginations with a sense of the fantastical, such beliefs helped bind the younger to the elder's authority, at least in childhood. A number of eighteenth-century chapbooks, many of which were still in circulation in major early nineteenth-century cities, made direct appeals to children's obedience to their parents through using the supernatural as a means of control. *A Timely Warning to Rash and Disobedient Children* gave a 1721 account of a young man from Stepney who sold himself to the Devil so that he could take his revenge upon his parents. His plan backfired and he was left in 'a sad and deplorable condition', eventually unable to escape neither the power of his parents nor the Devil.[97] Tales

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[95] Atkin, *Norwich, History and Guide*, p. 90.
[96] This was promoted through urban street ballads. See for example 'Old Women's Sayings!', *Madden Ballad Collection*, vol. 21, no. 205. Here elderly women were seen as repositories of bygone superstitions. In a Norfolk folktale Mary Chergrave, the daughter of a local witch, rejected inheriting her mother's magical powers despite promises that she would become even more powerful than her mother had been. See 'Lucky Chance' in James, *Bogie Tales*, pp. 2–8.
[97] See Ashton, *Chapbooks of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 56.

of supernatural empowerment against parental authority were obviously designed to reinforce conformity to that authority though, in the light of previous evidence, such a vehicle may not have worked quite as well in 1850 as it might in 1750.

Oral folklore arguably retained greater potency, for while chapbooks and, later, penny dreadfuls, may have been read as fiction, supernatural tales told by parents or grandparents to control the young may have been taken as real, not least because they were imbued with personalised adult authority. In Middleton, Manchester, children were 'taught to believe that if they were left alone in the house at night and gaze into the looking-glass they will see "Th'Owd Lad"'. Scared children were known to turn the mirror to the wall.[98] Belief in bogies such as Jenny Greenteeth kept them from danger near rivers and, later, Manchester's canals.[99] In 1872 the Lancastrian folklorist Charles Hardwick recalled how when he was young he had been warned against going near 'stagnant pools of water partially covered with vegetation'. He had 'firmly believed that if I disobeyed this instruction, a certain water "boggart" named "Jenny Greenteeth" would drag me beneath her verdant screen and subject me to other tortures besides death by drowning'.[100] Such stories and their supernatural threats made children compliant to the instructions of their elders.

Magical authority was frequently entwined with advancing age. In 1843 the *Manchester Times* condemned local fortune-telling as an 'imposition … by which old people pretending to a gift of witchcraft impose upon the simplicity, ignorance and superstition of the poor'.[101] The *Middleton Guardian* echoed such sentiments, declaring fortune-telling to be 'the inventions of older people desirous of playing pranks upon foolish maidens'.[102] Similarly in Norwich in 1857 the *Norfolk Chronicle* reported that cunning folk 'fasten on the minds of children, and thus perpetuate "from generation to generation little schemes" and great delusions' that allowed these manipulative practitioners to prosper.[103] While the homely title of 'mother' could denote knowledgeable authority, wisdom, and insight gained from life, associations between female gender and age tended to negatively conflate into witchcraft

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[98] *Middleton Guardian*, 'A Series of Original Articles – XXIII – Omens, Good and Otherwise' in News Cuttings, MLA ref.942.72.M6, p. 36.

[99] For the suggestion that Jenny Greenteeth, a boggart of rural Lancashire, transferred to the canals of Manchester see *City Life* (22 January–6 February 2003), p. 23.

[100] Hardwick, *Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore*, p. 279.

[101] *Manchester Times*, 14 January 1843, p. 4.

[102] *Middleton Guardian*, 'A Series of Original Articles – XXIII – Omens, Good and Otherwise' in News Cuttings, MLA ref.942.72.M6, p. 37.

[103] *Norfolk Chronicle*, 2 May 1857.

stereotypes. Charles Mackay recounted how in Hastings in 1830 an old woman who 'was so repulsive in her appearance, that she was invariably accused of being a witch … actually encouraged the popular superstition; she took no pains to remove the ill impression, but seemed to delight that she, old and miserable as she was, could keep in awe so many happier and stronger fellow-creatures.' Liberally cursing all who offended her, it was said that '[t]imid girls crouched with fear when they met her'.[104]

Even the perception of possessing magical powers was enough to distinguish elderly individuals within urban communities, ensuring that they did not face obsolescence, and making the young hesitant in voicing their generational prejudices. As late as 1901 Emily Frances Cranworth declared, 'I fancy ugly and ill-natured old women will still be glanced at askance for some time to come.' Interestingly she noted that rather than being persecuted the affiliation with witchcraft led to them being 'treated with greater deference than their neighbours'.[105] Such an observation resonates with Laura Stark's suggestion that magical knowledge and practices could act as a form of 'symbolic cultural capital which could be exchanged for prestige, recognition, or material goods'.[106] Those who found themselves in a precarious socio-economic position within a community late in their lives may have had little to lose and much to gain by cultivating a magical reputation, especially as there was no longer any legal retribution in being proclaimed a witch. Indicative of a composite social identity that could include class and race, gender, and generational associations with magical practices and supernatural beliefs created a cultural web in which older women could be located, the age *and* sex of a woman mutually reinforcing others' assumptions about her or her own assertions to magical powers.

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[104] See Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions*, pp. 559–60.
[105] See Cranworth, 'East Anglian Superstitions', p. 172.
[106] Stark, 'Narrative and the Social Dynamics of Magical Harm' in Blecourt and Davies (eds.), *Witchcraft Continued*, pp. 69–88, at p. 71. Generational associations with supernatural powers and qualities were not the sole preserve of the elderly. In May 1777 a Norwich newspaper reported on seven-year-old Ann Waterson, a skilled ventriloquist. From a young age she had disturbingly imitated the voice of her dead mother, exploiting her talent to get whatever she wanted 'from her terrified friends and neighbours'. See *Norfolk and Norwich Notes and Queries*, 2nd series (1899–1904), 26 August 1899, p. 53. There were also popular superstitions relating to yarn spun by girls under seven years old. It was believed that 'linen made of it furnishes the best bandages for gouty patients, and when wrought into garments forms a complete coat of mail, not only against bullet and dagger, but even against the more formidable operations of witchcraft. The very yarn itself can be wound into unerring musket balls.' See *Hampshire Telegraph*, 2 November 1895.

Conclusion

Through its focus on gender this chapter has sought to explore the divergence between ideological discourse and experience in the nineteenth-century city. The magical imagination was employed as a way of constructing gendered dichotomies, derogatorily defining women as 'naturally' superstitious and, through inverted reflection, shaping an implicit view of men as rational. Ignoring, or failing to recognise the active sense of agency that believers and practitioners obtained through magic, the ideological equation of female 'superstition' with what Rita Felski terms a 'nonmodern identity' encouraged the view that female nature was unresponsive to the influence of modernity's forward momentum.[107] This gendering of the relation to magical ideas informed and maintained a number of socio-cultural boundaries which equated to methods of orientating oneself within a developing urban environment. Ordering the nature of urban strangers through defining gendered and generational differences created an attendant sense of self through opposition to perceived otherness. These acts of orientation, even if based on groundless prejudices, undermine earlier sociological notions of the disorientating, atomised life of the modernising city.

Yet while these boundaries helped shape perceived differences between the sexes they were not simply male impositions. Despite a derogatory, even controlling aspect to male magistrates and journalists portraying women as the predominant sources of magical knowledge, women proved capable of co-opting the empowering elements within such a view. This gave them access to unconventional means of navigating the difficulties of urban life, enabling them to assert a sense of control over both relationships and their frequently circumscribed status in the working world beyond. At the same time the frisson arising from magic's divergence from the 'norms' of a disenchanted masculine modernity meant such resources were unwittingly granted power through their subversive association with a predominantly female sphere. In this we see parallels with the frequently paradoxical ways in which mid nineteenth-century spiritualism provided a compromised expression of feminine power that simultaneously worked within and challenged the perceived boundaries of contemporary gender models. As Alex Owen has clearly articulated, the female medium was simultaneously passive and powerful, her temporary subservience to the channelled spirit enabling her access to hidden knowledge.[108]

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[107] See Felski, *Gendering of Modernity*, p. 18.
[108] The best consideration of these issues remains Owen, *Darkened Room*.

This relationship with urban magic is informed and complicated by gendered interpretations of modernity. The 'masculine' formulation of modernity advancing a narrative of control over nature, the growth of rational disenchantment, and dynamic progress which liberated contemporaries from the grip of tradition, defined in part as a superstitious feminine 'other'. By contrast, formulations that portray modernity as liberating, chaotic, devoid of a stable centre, and governed by impulses, fantasies, and desires have been frequently associated with feminine irrationality.[109] There is a false ring to this gendering of modernity, both formulations representing an obvious and clumsy articulation of masculine prejudices. Yet these differing conceptualisations of modernity intersect in the case of magical practices. While the purchasing of magical solutions in the nineteenth-century city had obvious links to a developing 'feminised' consumer culture based on desire, this chapter has also suggested such actions were driven by a hard-headed pragmatism, a quality antithetical to desire and associated with 'masculine' rationality. In combining a supposedly masculine modernity of order and control with a supposedly feminine modernity defined by desire and fantasy the study of magic in the Victorian city encourages us towards the concept of a hermaphroditic modernity.

The full ramifications of where a hermaphroditic modernity might lead will necessarily require far greater contemplation, but its most obvious and immediate influence is to inject dissonances into the grand narrative of a masculine modernity while avoiding what Kathleen Canning has suggested as the existence of 'disparate [gendered] temporalities'.[110] Such a formulation seems to be more the stuff of feminist polemic than historical experience, one that appears to actively seek a temporal reaffirmation of gendered spheres. Gender has undoubtedly proven itself a valuable category for historical analysis but like any other it is prone to obscure rather than enlighten if it bluntly operates from a default position of division and difference.[111] In its incorporation into the relationship between magic and modernity we seem to return once again to the credibility of antinomial formulations over binary divisions, to the value of the 'and/also' tensions and paradoxes of gendering magic and modernities over their simple dichotomous division.

[109] See E. Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy* (London, Virago, 1992), and, for modernity and irrationality, Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.
[110] Canning, *Gender History in Practice*, p. 61.
[111] See J. W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis' in Shoemaker and Vincent (eds.), *Gender and History*, pp. 42–65.

5   Urban communal formation and protest

At anchorage near Portsmouth in April 1797 the sailors of sixteen Royal Navy vessels of the Channel Fleet asserted their demands for better pay and improved living conditions onboard ship. During this tense standoff with the Admiralty, emotively labelled the Spithead Mutiny in the heightened context of Britain's engagement in the Revolutionary Wars against France, the *Sun* printed a critical letter. What made this letter remarkable was that it was supposedly written by the ghost of Admiral Kempenfeldt, who had died fifteen years earlier. Since the ghost had questioned the motives behind their protest the sailors politely responded with a reply addressed to 'the Brave Admiral Kempenfeldt's Ghost, Buoy of the Royal George, Spithead' on 20 April. Directing their correspondence 'From the Living to the Dead' and inquiring whether the author was a 'Spirit or … goblin damn'd' they claimed that they were loyal to king and country but were merely asking for more 'comfortable subsistence', which the Admiralty could easily provide. Employing their knowledge of naval history and ghosts with a dose of cutting humour they added that 'We wish that your body, that has so long lain under the well-known Buoy, will in real and corporeal state come forward, and try for one week if the scanty allowance on which we are obliged to subsist will keep you in the spirited state which men of our description require.' Kempenfeldt's ghost does not appear to have replied to the sailors' challenge.[1]

This brief exchange is illustrative of the focus of this chapter, demonstrating a contemporary communal familiarity with not just thinking with but actually talking through supernatural tropes. Firstly, given the differing plebeian cultures existent in the three urban centres during this period this chapter considers the way in which the magical imagination helped unite a diverse range of peoples, encouraging an awareness of collective cultural ties without invoking an explicit sense of 'class' identity. It then explores how supernatural tropes such as ghosts and

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[1] PCL ref. 942.2792 – Saunders, 'Tales of Old Portsmouth', pp. 79–80.

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the Devil were used in street ballads to foster a sense of imagined urban communities and their attendant boundaries. It argues that this urban literature, while not necessarily the sole preserve of the lower classes, used such tropes to criticise social injustice and articulate a social typology that was defined less by class distinctions than traditional, moralised divisions between 'them' and 'us'. Finally this chapter explores the use of the magical and the prophetic as a vocabulary of protest, exploring a spectrum of responses from humour and mockery to the vicarious enacting of revolutionary deeds. While performing different functions, these various applications of the magical imagination were not mutually exclusive. Through voicing protest against perceived exploitation the magical imagination also fostered a cultural stance that informed an orientating sense of communal identity which helped groups navigate urban power relations. Therefore while the previous chapter examined how the magical imagination could inform a sense of internal but orientating divides within urban communities, this chapter explores it as an aid to formulating a collective identity in opposition to those perceived to be outside that group. Underpinning all of this is the emphasis on functionality in the plebeian magical imagination. Unlike elitist efforts to theorise the spectral into psychological or physiological dysfunction, at the popular level the epistemological understanding of ghosts was less important than their communal application, the issue being less about what ghosts were and more about the veracity of the message their stories articulated.

   In exploring the workings of the magical imagination this chapter adopts Mikhail Bakhtin's interpretation of the carnivalesque as a popular 'folk' mentality that extends beyond a temporary, static festive event.[2] As with Bakhtin's conception of carnival, the supernatural informed challenges to and inversion of the accepted order, being used to mimic and mock, undermining the serious with humour and distorting the mundane with the magical. Part of carnival's power lay in its emphasis on spectacle, display, and acting out, elements similarly articulated by accounts of unruly ghosts and shared prophetic fantasies which frequently embodied visual excess and dramas, both of which served to deflate authority's pretensions to an immutable 'natural' order in which all things had their allotted place.[3] Prophetic perspectives offered hope, a cathartic imagining of radical change, and an acting-out of alternative social orders within the safe bounds of a collectively imagined fiction. This was not or not solely escapist consolation, for these supernatural

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[2] See Bakhtin, *Rabalais and His World*, p. 218.
[3] *Ibid*., pp. 212–13.

tropes had a role to play in formulating a collective view on contemporary urban realities. Prophecy projected into the future but its target of criticism was always the present. As such the magical imagination manifested weighty socio-psychological tools which were then lightly wielded through mockery and humour.[4]

In parallel with earlier historiographical arguments about the decline of witchcraft and magic, Bakhtin argued that carnival as an expression of medieval popular culture went into decline with the eighteenth century's developing emphasis on rationalism and individualism, which weakened a sense of communal unity.[5] Yet this did not necessarily mean an end to what he termed 'popular-festive forms' and subsequent historians have rightly identified continuing expressions of the carnivalesque in modern society, most obviously the eighteenth-century masquerade and London's Bartholomew Fair (until its demise in 1855), but also in nineteenth-century electoral campaigns.[6] Nineteenth-century street ballads also embodied this spirit of carnival, frequently focusing on issues of want and abundance, popular justice, and utopian wish-fulfilment. If it had been a subversive weapon of ridicule against the grand claims of authority during the ancien regime then in the nineteenth century its more muted expressions were brought to bear against an increasing bourgeois authority with its own pretensions towards social dominance. As a marginalised site the supernatural became an implicitly subversive way of imagining more than the material world, destabilising and liberating oneself from the modern 'norm' of materialistic rationalism. Like the carnivalesque, the imagining of a supernatural dimension to the world literally created 'a second life outside officialdom'.[7]

While this would seem to situate it as naturally resistant to an ideological 'modernity' it could equally be read as a means of adaptation to the realities of city life. Carnival can be interpreted as both a radical and conservative force. Bakhtin's promotion of a rather romanticised sense of 'the people' as a coherent, radical body has been challenged by

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[4] For the political function of folk and fairy tales see Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell*, pp. 23–46.

[5] For more on these developments see Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival*, P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd revised edn (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2009), K. Eisenbichler and W. Husken (eds.), *Carnival and the Carnivalesque: The Fool, the Reformer, the Wildman, and Others in Early Modern Theatre* (Amsterdam, Rodopi B. V., 1999), and Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*.

[6] See Castle, *Female Thermometer*, pp. 82–119, Altick, *The Shows of London*, and O'Gorman, 'Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies', pp. 79–115. See also Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, p. 70, Golby and Purdue, *Civilisation of the Crowd*, Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, and Bushaway, *By Rite*.

[7] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 6.

critics who have read the nature of carnival as a conservative safety value.[8] Proponents of this theory argue that elites sanctioned the temporary inversion of the social order to grant the cathartic release of tensions that would otherwise grow into social unrest. The unspoken agreement between revellers and authorities was that the existing order would be reinstated, and that the 'liberation' of carnival only had meaning when bounded by such restraint.

However, the 'safety valve' interpretation is equally open to criticism. It grants near-omnipotent powers of control to elites, suggesting they could effortlessly withdraw and, with the tacit consent of the people, reinstate their influence as they wished. It also assumes that elites could govern the way carnivalesque performances were conducted, received, and interpreted by the lower orders, inferring that 'the people' were willing to simply play at social inversion rather than being frustratingly teased by the prospect it temporarily offered. At its worst the 'safety value' theory of the carnivalesque risks reducing a highly complex cultural performance to an over-simplistic singular explanation when it was actually a symbolically rich phenomena involving evasion, inversion, conflict, fantasy, and manipulation.[9] A focus on popular supernatural mentalities seems to enhance such a view. Its more organic, cultural expressions such as spontaneous communal ghost hunts lacked the static, institutionalised nature of an 'event' that could be condoned, employed, or controlled as a social 'safety value' from above. However, wary of romanticising a collective popular opposition to social and political authorities, this chapter will also question the ability to muster a coherent voice of resistance to the nineteenth-century urban experience, a difficulty that was engendered by the wildly differing attitudes to its utilising of the supernatural.

Communal formation and boundaries

The classic pessimistic ideal of the modern city as presented by the likes of Lewis Mumford, Georg Simmel, and Emile Durkheim was defined by increasing anonymity, indifference, and atomisation, a conception that renders the existence of urban communities as residual 'pre-modern' anachronisms.[10] In early urban sociological discourse 'community'

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[8] See Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power*, pp. 131–33. See also Sales, *English Literature in History, 1780–1830*, p. 169, and C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford University Press, 1993).

[9] For more on this see Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 178.

[10] For classic sociological interpretations of urban anonymity see Simmel, 'The Stranger', in Jenks (ed.), *Urban Culture: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural*

was often defined *against* the city, usually in positive terms and with a degree of nostalgia, a view best encapsulated in Ferdinand Tonnies' binary distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* social models. For Tonnies g*emeinschaft* equated to a 'traditional' or 'folk' community based on mutual dependence. By contrast, *gesellschaft* or 'society' is more representative of classic sociological formulations of modern urban relations defined by social bonds which tend to be impersonal and contractual, with a consequent reduction of 'mutual identity'.[11] Yet anonymity and loneliness in the modernising city was as much a fantasy as that of the persistence of community. Isolation was not some default state but required as much an act of willingness as being sociable; no figure was more representative of such solipsistic fantasies than the self-appointed flaneur.[12] Indeed it seems reasonable to suggest that any increasing sense of anonymity attendant upon modern urbanisation would have actually heightened the appeal of community rather than eroded it.[13] Such communities may have been less tightly bound than before but they nevertheless possessed a sense of meaning and familiarity informed by a raft of shared experiences, practices, and beliefs, of which the supernatural was but one strand.

Where quantitative data is available, the suggestion is that internal demographic changes within cities were far from uniform, raising questions about the extent to which historians can talk of a general growth in urban anonymity per se and how far population increase placed pressure on a coherent sense of local community. For example, between 1801 and 1851 the population of Portsea Island doubled from 33,226 to 72,126 but growth was not even. In the first decade of the nineteenth century Portsea and the suburbs of Landport and Kingston increased by 32%, but Old Portsmouth's population actually declined, the former most likely linked to expanding dockyard employment, the latter influenced by naval service in the Napoleonic Wars.[14] Even such a simple indication as this suggests the need to appreciate a more textured, nuanced understanding of micro-urban development that does not fit

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Studies, vol. 3, pp. 73–77, and L. Wirth, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life' in Kasinitz (ed.), *Metropolis: Centre and Symbol of Our Time*, pp. 58–82.

[11] Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, p. 12. See also Tonnies, *Community and Society*.

[12] See Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', pp. 390–435, and Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. Feminists have led the way in deconstructing the flaneur as another product and consumer of the society he was supposedly detached from. See Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, and also E. Wilson, 'The Invisible Flaneur', *New Left Review*, 191 (1992), pp. 90–110.

[13] See for example Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, p. 14.

[14] Lawton and Lee, *Population and Society*, p. 232.

neatly into generalising sociological models. While relative degrees of anonymity obviously grew with urban expansion, the true fragmenting and diffusion of nineteenth-century urban society arguably came later with the increasing shift towards a culture of suburbanisation. While this cultural locale usually reflected a symbolic community through shared signifiers such as houses, gardens, and occupants of a comparative socio-economic status, the frequent emphasis on privacy and the lack of mutual support networks (often informed by relatively greater affluence than inner city districts) meant they were not underpinned by the same sense of communality.[15]

As a concept and a historical reality 'community' is no easier to define or formulate than 'class'.[16] It is used here as a unit of collective socio-cultural identity and association that was smaller than that of an entire city, one that may have a sense of itself through various differences, most obviously spatial, yet one that did not always have clearly defined boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. It could encompass considerable social and ethnic diversity whilst binding itself through shared cultural ties and experiences. From this fantasy of inclusion came a sense of positioning with regard to urban power relations and socio-economic realities, one that could foster a collective voice of assertion, opposition, or agency.[17] Yet the workings of such a community through the supernatural suggest this need not be a replication of traditional face-to-face relations but rather a co-existing community of adjacent individuals, an admittedly awkward formulation but one is reluctant to suggest 'shoulder-to-shoulder' on the grounds that it wrongly invokes an image of solidarity. This looser formation could more easily accommodate difference in the form of new urban arrivals and did not necessarily demand similar levels of conformity as earlier expressions of communality. Rather than clearly delineated social groups they formed more amorphous knowledge or narrative communities. The ubiquity of supernatural beliefs and their familiar tropes offered one way of binding disparate individuals and groups into such communities, providing an important cultural conduit that eased transference between localities and enabled adaptation to differing communities, helping migrants and certain

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[15] For recent histories of suburbia see Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, pp. 179–223, L. Hapgood, *Margins of Desire: The Suburbs in Fiction and Culture 1880–1925* (Manchester University Press, 2005), and D. Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820–2000* (New York, Pantheon, 2003).

[16] See Ahmed and Fortier, 'Re-imagining communities', pp. 251–59, and Young, 'The Ideal of Community', pp. 300–23.

[17] See Wirth, 'Urbanism as a way of life', p. 79, and also Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, and G. D. Suttles, *The Social Construction of Communities* (University of Chicago Press, 1972).

immigrant groups such as the Irish manage the initial experience of dislocation and disorientation. Of course these experiences were also moderated by more mundane factors too, among them the nature of most rural–urban migration, often achieved through a chain of short moves and frequently dependent upon existing kinship networks within cities. Yet where real kinship networks may not have existed urban communities were inclined to create fictional ones, and although these can be seen as manufactured and possessing little substance they could nevertheless prove binding, people necessarily willing to invest a lot in fostering such bonds.[18]

Norwich, Manchester, and Portsmouth possessed different lower-class cultures that reflected their particular socio-economic characters. Portsmouth's working classes tended to be politically conservative due to the domineering presence of governmental and military authorities in the town. With many workers employed in the Royal Dockyard, and with the Admiralty opposed to trade unionism, Portmuthians were inclined towards the working-class Toryism of many who served in the armed forces. Compared to this both Manchester and Norwich had long traditions of religious and political radicalism. Eighteenth-century Norwich was renowned for its printers, booksellers, and coffee-house culture, and for its riotous and rowdy citizenry.[19] In the first half of the nineteenth century Manchester become synonymous with the struggle for political reform following the notorious Peterloo massacre of 1819 and its central role in the region's Chartist movement in the 1830s and 1840s. Yet despite these cultural differences, all were witnessing the inflow of migrant and immigrant newcomers. For the most part, Norwich's influx were migrating from the county's rural hinterland as modernising agricultural practices led to increasing levels of under- and unemployment. Manchester's migrants were far more varied. In addition to the rural Lancastrians (and others) who were drawn to the city in search of steady work and better wages there was an influx of Scottish migrants seeking improved opportunities south of the border, though their numbers were eclipsed by Manchester's growing Irish

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[18] For the strength of fictional communal bonds see Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, p. 24. For the socio-psychological urban context see Michelson, *Man and his Urban Environment*, p. 148–67. For nineteenth-century communities see MacRaild and Martin, *Labour in British Society*, pp. 86–113, and W. C. Cheong, *Victorian Terrace: A Community Study, 1860–1960* (Studley, Brewin Books, 1993). For early modern developments see A. Shepard and P. Withington (eds.), *Communities in Early Modern England*, and F. Williamson (ed.), *Locating Agency: Space, Power and Popular Politics* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

[19] See K. Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, p. 305.

immigrant community. Predominantly Catholic and rural in origin, by the late Victorian period they accounted for nearly a third of the city's population, one that shaped its own enclave inspired by religious and political divides and reflected spatially within Manchester's 'Little Ireland' community located south-west of Oxford Street by the River Medlock. Numerous other immigrant groups had a presence in the city too, including Germans, French, Italians, and Jews.[20] As a port and as a base for the armed forces Portsmouth had a perpetually changing population while having established, amongst others, a notable Jewish community. As a result late nineteenth-century Portsmouth's population was said to be 'as heterogeneous as that of the metropolis'.[21] Yet for all their regional, religious, and political inclinations, and their heterogeneous communal formulations, these mixed communities appear to have shared a knowledge of and a seemingly innate interest (though not necessarily belief) in the supernatural. This is not to infer that supernatural tropes could unify different ethnic, political, or religious groups in nineteenth-century urban communities but rather that communities that most likely contained these various divisions could find in supernatural motifs common cultural references which all could recognise although not necessarily agree upon.

Contemporaries were often keen to explain the existence of supernatural ideas in urban communities as the result of beliefs imported by rural newcomers, a view that, as we have seen, arose from biases that promoted such beliefs as something confined to 'backward' rural environments.[22] In 1732 Thomas Salmon had argued that Londoners who still believed in ghosts, haunted buildings, and witchcraft were most likely recent rural migrants who had 'not yet overcome the prejudices of their education'.[23] Such views only hardened as urbanisation became a more pronounced feature of nineteenth-century society. In particular, Barry Doyle has noted how the lack of an Irish, Jewish, or Chinese immigrant 'other' in late nineteenth-century Norwich led Norfolk's rural migrants to be demonised, being blamed for spreading diseases in the city and undercutting urban workers by their willingness to work for

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[20] See Messinger, *Manchester in the Victorian Age*, pp. 8, and 177–180.
[21] Hudson, *Hampshire Days*, p. 222.
[22] For Irish immigrants and the adaptation of their cultural beliefs to urban environments see E. Moore Quinn, *Irish American Folklore in New England* (London, Academica Press, 2009), W. J. Lowe, *The Irish in Mid-Victorian Lancashire: The Shaping of a Working-class Community, Irish Studies*, vol. 1 (New York, Peter Lang, 1990), and L. Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London* (Manchester University press, 1979), especially chapter 6.
[23] Davies, *The Haunted*, p. 60.

low wages which were nevertheless better than what could be obtained through agricultural labour.[24] There is scattered, largely anecdotal evidence that rural migrants did indeed bring and retain their supernatural beliefs in the urban environment. When Richard Hoggart's grandparents moved to Leeds in the 1870s they 'long retained' many of their rural 'superstitions'.[25] Yet these ideas were not simply transposed onto urban culture as a foreign element, for rural migrants and immigrants would have found indigenous urban expressions of such ideas awaiting them. As such, one way of assimilating into an urban community for new arrivals was the realisation that they often possessed a similar cultural vocabulary of the supernatural.

A key way in which these ideas helped bind people together was through supernatural storytelling. Sasha Handley has argued that the eighteenth-century expansion in trade and empire encouraged an increase in the circulation of ghost stories, particularly amongst confined groups such as soldiers and sailors. Yet the cultural application of storytelling was obviously a universal form of sociability employed well beyond such bounded groups, as relevant to factory operatives, workshop employees, and neighbours in the street as it was to mariners or convicts.[26] For the urban poor the exchange of supernatural tales was both a cheap form of entertainment and a means of expressing communal values. Messages were transmitted through supernatural metaphors. In 1883 James Bowker astutely observed that Lancashire's ghost lore was 'not simply the vain creations of ignorance and darkness', for beneath their crude 'fables' there was usually 'a moral and a warning', these accounts 'influenc[ing] minds impervious to dry facts'.[27] Tales of the supernatural frequently involved taboos that were not to be broken and rules of conduct that dictated both their operation and human survival when encountering such entities. Rules such as consumption of fairy food would lead to a human's enslavement in the fairies' realm and ghosts had to return to the grave at cockcrow were known and disseminated through oral folktales and printed literature alike. Such tales could serve as metaphorical blueprints for new migrants approaching

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[24] Doyle, 'Mapping Slums in a Historic City', pp. 54–55.
[25] Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*, pp. 24–25.
[26] Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*, p. 188. For consideration of how storytelling helped foster communities by passing on information and values, and also acted as a form of cultural capital which enabled the establishing of internal hierarchies and authorities within groups see Hopkin, 'Storytelling, Fairytales and Autobiography'. See also Tilly, *Stories, Identities and Political Change*.
[27] Bowker, *Goblin Tales*, p. 18.

equally strange urban worlds, their subtextual message being to proceed with caution in an unknown environment.[28]

The continuation of local ghost hunts in nineteenth-century cities provides a more direct and active manifestation of the way in which popular supernatural beliefs could encourage urban communal solidarity.[29] Having obvious precedents in London's Cock Lane Ghost sensation of 1762, these hunts could become something of an impromptu entertainment and a thrilling diversion for local urban communities. In October 1826 the Hart family were repeatedly disturbed by noises and voices within their house on Orford Hill, Norwich. When their belief that it was 'some perturbed spirit' became known to the neighbourhood the *Norfolk Chronicle* reported that 'hundreds of persons repaired to the spot in expectation of hearing the ghost'. The ghost was heard to laugh at those who dared seek it, telling them to abandon their hunt. Eventually the Orford Hill Ghost's fame spread across the city and 'so anxious were people to catch the sound of his voice that at last there was scarcely a possibility of passing in the street for the multitude'. This continued until Saturday 21 October 1826, when a policeman, having examined the premises, went into the adjoining building which was vacant and discovered a crevice in the wall allowing the hoaxer to spy on the Hart's kitchen. After this discovery the 'ghost' disappeared though the newspaper hoped the person who 'foolishly disturbed the peace of the neighbourhood' would be found and punished.[30] Later when ghosts were said to have frightened and assaulted guards at Norwich Castle in the 1830s a local ballad recorded that 'folks run from all parts to see what's the matter'.[31] For several nights in October 1845 a crowd of up to 400 children and youths gathered in Norwich to catch or at least catch sight of a ghost who had been linked to a tower in the city though it remained elusive.[32]

In October 1835 *The Times* reported how rumours of a ghost in Manchester had led to 'hundreds of people congregating near the spot, including many pickpockets'.[33] Such groupings were initially formed

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[28] In this they resonate with more mundane street ballads which implicitly or explicitly warned new migrants about the wiles of urban living, thus encouraging a sense of control over one's life. See Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse*, pp. 26–38.

[29] See Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 44.

[30] *Norfolk Chronicle*, 28 October 1826. See also Davies, *Haunted*, p. 173.

[31] 'The Pranks of the Castle-Hill Ghosts', *Norwich Songs*, vol. 4, NHC ref. Colman Collection 59B [XL], ref. C821.04, p. 79.

[32] *The Times*, 16 October 1845.

[33] See Davies, *Haunted*, pp. 181–82. For the 1835 case in Manchester see *The Times*, 19 October 1835.

by local gossip and rumour, and then reported through street ballads and, increasingly as the century proceeded, through developing regional newspapers, this particular 'event' eventually garnering the attention of the *Manchester Guardian*. It was frequently the disruption to the normal rhythms of the neighbourhood as much as any supernatural presence that made such incidences newsworthy. This particular case was promoted by a broadside which shifted local attention away from its original concerns with strange noises in an office on the corner of Cross Street and St. Ann's Street, to the more expected setting of the nearby burial ground.[34] In May and June 1869, news of a haunting at the Feathers Hotel in Manchester similarly spread in the locality, its occupants being repeatedly disturbed by the ringing of all its service bells at once. When the ghost was supposedly seen by a policeman and some boys on the stairs huge crowds began to nightly gather around the hotel. While 'hundreds' indulged in spirits of a different kind as they awaited a glimpse inside, many more 'thronged the streets and lanes outside anxious to obtain sights or hearing of a ghost'. As is evident from several of the examples cited here, local broadside ballads were often quick to comment on such sensational events. In this case the balladeer suggested the proprietor of the Feather Hotel had concocted a ghost hoax to increase trade, arguing that it seemed incongruous that 'of all the places in the world, [the ghost] has chosen one of the busiest centres of Manchester, immediately opposite the London Road Station [for] its nocturnal appearances.'[35]

   Contemporary newspaper sources rarely provide a detailed indication of the social constitution of these ghost-hunting crowds although Owen Davies has claimed they were usually composed of 'a cross section of working class and artisan society', particularly young males.[36] As with other boisterous, 'masculine' urban entertainments, the formation of an excited, predominantly lower-class male gathering usually prompted a police presence and possible intervention whilst encouraging journalistic references to 'mobs' in the streets. These communal displays were seen as disruptive and even potentially threatening to authorities, not least because unlike fixed popular entertainments such as fairs, they were spontaneous, organic, and therefore much harder to manage.[37]

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[34] *Manchester Guardian*, 19 October 1835.
[35] 'Funny Doings of the Manchester Ghost', *Broadside Ballads*, vol. 2, p. 186. See also *The Times*, 5 June 1869.
[36] Davies, *Haunted*, p. 92. See also pp. 90–94.
[37] A similar urban communal strength was still expressed in various customary practices in all three cities, particularly when they were challenged by the authorities. In Portsmouth one saw local tension over the ending of the Freemart Fair in July 1847 and what was locally known as the 'Battle of Southsea Common' in 1874. See Gates, *Free Mart Fair*, Esmond, *Charm of Old Portsmouth*, p. 41, and J. L. Field, *The Battle of*

A haunted house could encourage a static mass to gather, thus congesting the thoroughfares, while communal ghost hunts frequently involved the pursuit of the invisible, meaning the collective hunters were likely to move unpredictably through the streets, susceptible to massed reaction based on rumour or the slightest misinterpretation of the local environment.[38] The rumours that fed such hunts possessed a diffused yet powerful popular authority; decentred and anonymous, with no single author or originator, their exaggerations and elaborations could lead to collective perceptual alterations to their local realities, a point that will be explored in more depth in the next chapter. Furthermore, the efforts of youths charging about the streets in the hope of catching phantoms also suggests a willingness to police their own communal environment against the supernatural. These popular affairs may have confirmed prejudices that the urban lower orders remained superstitious, credulous, and irrational but urban communal ghost hunting expressed a rare, public, and symbolic display of continuing collective fascination with, if not belief in, the supernatural.

If supernatural tropes helped underpin a sense of communal commonality they also informed its boundaries. Numerous socio-cultural boundaries were intimately woven into the fabric of nineteenth-century urban life, formulating a sense of division and order. Just as perceived gender and generational differences marked out internal communal divides so the semiotics of social status tended to mark out boundaries between larger social groups. Certain linguistic descriptors such as

Southsea (Portsmouth City Council, 1981). In Norwich there was popular lament for the end of Snap the Dragon, an entertainment that was 'the delight and terror of the children' at the Lord Mayor's procession. See Lane, *Snap*, p. 22. In Manchester the 'Black Lad' in Ashton-under-Lyne similarly reflected a popular reclamation of the street by revellers each Easter. Hardwick believed this practice derived its character from an older tradition linked to the spectre huntsman of Norse lore. As such even this physical appropriation was underpinned by reference to a legendary supernatural narrative. See Hardwick, *Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore*, p. 186. See also M. W. Steinberg, 'The Riding of the Black Lad and Other Working-Class Ritualistic Actions: Towards a Spatialized and Gendered Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Repertoires', in M. P. Hanagan, L. P. Moch, and W. Te Brake (eds.), *Challenging Authority: The Historical Study of Contentious Politics* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 17–35, F. H. Griffith, 'The Black Lad of Ashton-under-Lyne', *Folklore*, vol. 9 (1898), pp. 379–82, and Hone, *The Everyday Book*, vol. 2, pp. 469–70.

[38] In the case of a ghost in a tenement building off Anlaby Road in Hull in October 1852 local rumour seems to have encouraged the rapid growth of the attendant crowd. On Wednesday 20 October the crowd had numbered about 1,000 people. The following night it rose to between 2–3,000 bystanders eager to catch sight of the ghost despite the cold, damp weather. The incident was not reported in the local newspaper until the following day. In communally reclaiming the streets the *Hull Packet* reported that crowds 'besieged the spot'. See *The Hull Packet*, 22 October 1852, and also 29 October 1852.

'rough' and 'respectable' were moralised boundaries explicitly imposed from 'above' but divisions were frequently more implicit. Social distinctions were evident in such things as the time people went to work, with factory operatives starting before shopkeepers, shopkeepers before white-collar professionals. This was reiterated through one's type of clothing, food, leisure activities, and place of residence.[39]

One also has to appreciate urban spatial formulation in this context, the Georgian and Victorian city dweller being familiar with thinking in terms of socio-physical boundaries. The supposed social and physical gulf within Manchester was summarised by a contemporary declaration that 'there is no town in the world where the distance between rich and poor is so great, or the barrier between them so difficult to be crossed'.[40] While this may have been mere hyperbole, there was undoubtedly a marked sense of communal difference. Manchester's slum areas such as Angel Meadow had a notorious reputation while the concentration of Irish immigrants in parts of the New Town area in the 1820s and 1830s led to a district becoming locally known as 'Irish Town', adding an ethnic sub-division to social segregation.[41] Ancoats became a renowned and self-consciously working-class area of the city while the development from the 1820s of suburbs such as Ardwick encouraged middle-class cultural isolation and meant urban space was crudely marked out by class cultures.[42]

A bounded sense of community was physically reinforced in Norwich where into the late eighteenth century it shut its city gates at night, only spilling beyond the bounds of its medieval walls in the 1790s. Doyle has indicated various levels of spatial awareness and categorisation within Norwich. Certain districts were stereotyped in the local imagination

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[39] Joyce, *Visions of the People*, p. 157.
[40] R. Parkinson, *The Present Condition of the Labouring Poor in Manchester* (1841), p. 12. See also Morris and Rodger, *The Victorian City*, p. 119.
[41] See Ellis, *The Georgian Town*, p. 111. Alan Mayne has indicated historians' need to be cautious about the coherence of slum communities, viewing them more as a product of 'slumland' literature produced by the press and middle-class urban reformers than an objective reality. See A. Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities, 1870–1914* (Leicester University Press, 1993). Mayne's claim that middle-class suburbanites only knew of poorer urban communities through the press may hold for Manchester but not more modest cities, including Norwich. For a convincing challenge to Mayne's thesis see Doyle, 'Mapping Slums in a Historic City', pp. 49–51.
[42] For the development of a Manchester suburb see M. Spiers, *Victoria Park, Manchester: A Nineteenth-Century Suburb in Its Social and Administrative Context* (Manchester University Press, 1976) and also F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Suburbia* (Leicester University Press, 1982). The social gulf was emphasised by Victorian urban investigators, who typically used metaphors of exploration with regard to the uncharted territories within their own city. See Dentith, *Society and Cultural Forms*, p. 107.

by their relative poverty or associations with particular occupations, Pockthorpe generally being conceived as 'rough and lawless'. Beyond these generalisations there were further distinctions linked to particular parishes, streets, and even courts and yards. Oak Street was associated with the elderly, Ber Street with casual labourers, while Black Boy Yard and Priory Yard possessed their own local notoriety as slums.[43]

This spatial taxonomy was just as explicit in Portsmouth. As a military town which maintained its gates, ramparts, and defences well into the nineteenth century there was an almost occupational division within and outside the town's walls. In 1813 it was noted that few dockyard workers actually lived in Old Portsmouth and Portsea Island's nineteenth-century urban expansion into Portsea, Landport, Fratton, Milton, and Southsea continued to be marked by a strong sense of social and occupational communal demarcation.[44] In the 1890s Father Dolling could still claim Portsmouth actually consisted of 'four separate towns': Old Portsmouth was for soldiers, Portsea for sailors, Landport and Kingston the residence of dockyard workers, and Southsea a middle-class suburb for retired military officers and Portsmouth's professional classes. Dolling added that '[t]his quadruple town, with its different, and often conflicting interests … has been a very difficult mass out of which to create a really united city'.[45] For example, 'The Point' at the mouth of Portsmouth Harbour, colloquially known as 'Spice Island', had a strong sense of communal identity with 'Pointers' having a local reputation for being foul-mouthed roughs. This sense of self-identity was enhanced by the fact that the Point was not fortified along with the rest of Old Portsmouth in 1800. Unhindered by the ramparts and gates that restricted the movement of other Portmuthians, the Point's taverns were free to operate day and night, with the result that it became renowned for its boisterous, drunken nightlife.[46] Such arbitrary developments reinforce the way in which physical configurations of urban space informed a sense of local communal cultures in nineteenth-century cities. Given this self-awareness amongst particular urban communities, supernatural tropes could be employed to further define boundaries. The magical imagination not only fostered a sense of internal communal coherence but also, as will now be considered, helped articulate criticism or protest against 'outsiders'.

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[43] Doyle, 'Mapping Slums in a Historic City', pp. 51–52. Doyle does not really question the extent to which these delineations were internalised and accepted by those who lived in these locations.

[44] Webb, *Early Nineteenth Century Dockyard Worker*, p. 2.

[45] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, p. 10. See also Riley, *Growth of Southsea*, p. 3.

[46] Proctor, *Reminiscences of Old Portsmouth*, p. 202.

Communal protest and adaptation

Broadside ballads and other forms of nineteenth-century street litera-
ture are slowly starting to attract the academic attention they so richly
deserve, for historians have undoubtedly undervalued their potential for
insights into popular urban mentalities. Having developed in the early
modern period, the street ballad started to go into decline in London
in the 1860s (hastened by laws banning street music) though the trad-
ition lingered on in Lancashire's mill towns into the 1870s and 1880s.
Despite increasing competition from cheap newspapers and the shift
of the ballad tradition into contemporary music hall entertainment, it
struggled on to the end of the century.[47]

While usually given local relevance, street ballad themes tended to be
universal and expressed fairly consistent cultural concerns from one city
to the next. They could demonstrate a popular conservatism that nos-
talgically harked back to an imaginary (rural) 'Old England' while also
being exuberantly pro-monarchist and bombastically patriotic, lauding
the virtues of the English sailor and soldier and deriding national rivals,
particularly the French. Equally they could be radical, aggrieved by
contemporary social and political injustices, asserting perceived 'rights'
as 'freeborn Englishman', these 'rights' being vague, largely unques-
tioned assumptions derived from an imagined tradition.[48] These con-
servative and radical elements were often conflated. An emphasis on a
golden age of plenty, commonly defined by beef and beer, implicitly and
sometimes explicitly criticised the poverty of the 'modern' present. At
the same time the idealisation of rural England became a collectively
imagined realm untouched by modernisation, one concerned less with
enclosures and mechanisation and more with the sentimental or doomed
romances of maidens and their lovers. Ballads' prophetic visions of the
future were more overtly radical in their criticisms of the present and
did not imagine the inversion of rich and poor so much as the negation
of inequality via a bountiful, carnivalesque future for all.

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[47] Earlier historiographical works such as L. Shepherd, *The History of Street Literature*
(Newton Abbot, David and Charles, 1973) and R. Collinson, *The Story of Street
Literature: Forerunner of the Popular Press* (London, Dent, 1973) tended to be broadly
illustrative surveys lacking in detailed analysis. For more recent works see P. Fumerton,
A. Guerrini and K. McAbee (eds.), *Ballads and Broadsides in Britain, 1500–1800*
(Abingdon, Ashgate, 2010), J. Holloway and J. Black, *Later English Broadside Ballads*
(London, Routledge, 2005), and J. Hepburn, *A Book of Scattered Leaves: Poetry of
Poverty in Broadside Ballads of Nineteenth-century England*, vols. 1 and 2 (Bucknell
University Press, 2000 and 2002).

[48] See Joyce, *Visions of the People*, pp. 243–45.

Informed by both local issues and national concerns street ballads
provided urban dwellers with a way of comprehending and articulat-
ing a sense of community at both the neighbourhood and nation level.
However, this was not a straightforward construction. Although simple
in their literary form, the historians' use of such material is nevertheless
fraught with familiar difficulties relating to issues of authorship, audi-
ence, intention, and reception. Henry Mayhew in London and Fred
Leary in Manchester both made claims that ballads were 'the essen-
tial literary voice of the working class, especially the operatives' though
they recognised that this did not exclude '"the educated part" of the
community' from purchasing them too.[49] Patrick Joyce has argued for
the validity of ballads as plebeian literature on the grounds that their
writers, commissioners, and printers were of a similar social class to
their customers and, strongly motivated by commercial pressures, were
led by popular tastes and expectations rather than attempting to shape
them.[50] In literary terms, this meant ballad writers were constrained
by genre conventions and precedents which informed readers' expecta-
tions. However this does not mean ballads were simply pro-plebeian,
for they frequently mocked the common man's potential for foolish-
ness, ignorance, and credulity, especially with regard to politics and
the supernatural. The problem is that this 'popular' literature cannot
simply be equated with the lower classes. By its very definition 'popu-
lar' was inclusive rather than exclusive, allowing differing social classes
to selectively or temporarily engage with such artefacts and practices.[51]

These issues of production and consumption are complicated by the
fact that while ballads were initially penned by an individual writer

[49] See *ibid*., p. 231, and Mayhew, *London Labour*, vol. 1, pp. 220–26 and 271–89.
[50] See Joyce, *ibid*., pp. 231–32.
[51] For difficulties in defining the 'popular' see B. Scribner, 'Is a History of Popular
Culture Possible?', *History of European Ideas*, vol. 10, 2 (1989), 175–91, and S. Wilson,
'Popular Culture? What do you Mean?', *History of European Ideas*, vol. 11 (1989),
515–19. See also P. Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular
Culture, 1790–1860* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991). Even if we accept their super-
natural content was the result of publishers satisfying consumer interests we cannot
know exactly who was buying and reading such material (the second group being
considerably larger than the first given the customary practice of the literate reading
to the illiterate). This is best demonstrated by the dream book *Mother Bunch's Closet*,
which was directed towards a female readership's concerns about courtship and mar-
riage. Intended and actual audiences need not always be commensurate, Spufford
recording that this text was one of twelve fortune-telling and dream-interpretation
chapbooks owned by Samuel Pepys in the 1680s. Even if there was a gendered dis-
tinction, that female readership was still spread across a broad social spectrum in
the nineteenth century, from the domestic servant up to the likes of Hesba Stretton,
author of works for the Religious Tract Society, and beyond. See Spufford, *Small
Books*, pp. 61, 64–65, and Perkins, *Reform of Time*, p. 72.

the narrative was continually recreated through their complex multi-authored means of local dissemination. Ballad accounts were distributed through being sung by street sellers and endlessly reproduced in song and rereading by those who paid their penny or halfpenny for a copy, only to be retold as oral tales by subsequent listeners. Frequently fusing the visual, oral, and the literary, ballads enabled the illiterate and barely literate to gain some inkling of the narrative from their wood-cut image or through doggerel rhyming couplets set to familiar tunes, both of which aided retention of the short narratives. Many alluded to oral culture through scripted conversation which frequently drew upon regional dialect. Therefore just as the nature of ballads effectively meant they were multi-authored, so there was no singular audience either. This public, active participation rather than private, passive absorption meant ballads were certainly socially orientated, although not necessarily 'collective'. For example, while ballads make obvious ethnic appeals to Irish or English groups they reveal less about the gendered and generational nature of their audience.[52] Ballads were broadly encompassing, their narratives enhancing the sense of community by targeting and thus excluding specific groups as outsiders, most typically small traders, the police, and the Irish. Generally they promoted an unexamined sense of collectivity that could expand from a particular district to an imagined national community and vice versa.

Jonathan Barry has argued that plebeian communities were highly adept at detecting concealed messages in their popular literature.[53] This may be true but the more important issue is whether they all detected the same message. These organic processes of communal distribution and reception meant ballads potentially disseminated local supernatural rumour across a broad cross-section of the urban population but the mode of delivery and endless retelling naturally engendered multiple interpretations of the narrative. A local 'community' had no way in which it could assert a singular stance on the intention or symbolic meaning of ghost stories, resulting in different groups and individuals assigning them multiple significations that discouraged a coherent view. Compared to Manchester, Norwich was both smaller and had

[52] This chapter draws upon examples drawn from the Colman Collection in the Norwich Millennium Library, the Pearson Collection in Manchester Central Library, the Madden Collection in Cambridge University Library, and the Barring-Gould Collection in the British Library. There appears to be an absence of street-ballad collections in Portsmouth although Frederick Madden was himself a son of Portsmouth and a local antiquarian. As a result the subsequent study focuses almost exclusively on Manchester and Norwich.

[53] See Barry, 'Literacy and Literature in Popular Culture', p. 87.

less explicit spatial demarcations between classes but even these factors did not prevent the potential for a lack of coherent interpretation. This was clearly demonstrated in the Norwich ballad 'The Pranks of the Castle-Hill Ghosts', which suggests that while the ghosts were popularly interpreted as harbingers of calamitous change as to exactly what they symbolised or what that change may be 'you could scarcely find two people both of one mind'.[54] Nor were ballads' messages always transparent. The mid nineteenth-century ballad 'Window Smashing in Norwich' begins with a statement that prior to the appearance of a glazier's ghost 'the good folk of Norwich, both f[u]llers and weavers, from father to son, were all sad unbelievers'. Whether the implied message in the account that followed was that they should or should not (genuinely) believe in ghosts remains rather ambiguous.[55]

There is certainly the potential for reading ballads as an example of what the anthropologist James C. Scott calls 'hidden transcripts', disguised political gestures or performances which allow the venting of anger and mockery by the oppressed.[56] Like communal rumour and folklore, the authority of these songs and narratives was diffused, their subversive application best appreciated by the particular group or community they implicitly or, less frequently, explicitly addressed. In this way ballads conformed to the nature of hidden transcripts as a 'nonhegemonic, contrapuntal, dissident, subversive discourse'.[57] Yet the lack of a clearly bounded audience and the inability to ensure that the intention and outcome of using such a trope could be guaranteed to align means street ballads cannot fit neatly into Scott's overly determined divide between oppressors and oppressed. As will be demonstrated in many of the following examples, ballad references to ghosts were most likely intended to provoke laughter as much as fear, and could be written, read, and received as a comedic romp in a familiar locale rather than as a politically significant tract expressing local anger at social injustices. This raises the unanswerable question of whether the popular appeal of these ballads lay more in their supernatural tropes, their humour, or their subtext, or, to put it another way, in their content, mood, or message. Locals could obviously relate to the issues but their heterogeneous responses to and interpretations of the meaning of the narratives meant they potentially formulated a multiple as opposed to a singular transcript.

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[54] 'The Pranks of the Castle-Hill Ghosts', *Norwich Songs*, vol. 4, p. 79.
[55] 'Window Smashing in Norwich', *Norwich Songs*, vol. 4, p. 111.
[56] Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, pp. 19 and 38–39.
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Ballads raise other difficulties with Scott's concept too, particularly the uncertainties and difficulties regarding the way in which these transcripts were known to the oppressed, how far they were conscious of such messages, and hence how genuinely collective they were. Ghost ballads which criticised social conditions often left little ambiguity as to where their sympathies lay, although such messages were arguably shielded by the narrative's easy dismissal as mere mischievous humour. Resort to this defence implicitly surrendered any oppositional power they possessed though a more subversive challenge obviously lay in invoking supernatural tropes that had been discredited by 'modern' rationalism, thus making the use of ghosts deliberately provocative. The power of such an application implicitly rested upon the suggestion that the belief in ghosts remained sufficiently tenacious and widespread as to act as a common trope for articulating opposition. One could go so far as to claim that effective articulation of communal protest through an authoritative supernatural figurehead arguably required some sort of unified interpretation of such beings, for while these ciphers or masks tapped evocative (and provocative) forces the sense of empowerment ultimately derived from their articulating a disgruntled communal voice. As with the carnivalesque the organic dissemination of ballad narratives which contained the imaginative expression of collective wishes meant communities were not passive spectators but active participants.[58] While this may not have required overt communal cohesion it at least demanded an implicit appreciation of themselves as a community.

There is considerable evidence to suggest this was the case. Norwich ballads tended to imbue ghosts and devils with a charismatic leadership which conferred upon them a popular authority founded on notions of fair play and justice, an authority which countered and even usurped that of the political or social figures that were the target of their condemnations. For example, in 'Window Smashing in Norwich' a glazier's ghost returns from the grave to smash windows around the city and thus create work for his hungry, unemployed colleagues.[59] To give credence to this tale the ballad provides a detailed description of the ghost's destructive perambulations, appealing to local knowledge through reference to particular street names and even individual shops. Not only does it strike a note of protest for underemployed glaziers, it also takes a swipe at bakers, a representative figure of exploitation in

[58] See Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 7. For the political function of masks in carnival and 'folk' culture see pp. 39–40.
[59] See 'Window Smashing in Norwich'.

Norwich street ballads. When confronted by the ghost the baker drops
to his knees and confesses, 'it's long been my practice in grinding the
poor, Pray don't break my windows and I'll do so no more'. In this case
the ghost performs its classic function of forcing the guilty to confess
their crimes and thus exposing a moral injustice.[60] At the same time
it conforms to another popular theme in street ballads by comically
portraying the police's ineffectual efforts to capture him. As agents of
civic order and authority the police were frequently the butt of such
jokes. In the context of this chapter it is interesting to note that when
the police fail to stop the ghost they have to appeal to the local com-
munity for information and assistance. In doing so the ballad writer
simultaneously suggests the police's lack of control over the city while
flattering readers through giving them a sense of communal empower-
ment within their locality.

Rather than a class discourse founded on 'labour' versus 'capital',
concepts that appear to have remained rather remote and abstract at the
communal level, ballad conventions expressed long-established modes
of imagining the social order in older, moralised contrasts between hon-
est toil and parasitic wealth. It is this engagement with social morality
which fused them with the 'traditional' trope of ghosts as moral arbiters.
The supernatural had long been used by the powerless to publicly reveal
sins and transgressions in the early modern period.[61] In seventeenth-
century folklore and across a range of cheap literature from satirical
political pamphlets to chapbook fictions, oral and literary accounts of
ghosts tended to present them as 'otherworldly sleuths' who revealed
murderers (often their own) or exposed unfaithful lovers. In this cap-
acity they were agents of providence restoring a sense of justice.[62] While
the period 1660–1700 witnessed a glut in the production of ballads and
chapbooks featuring ghosts the eighteenth century was notably more
muted on the subject.[63] Generally there was a transference from serious
debate in respectable periodicals to titillation in emerging Gothic litera-
ture (and their plagiarised chapbook renditions), this fictional emphasis
shifting such tropes away from reality and locating them more firmly
in the fantastical.[64]

[60] For an example of this anti-baker sentiment see 'The Philistines Amongst the
Bakers!', NHC ref. 821.04 [OS] – *Broadside Ballads and Songs*, p. 79.
[61] Gowing, 'The Haunting of Susan Lay', p. 198.
[62] See Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*, pp. 50 and 53. See also T. Watt, *Cheap Print
and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), and Spufford,
Small Books.
[63] See Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*, p. 49.
[64] See Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*.

Given this and the cultural shifts of the Enlightenment, by the nine-teenth century the providential element had faded in contemporary street ballads, their narratives having become more questioning of the provenance of ghosts, not always taking them seriously and frequently indicating foolishness on the part of believers.[65] While street ballads did not necessarily foster a standardised representation of ghosts their increasing detachment from the theological and philosophical baggage that had surrounded them in previous centuries enabled them to be put to distinctly secular use as the mouthpiece of plebeian concern, disap-proval, and resistance. The public exposure of moral wrongs remained a key feature but, importantly, in the nineteenth-century broadside for-mat this exposure of injustice was often extended beyond individuals to inform broader social and political criticism. That ghosts seem to have been the most commonly employed and arguably the most effect-ive tropes when dealing with localised concerns indicates how their power resided in imagined associations with known localities and per-haps even an element of 'personal' acquaintance, at least in terms of voicing protest through local dialect. As seen in 'Window Smashing in Norwich', ghost ballads frequently referenced real urban locations and ordinary types of people known to the local communities who pur-chased them, enhancing a sense of the verisimilitude of the account by weaving ghosts into the material fabric of the city and its communities. One could argue that this enrolment into local communal discontents represented a diminishing of ghosts' functions but belief in such entities had always been informed by specific contemporary purposes, whether it was to serve as indication of life after death, the existence of a spirit world, or the influence of providence in human affairs. They had never been allowed to merely 'exist' but had always been read as symbols of something else and, like ghosts, supernatural ballads were essentially a vehicle for conveying socially relevant messages.

When applied to local socio-economic and communal tensions one frequently detects a distinct strain of subversive carnivalesque humour at play. Just as Bakhtin illustrated the role of laughter as a means of oppos-ition to the seriousness of medieval ecclesiastical culture so there seems valid evidence for considering such ballads as an oppositional expres-sion to mid-Victorian bourgeois sobriety and propriety.[66] Discredited by their oppositional 'otherness' to enlightened 'norms' yet retaining

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[65] For eighteenth-century developments see Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*, pp. 133–35, Davies, *Haunted*, pp. 119–28, Outram, *The Enlightenment*, pp. 109–25, and Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 205–57.

[66] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 4.

considerable imaginative force by their very nature supernatural narratives possessed the power to provoke interest in and draw attention to moral wrongs. The particularity of local grievances was articulated in the Norwich ballad, *Signs! Tokens! Or a Wonderful Apparition*. Here a ghost appears on top of the bank in Bank Street, Norwich and announces its presence so loudly that it frightens the elderly watchmen awake, again mocking contemporary urban law enforcement. The ghost then proceeds to express local anger at two specific targets; the rich who are suspected of defrauding donation collections for the poor and exploitative coal sellers:

> For as sure as I'm a ghost I now tell ye plainly,
> That if you have got any charity in ye;
> Don't take the last six-pence from their pockets, poor souls,
> For a bushel bad measure of very bad coals.

This provokes a supportive cry of 'good luck to your ghostship' from the old women who are looking on and encouraging him to 'go on with your sermon'. This spectral champion and voice of Norwich's poor then warns that if their exploiters persist he will 'appear twice a week in purpose to maul them'.[67] One detects a vicarious desire to reach out and punish the exploiters of the city's poor, even if that wish can only take the insubstantial form of a ghost. At the same time the ghost's bold theatrics and the engagement of spectators conforms to a carnivalesque emphasis on public spectacle and performance.[68]

Interestingly, while urban ghosts were usually anthropomorphised to enhance their credibility and to conform to their human environment this ghost inexplicably appeared in the shape of a winged horse with 'great saucer eyes' and 'a mouth like a man trap'. While the common portrayal of ghosts in street ballads may have encouraged a narrowing of popular perceptions of just what one would look like, namely

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[67] 'Signs! And Tokens! Or A Wonderful Apparition', *Norwich Songs,* vol. 2, p. 113.
[68] See Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, p. 5. This ballad's concern with the rich stealing money intended as donations for the poor is echoed in 'Gog and Magog! Or a Row about the Donations', *Norwich Songs*, vol. 4, p. 29, which features two legendary giants from British folklore rather than ghosts. The strong sense of moral divide evident in ghost ballads was reflected in the grotesque depictions of politicians in works of graphic satire by the likes of Gillray and Cruickshank. Here the monstrous provided a moral shorthand for popular perceptions of the elite. While hand-coloured etchings produced in small editions and priced beyond the reach of the labouring classes may encourage the assumption that the audience for these works were overwhelmingly the metropolitan elite, it has been argued that cheaper, plagiarised versions were 'widely exported to the provinces' and purchased by 'lower social levels'. See Donald, *Age of Caricature*, p. 19. See also M. Wood, *Radical Satire and Print Culture 1790–1822* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994).

pale white but distinctly human, this ballad served as a reminder that ghosts could take a far greater variety of animal forms, particularly in rural areas.[69] If street ballads generally promoted a standardising of the spectral form they at least continued to appreciate ghosts' multiple functions, ranging from humorous pranksters or mistaken perceptions that allowed for the mocking of supernatural beliefs, to more serious symbols of moral wrongness and imminent upheaval, and even as vehicles for voicing social criticism.

In dealing with the theme of exploitative coal sellers, the Norwich ballad 'The Disappointment of the Black Club' invokes a different supernatural entity, namely the Devil. This ballad tells of how a monopolistic group of coal sellers, rejoicing at the cold weather, meet in Norwich 'to consult about raising the price of their coal, for coal-sellers have neither conscience nor souls'.[70] They propose stockpiling their coal to create scarcity, hoping that people would rather go without food than fuel. The meeting is interrupted by the appearance of the Devil. He announces that he is taking them all to Hell, playing to the readers' sentiments by declaring, 'I think long enough you have been robbing the poor, and I'll take care in future you shall do so no more.' Once again, it requires the power of the supernatural to challenge and break the power of crooked, monopolistic traders. The ballad ends with a direct address to real coal sellers, warning that since it is uncertain when the Devil will call, 'bring out your old stocks, and don't tell any more lies, but let us have coals at a reasonable price'. In defining the basic honesty of the poor in contrast to the corrupt coal sellers, the poor asking only that they should pay an honest price for the goods they need, the ballad serves as a mid nineteenth-century literary expression of the 'moral economy' of the crowd.[71]

It is noticeable, especially in Norwich ballads, that the perceived exploiters of the urban poor were not the large manufacturers but those immediately above them in the social hierarchy, the small shopkeepers and traders who provided workers with the essentials of food or coal. Given the poverty-stricken circumstances facing many in Norwich in the first half of the nineteenth century, especially among its increasingly large numbers of unemployed handloom weavers, this is not so surprising. The poor vicariously vented their spleen not against those entrepreneurial businessmen whose factory machinery made their skills

[69] For popular conceptions of ghostly manifestations see Davies, *Haunted*, pp. 13–38.
[70] 'The Disappointment of the Black Club', *Norwich Songs*, vol. 4, p. 10.
[71] For more on the 'moral economy' see A. Randall and A. Charlesworth, *The Moral Economy and Popular Protest: Crowds, Conflict and Authority* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 1999), and Thompson, *Customs in Common*, pp. 185–351.

redundant but towards those immediately on the other side of the intense interchange between very limited funds and necessary provisions.[72] It is therefore not surprising to find that tradesmen who provided necessities were often associated with the devious and the diabolical in street ballads. Distrust of butchers and bakers was aided by the increasing depersonalisation of food production in the nineteenth century. The dependency on others for foodstuffs, always more pronounced in urban than rural communities, seems to have fostered apprehensions and resentments among the powerless towards those upon whom they were forced to rely, tensions which balladeers could express through the supernatural.[73] In this context the menacing weight of the Devil was calibrated to suit the needs of the particular ballad. While he continued to assume the traditional role of punisher of the immoral in some ballads he was more often cast as a less threatening representation, frequently being outwitted or beaten up by brusque working-class women.[74]

In Manchester, where factory production had developed considerably earlier and was far more prominent, there tended to be a different emphasis in both the tone and function of diabolical tropes. *The Lancashire Miller* recounts how an elderly mill-owner tested his three sons as to which of them should inherit his mill, the business passing to Will, the youngest and greediest. Only in the closing line is the Devil invoked, stating, 'little Will, he won the mill, and the Devil he got his dad'.[75] The use of the supernatural here is rather perfunctory, the association with the Devil merely serving as a moral shorthand to illustrate

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[72] Criticism of factory owners was expressed in more substantial melodramatic literature of the period such as John Walker's *The Factory Lad – A Domestic Drama in Two Acts* (London, 1832) and informed more literary works, the most obvious in relation to Manchester being Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848).

[73] For a Manchester ballad that drew associations between butchers and the Devil see 'The Butcher Turned Devil', *Pearson Broadside*, vol. 2, p. 317. In the nineteenth-century urban context anxieties about food production came to be best expressed through the legend of Sweeny Todd. See R. Crone, 'From Sawney Beane to Sweeney Todd: Murder Machines in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Metropolis', *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 7 (2010), pp. 59–85, R. L. Mack, *The Wonderful and Surprising History of Sweeny Todd* (London, Continuum, 2007), and S. Powell, '"Black Markets and Cadaverous Pies": The Corpse, Urban Trade and Industrial Consumption in the Penny Bloods' in A. Maunder and G. Moore (eds.), *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004), pp. 45–58.

[74] For comic portrayals of the Devil see 'The Devil and Little Mike', Pearson Collection, vol. 1, no. 56, 'The Devil and the Washerwomen', *Madden Collection*, vol. 21, no. 440, and 'The Orton Ghost; or, The Devil Outwitted', *Madden Collection*, vol. 18, no. 1137. See also Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 266–67.

[75] 'The Lancashire Miller' in Harland, *Ballads and Songs of Lancashire*, pp. 135–37. One has to consider factory-owner paternalism as a factor in accounting for the relatively small number of ballads attacking this rank of society, especially in northern industrial cities. For more on this see Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*.

to the reader what type of employer the old man had been. A similar function is served in another Manchester ballad, *Grimshaw's Factory Fire*, which relates to an actual event in Gorton, near Manchester in 1790. Grimshaw had contracted the use of 500 power looms and thirty had been installed into his steam-powered weaving factory when, just a few weeks into its operation, it was burnt to the ground. Grimshaw had received anonymous letters threatening the mill's destruction if he continued to operate it and the fire was said to have deterred attempts to introduce the power loom into Manchester for sixteen years. Lacking the obvious humour of the Norwich ballads, *Grimshaw's Factory Fire* voiced plebeian opposition to the introduction of steam-powered machinery into Manchester's textile industry, expressing a wish that the Devil should take 'th' machinery'.[76] This ballad suggests the supernatural element faded to little more than a common curse as local protest shifted from the imaginary to the real. With the subsequent burning-down of the factory being portrayed as the restoration of popular justice, mention of the Devil again posited him as a force for moral good.[77] Despite the supposed secularisation of nineteenth-century urban society these ballads point to a continuing desire for divine justice, at least in terms of a satisfyingly cathartic fictional ending. As previously suggested, this may be due to the fact that street ballads in both Manchester and Norwich tended to reflect a very low opinion of the efficiency and honesty of human law and its urban enforcers.[78]

There are distinctions between ballads' uses of supernatural tropes in Norwich and Manchester. Norwich balladeers used such metaphors to promote local calls for social justice, presumably with the knowledge that the city dwellers who read them were willing to accept and even enjoyed thinking with such tropes. This is far less common in Manchester where, as we have seen, ballad protest was usually more direct and more firmly focused on harsh realities. People had little need to resort to voicing discontent through metaphorical supernatural characters when a perceived injustice could be countered by burning a factory to the ground.[79] Nor did ghosts tend to perform the same

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[76] 'Grimshaw's Factory Fire' in Harland, *Ballads and Songs*, pp. 203–04.
[77] Proof that the gap between balladeer and audience could be very narrow and that they could speak directly for plebeian views is demonstrated by Lucas, the Gorton handloom weaver who created this ballad. Unable to write, others appear to have set his rhymes down to music. That it chimed with workers' sentiments is indicated by the fact that it was regularly reprinted by Manchester's ballad dealers. See Harland, *ibid*.
[78] For ballad criticisms of city watchmen's brutality and police ineptitude see 'The Charlie in a Hobble', *Norwich Songs*, vol. 2, p. 139, and 'The Pranks of the Ghost', vol. 4, p. 80.
[79] For the frequent burning down of Manchester's factories, not all of them necessarily due to arson, see Axon (ed.), *Annals of Manchester*.

function in Manchester's ballads. Rather than serving as a voice for collective moral outrage they were usually employed as a humorous way of mocking an individual, one who had often been perceptually deceived by being under the influence of alcohol. As seen in Chapter 3, regional self-image and identity may have also been an influential factor here. Mancunians, perceiving themselves as possessing a pragmatic and no-nonsense character, seemed less comfortable with using the supernatural to articulate protest, preferring instead to marginalise and contain it through humour and specific mitigating circumstances such as drunkenness.[80]

These differences, while real, risk imposing a false sense of unified cultural responses on the part of particular cities. Given its smaller size and population, Norwich's street ballads could collectively address themselves to 'Norwichers' in a way Manchester's ballads tended not to. The latter's rapid expansion in the three decades prior to the 1840s had resulted in a more conscious fragmentation into distinct districts and it took an emerging civic culture and the development of the 'Manchester Man' cultural ideal to go some way towards reformulating these into a coherent amalgamation in which, regardless of class or particular locality, those who lived in the city could all view themselves as Mancunians.[81] While Manchester's spatially segregated social structures may have encouraged a stronger sense of local solidarity these communities were far from homogenous or rigid. Fredrick Engels' *Conditions of the English Working Class* famously presented Manchester as conforming to what the Chicago School of urban sociologists later referred to as a concentric ring formulation, with a central business district hub surrounded by factories, mills, and the homes of the workers employed there, and an outer ring of the more affluent dwelling in the growing suburbs.[82] Yet these rigid delineations clearly sought to associate socio-spatial division with emerging class consciousness. The reality lacked such neat precision.

Manchester's wealthiest citizens had started to migrate to the town's rural fringes from the 1790s and while this had gathered pace by 1840 it only became a sustained development after 1870. Prior to this Manchester's districts retained far greater social heterogeneity than

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[80] See for example 'Dean Church Ghost! A Recitation', Pearson Ballad Collection, vol. 1, p. 158, 'Teddy's Ghost', *Pearson Ballad Collection*, vol. 3, p. 381, and 'The Boggart o' Gorton Chapelyard' in Harland, *Ballads and Songs*, pp. 536–39.

[81] See Messinger, *Manchester*, pp. 173–77, and Gunn, *Public Culture*. For the classic literary portrayal of the 'Manchester Man' ideal see G. Linnaeus Banks, *The Manchester Man* (Sheratt & Son, London, 1876).

[82] Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England*, pp. 85–87.

Engels suggested. Previously 'middle class' areas such as Ardwick Green and Greenheys gradually witnessed the encroachment of working-class elements, which pushed the affluent further out towards Didsbury and Altrincham by the 1870s. The result of this was that Greenheys became a district which contained 'wealth and poverty, respectability and vice'.[83] Such communities were internally riven by a rich social sub-strata of small tradesmen, artisans, factory operatives, and casual labourers. Ethnically and religiously divided between English Anglicans and dissenters and predominantly Irish Catholics, communities frequently contained opposing views on moralised issues such as temperance while their responses to the supernatural could obviously range from fervent belief to extreme scepticism. At best such communities represented a contingent, relational dynamic that could align or diverge depending on the issues in question.[84] In such circumstances the idea of a coherent sense of community may have become problematic, its spatial formulation less a bounded expression of local identity and more a battlefield for intra-communal tensions. Regardless of individual stances on the supernatural, these multiple divisions further prevent street ballads from being interpreted as straightforward examples of cohesive 'hidden transcripts' at the communal level.

Expressions of local criticism through magical practices can be found but are far less frequent. A satirical piece in *The Monitor* in July 1879 focused on a forthcoming election in Portsmouth's St. Paul's ward. The journalist claimed to practice astrology and had supposedly drawn up horoscopes for three of the candidates to predict who would win. Through this conceit he was able to be highly critical of the prospective candidates. Of one candidate called Baker he claimed:

The position of the Sun makes him proud and ambitious … and Mercury being afflicted deprives him of those brilliant and conspicuous mental abilities which are necessary to enable any man to attract public admiration … Venus … has kept this person from the necessity of vulgar toil or trade … Had he been in trade, or worked at the artisan's bench, and so become known to the

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[83] See Scola, *Feeding the Victorian City*, p. 32, and Gunn, *Public Culture*, p. 39. See also *Manchester City News*, 18 November 1871.

[84] Portsea's four 'towns' similarly retained a far richer social mixture than Father Dolling's over-simplistic interpretation suggested. Landport residents who would have been expected to have middle-class affiliations with those of a similar economic rank in Old Portsmouth or Southsea frequently demonstrated loyalty to the poorer neighbourhoods in which their small businesses were based and upon whose custom they depended. Artisan terrace housing could be found in bourgeois Southsea just as plebeian Landport possessed middle-class villas, thus complicating class-based notions of urban spatial division. See Field, 'Wealth, Style of Life and Social Tone', pp. 99–100.

people, they would have had more confidence in him … [I]f he lives to be a very old man, he will perhaps succeed in being elected. But this time, I fear he is doomed to disappointment.[85]

The influence of the Sun was similarly cited as a cause of the second candidate's over-ambition, causing the journalist to again predict failure. He suggested electoral success awaited Buckell, the third candidate, who was supposedly aided by the good fortunes of Jupiter. One can only speculate how far such 'predictions' were believed and to what extent such a tongue-in-cheek piece influenced subsequent voting patterns.

The use of magical practices as a vehicle for criticism tended to find more frequent expression when voicing national concerns. A Norwich ballad, *The Benefits of Mesmerism*, criticises politicians through Queen Victoria's need to resort to mesmerism to rule effectively. It is representative of street literature's strong undercurrent of mockery and disrespect towards politicians which contrasted sharply with a general respect for the monarchy, particularly Victoria. At first there is malicious fun in mesmerising the Duke of Wellington so that he can have several inches cut from his nose. She also has all the cabinet ministers put to sleep because 'if they keep awake, next session of Parliament much mischief they'll make'. The Queen then instructs the mesmerist to put Prince Albert to sleep, thus costing her less to keep him. While mesmerism is the tool it is not supernatural entities but Queen Victoria who becomes the spokesperson and liberator of the poor. Having dealt with the politicians she turns on a trembling Poor Law Commissioner and asks, 'what says she have you done to this nation, besides keeping my people at the point of starvation?' before having him mesmerised too. The closing stanza makes the ballad's tongue-in-cheek stance on mesmerism clear, summing up with:

> To cure our Grievances 'tis a famous good plan;
> And as for Poor People from grumbling to keep,
> Mesmerise the whole batch of them and send them to sleep.[86]

Here mesmerism is used in the sense of a surgical procedure, a means of disconnecting the patient from pain as it was believed capable of doing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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[85] 'Election Horoscopes', *The Monitor*, 19 July 1879, p. 449.
[86] 'The Benefits of Mesmerism' in *Norwich Songs*, vol. 4, p. 94. For the continuing use of witchcraft tropes in expressing collective concerns and anxieties, in this case about central government's policies, see the satirical print *Political Drama No. 17: State Witches Laying a Spell over the Country*, People's Museum Archive, Manchester, hereafter PMA ref. PDB/NMLH. Portraying five politicians as witches flying on one long broom, a farmer below declares they have cast 'their Whiggish spells o'er the country'.

The satire is broad ranging, using mesmerism to solve political debate, injustice to the poor and, ultimately, to silence the grumbling multitudes themselves. This mid-century ballad capitalised on the renewed interest in mesmerism in the 1830s and 1840s, portraying it as an effective tool for a conservative revolution in the hands of the Queen as she removes the squabbling representatives of a limited parliamentary democracy and establishes herself as a benevolent absolute monarch. However, one should not place too much weight on the opinion of any one ballad. Magic and the supernatural were both the butt and tool of satire, and while mesmerism can be read as a corrective force for good here, in other Norwich ballads it was roundly condemned as a fraud and an excuse to publicly molest women.[87]

Social protest found further expression through the temporal aspects of the magical imagination, most obviously prophetic dreams. The impact of the French Revolution on the popular imagination, coupled with the social impact of emerging industrialisation, urbanisation, and periodic rounds of cholera epidemics from the 1830s all helped stir prophetic and even apocalyptic speculations in the first half of the nineteenth century.[88] While ballads' visions of the past implicitly criticised the present through a glaze of nostalgia these discontents found more explicit form in imagined futures. As with ghost ballads, ballads about prophetic dreams offered a means of highlighting social injustices, a way of gauging present failings against future visions of plebeian utopias. Despite these negative elements they tended to be overwhelmingly positive, expressing not only plebeian aspirations but also a wildly energetic joviality. Frequently tipping over into the absurd these manifestations of the carnivalesque envisioned a world where laws of reason and order have been abolished. As such these dreamed futures usually rejected notions of the 'modern' associated with logic and social inequalities arising from capitalist industrialisation.[89]

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[87] See for example 'The Adventures of Paddy O'Brien; or The Humbug off Mussel', and 'The Adventures of Paddy O'Brien; or 'Mesmerism No Go', *Broadside Ballads and Songs,* NHC ref. 821.04 [OS], pp. 14 and 16. Many street ballads reflected a sceptical attitude towards magic. See for example 'The Young Men and Girls of the Period', *Pearson Ballad Collection*, vol. 1, p. 30, 'Old Women's Sayings!', *Madden Collection*, vol. 21, no. 205, and 'A Choice Pennyworth of Wit', vol. 2, no. 133.

[88] For biblical and apocalyptic associations with the urban see Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, pp. 46–51.

[89] While principally addressing social and political concerns the nature of these prophetic leaps into the future tacitly subverted the temporal hegemony considered in Chapter 3. For explicit discontent with the increasingly rigid temporal regimes engineered through clocks, bells, and factory whistles see the ballad 'The Factory Bell', *Madden Collection*, vol. 18, no. 1298. For magic's oppositional formulation to clock-based modernisation see Perkins, *Reform of Time*.

Importantly such wondrous changes were sometimes imagined to be both imminent and dramatic. An 1849 Preston ballad, 'Prophecy for 1850', predicted that in the following year 'the free hall is going to fall, believe me it's no fable, and legs of mutton from the clouds will fall upon the table'. Fantasies of abundance, particularly food, were a pronounced element of such ballads, with this one also predicting that 'morning and night they'll have fat cakes, the frying pans will flourish, with mutton chops and good beef steaks, their stomachs for to nourish'.[90] In the carnivalesque tradition these feasts seem to be public affairs, a 'banquet for all the world' which stands in innate opposition to what Bakhtin terms the 'private "chamber" feast' of bourgeois culture. This does more than just draw passive dichotomies between social stratas. In a utopian context of abundance the banquet is a celebration of a victory over existing hardships.[91] Imagining actions that alluded to customary humiliation of authority figures one stanza predicted, 'if any landlord call for rent upon a Monday morning, His tenants shall be authorised without a moment's warning, To strip him naked to the skin in any sort of weather. Daub him with tar from head to foot, and cover him with feathers'.[92]

Some prophetic ballads looked farther into the future. The narrator's dream of the future in 'A Prophecy for 1973' depicts an anarchic utopia in which there are no laws, nor magistrates to fine men 'Ten Bob and Costs' if they have been on a drinking spree, the last a rebuke to those many pieces of street literature which promoted an anti-alcoholism message. Claiming that 'everyone will be rich, there will be no need to beg', the familiar issues of inequality of wealth, provision of food, and aid for those in need are once again stressed here. In these imagined future societies ordered by the lower classes, their liberated chaos inversely illustrated the nature of the real constraints under which they daily lived in the present.[93]

The carnivalesque prophecy offered two modes of reimagining the social hierarchy. One, playing with parody and mockery, sought to turn the world upside down. Such a notion was directly referred to in an 1848 Norwich ballad entitled *Signs of the Times!*. It recounts how Monsieur Airagustor, the 'French prophet', had proclaimed that in 1849 'the

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[90] 'Prophecy for 1850', *Madden Collection*, vol. 18, no. 1176.
[91] See Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, pp. 276, 278, and 283. For the symbolic importance of the banquet in folk culture see pp. 278–302.
[92] 'Prophecy for 1850', *Madden Collection*, vol. 18, no. 1176.
[93] 'A Prophecy for 1973', *Baring-Gould Collection*, p. 604. For supernatural ballads with anti-alcoholism messages see 'Railroad to Hell' in Hindley, *Curiosities of Street Literature*, p. 33.

great and the noble will take the place of the humble and lowly' while new legislators will be drawn from 'what can now be called the Dregs of the People'. It went on to declare that before the year ended great changes would provide 'the working classes [with] a most astonishing amelioration of their condition', allowing the country to 'again assume the denomination of 'Merry England'.[94] Written in the year in which Europe was swept by revolutions, when the Chartists mustered their last great show of strength at Kennington Common, and a renewed cholera epidemic ravaged English cities it is little surprise that Airagustor's frequently apocalyptic prophesy explicitly invoked the rhetoric of class struggle. Yet more frequently expressed in these 'prophetic' ballads was the complete negation of a hierarchical system through fantasies of plenty for all. Humorous excess enabled the imaginative slackening of the shackles of seriousness associated with the present, with existing power structures and reality. In merely imagining the social order in a different way there was the suggestion of resisting submission to accepted 'norms'. While it is hard to assert the consciousness of such acts the very fact that alternatives could be conceived implied that existing structures and authorities were not 'natural' but arbitrary.[95] In such ballads the 'magical' element of the visionary, prognosticative dream was merely the means for enabling the setting-up of a narrative of the future which implicitly or explicitly served to critique the present. It was not necessary that the ghost had actually existed or that the narrator had really had a prophetic dream. These motifs did not require veracity to allow them to perform their function of fantasised resistance. As such they reflect the antinomial tensions and paradoxes considered in previous chapters, being both intrinsically powerful and at the same time knowingly employed as a feign, simultaneously escaping the realities and injustices of the present while condemning them from an imagined temporal stance in the future.

This criticism and rebellion was at its most severe in a prophetic Manchester ballad entitled 'Dialogue and Song, between Captain Swing and Joan o'Greenfield, on the Burning of both Houses of Parliament'. Joan o' Greenfelt (or John of Greenfield) was a traditional folklore character of northwest England while Captain Swing was essentially a newly created folkloric figure of southern England in the 1830s. In this ballad these two characters discuss the imagined scenario of how

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[94] 'Signs of the Times!', *Norwich Songs*, vol. 2, p. 18.
[95] For more on this see Scott, *Domination*, pp. 166–72, and also B. Babcock (ed.), *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1978).

Swing will set fire to the Houses of Parliament, barring the doors so that the politicians could not escape. Repeating the idea of diabolical forces reasserting justice that we have seen in ballads addressing local concerns, Swing declares the death of the politicians would have been 'no bad job', and while they 'would have been for giving him the slip if they could, … [The Devil] knows his subjects pretty well'. As a prompt to the moral right of Swing's massacre the ballad imagines that people came running to see parliament burn. With familiar reference to social injustice the song at the bottom of the ballad stated that Parliament had ruined the nation and turned Englishmen into slaves. Yet it concludes with an optimistic prediction for the common people, promising 'Our RIGHTS we shall get back again, our LIBERTIES then we will maintain, by this great conflagration'.[96] Again a popular sense of the apocalyptic and the utopian lies just below the surface of this striking ballad which combines the vicarious destruction of government, an invocation for the Devil to take politicians' souls, and the redress of the moral balance as a result. Through association with secular rebels such as the imaginary Captain Swing and more iconic supernatural ones such as the Devil readers could imaginatively indulge in visions of a world restored from its current inversion.

If ballads were good for thinking and talking with they were also good for laughing with. In the nature of the carnivalesque supernatural and prophetic ballads played at the boundaries of the comical and serious, toying with belief and non-belief as they wove the supernatural into the mundane concerns of nineteenth-century urban society. Street ballads were first and foremost a cheap form of urban entertainment and we risk distorting that basic fact if we attempt to overburden them with an abundance of solemn social meaning. Such interpretations fly in the face of their jovial tone and ephemeral nature. Yet it is exactly those obvious carnivalesque resonances that encourage such a reading. These mocking, satirical, and occasionally seditious narratives promoted a beguiling spell that toyed with the notion that the immoral rich could be lambasted by the supernatural and the poor could vicariously voice opposition to local and national hardships. Just

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[96] 'Dialogue and Song between Captain Swing and Joan o' Greenfield, on the Burning of both Houses of Parliament' (n.d) in *Ballads*, Manchester Central Library ref. MS F821.04 B25, p. 47. See also Joyce, *Visions*, pp. 239–40. Similar sentiments are expressed in the 1831 satirical print, *The Causes of the Present State of the Nation* (PMA ref. NMLH 1993.372.42). It depicts the Devil rising from the ground in a cloud of brimstone to seize a tax collector. For anthropological studies of the use of magic in challenging hegemonic control and expressing social criticism see Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, and M. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

as masked revellers in eighteenth-century London's masquerades had been liberated from their psychological, moral and social constraints by their disguise so supernatural tropes arguably operated in a similar way, the ghosts of ballads and local rumour being appropriated as collective masks.[97] That very choice of 'disguise' violated the boundaries of rationality that dominant discourses of modernisation strived to erect, rendering supernatural tropes and their uses innately transgressive. While often presented as having become diminished in the nineteenth century these expressions of the magical carnivalesque were potentially more subversive than earlier forms of carnival which had usually been bounded by an unavoidable element of institutionalisation, even if it was defined by nothing more than its specified timing, location, and the unspoken agreement that the established world order would be restored when it ended. Compared with this traditional carnivalesque liberation the supernatural manifested itself with far greater spontaneity and unruly unpredictability.[98]

Conclusion

The supernatural was a tool which helped starkly animate and dramatise perceptions of social and moral divides in nineteenth-century English cities. Given the rich social sub-strata within the urban lower and middle classes the portrayals of a Manichean worldview of honest plebeians and their corrupt, immoral exploiters was undoubtedly false but, like the bourgeoisie's own binary conceptions, nevertheless appealing in its simplicity. The ghosts, devils, and prophetic dreams explored here were all expressions of optimism and mockery which provided means of coping with urban hardships. This then was not mere escapism but a means of talking about and constructing a shared sense of social realities through the fantastical. It refutes Malcolm Gaskill's assertion that fantastical tropes lost their power as they became understood as metaphors for even when employed in this knowing way the supernatural remained a source of subaltern empowerment, albeit one that was compromised by its imaginary nature.[99] Communities invested these tropes with the power to order, critique, or vicariously strike back against those elements of urban life deemed to be exploitative or unjust. Yet the imaginary means through which these communal perceptions and opposition were articulated changed little in reality. The deceptive

[97] For masquerade as a symbolic means of expressing suppressed behaviours see Castle, *Female Themometer*, p. 97.
[98] See Scott, *Domination*, pp. 175–78.
[99] Gaskill, *Crimes and Mentalities*, p. 310.

sense of having registered a collective protest against urban power relations simultaneously led to their continued accommodation.

Any real changes took place at the perceptual rather than the political level, though the former arguably impacted on the latter. The moralised social dichotomy that was repeatedly articulated in these ballads helped reinforce the external boundaries of such groups by contributing to their sense of collective affiliation in opposition to others. Of course one should not assume loosely formulated communities that were held together by their shared supernatural narratives either could or did exist in a state of constant oppositional belligerence. The supernatural was *not* incorporated as an innate part of their identity and plebeian urban communities could certainly not claim exclusive ownership of its cultural tropes. Rather it served as a cultural vocabulary, a dialogue through which new migrants could find they spoke a similar language of the fantastical as the communities they were entering. Articulated through ballads, such ideas could temporarily speak for the concerns of those communities. Of course the diverse reception of the supernatural at the personal level meant such tropes could just as likely prompt a divisive, senseless babble formed from a spectrum of responses ranging from genuine belief to sceptical dismissal, but this was arguably overridden by a collective appreciation of the underlying messages these supernatural vehicles were frequently delivering.

The magical imagination enabled people to sketch out a loose but consciously affiliated communal identity that was simultaneously diffused and tenacious. From this localised perspective the idea of a collective working class seems to have been little more than an amorphous notion that surrounded a harder core of communal identity.[100] As a largely unanalysed assumption it was more often informed by older, moralised perceptions of differences between work and wealth than formulated in explicit terms of conflicting class interests. The evidence explored in this chapter grants considerable merit to the view that the creation of a broad sense of class as a larger, self-conscious, imagined community beyond one's locality was a far slower and more cumulative process than we have been led to believe. Into the late nineteenth century these cities

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[100] See L. Jon, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2002) and B. Doyle (ed.), *Urban Politics and Space in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Regional Perspectives* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007). The reality of and strong affiliation with one's local urban communities was best reflected in their response to the Boer War and the First World War. See for example B. Beaven, *Imperial Citizens: The City, Popular Culture and Empire in England, 1870–1939* (Manchester University Press, forthcoming), and H. McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

suggest that for the majority of the plebeian population the first and foremost unit of identification beyond the family remained the neighbourhood community. As such the socio-psychological functions of the magical imagination necessarily encourage us to revise stereotypical notions of modern urban relationships founded on explicit class tensions on the one hand, and anonymity and atomisation on the other.

6   Magical memory mapping

On 13 July 1833, lightning struck the thatched roof of the Black Tower, Butter Hills, Norwich during a severe thunderstorm. The tower, the upper storey of which was used by a society of amateur artisan astronomers to conduct astronomical observations, was utterly consumed by fire and the society's valuable apparatus was destroyed when it was thrown out the window. The event proved memorable, the *Norfolk Chronicle* recording that 'the appearance of the blazing tower on the old city wall, the lightning's glare at intervals on the faces of the assembled multitude on the hill and on the slope between Ber Street and King-street gates, with the thunder's roar altogether formed a scene of awful grandeur, and ever and anon of indescribable brilliancy'.[1]

Such an elemental sight seems to have fixed the event in the popular memory, and it was aided in this by a gradual transformation towards the magical. While initially reported as used by a group of astronomers, later accounts came to refer to a single 'planet-reader', a term commonly applied to astrologers. By 1885 it was being claimed that a large telescope used by Gooch, 'the famous planet-reader', had been placed on the summit of the tower for *astrological* purposes and it was this which had drawn the lightning to the building.[2] The line between astrology and astronomy easily blurred in the popular imagination since both required a knowledge of the stars, astronomy being as likely to encourage 'superstitious amazement' as its more overtly magical counterpart.[3] The transformation from a freak accident to a tale of dangerous magic may have originated from the poor transmission of the facts over time, but the aura of the magical certainly enhanced the memory of events.

This chapter focuses on the way nineteenth-century urban dwellers adjusted to their changing physical environment through the use of such magical or supernatural narratives. Modernising cities possessed

[1] *Norfolk Chronicle*, 13 July 1833.
[2] Varden, 'Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore', p. 94.
[3] Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 166.

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a seemingly contradictory quality. While the emergence of distinctive symbols of civic culture such as town halls, assembly rooms, theatres, libraries, key thoroughfares, and parks encouraged the illusion of planned and ordered growth, nineteenth-century urban centres long retained an organic quality, with older mazes of courts and streets creating 'pockets of mystery and invisibility' within the known city.[4] As late as the 1890s Father Dolling, whose ministry was located in Landport, one of Portsmouth's poorest parishes, emphasised the sense of an enclosed and concealed local community within the wider town. Describing his parish as 'a curious little island in this great town of Portsmouth', he noted how his community was firmly circumscribed by identifiable bounds: 'The Unicorn Road, leading to the dockyard, the Edinburgh Road, leading to Portsea, and the Commercial Road … form a kind of irregular square, with the Dockyard wall as a base.' Emphasising the community's insular, hidden existence within the larger population, he added that were it not for the fact that another of its streets was a key thoroughfare between the Dockyard and the workers homes 'we should be almost an unknown spot'.[5] Urban growth may not have been as dramatic, sustained, or total as we have come to assume but even more modestly paced developments equated to a relative loss of knowledge, understanding, and thus control over one's environment.

While the previous two chapters explored the construction of social boundaries as a response to this socio-psychological experience of urban growth this chapter explores a slightly different application of the magical imagination. Taking urban spatial theorists' emphasis on the street as not just a visual setting but rather as an influential factor shaping urban experiences it considers how supernatural narratives enabled spatial mapping, temporal transgressions, and communal reclamations of parts of the city. For Michel de Certeau, pedestrians created their own private 'stories' of the city by their informal wandering, their short cuts or scenic perambulations transgressing the logical coherence of what he termed the 'concept city', that is the city as set out in maps and plans which sought to determine spatial order via architectural arrangements.[6] Exploring the way that nineteenth-century urban

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[4] Cavallaro, *The Gothic Vision*, p. 32. See Dennis, *Cities in Modernity* for an engaging study of what made the modernising city 'modern'.

[5] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, pp. 9 and 10.

[6] See Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. For more on the value of everyday practices as a means of negotiating and understanding the city and society see M. Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life* (London, 2000), and G. Seigworth, 'Banality for Cultural Studies', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2000), pp. 227–68. For its historical applications see Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, L. Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and*

dwellers were active consumers of urban space, not its passive subjects, this chapter will consider supernatural narratives as akin to a mental form of perambulating which reimagined the city into new configurations. Certeau's ideas of the 'concept city' and the resistance to it inherent in everyday practices resonate with Henri Lefebvre's interpretation of urban space. Certeau's expressions of urban systematisation from 'above' reflect what Lefebvre terms 'representations of space', but it is the latter's notion of 'representational space' as something subjectively invested with alternative, subversive, and even oppositional readings to more official spatial orderings which underpins the focus of this chapter. 'Representational space' is conceived as physical space which the urban imagination appropriates and reinterprets by 'making symbolic use of its objects'.[7] Reconceiving the city in this way inclines it towards fragmentation, breaking up its topography by imbuing certain features with alternative meanings. Unlike Georg Simmel's 'metropolitan man', who sought to protect himself from the onslaught of nervous stimulation by shutting out much of the urban experience, the magical imagination's more robust communal formulation enabled it to seek imaginative engagement with Lefebvre's 'representational space' in a way the supposedly fragile individual could not.[8]

Although the operation of imagined urban communities has already been considered in previous chapters, this one requires a slightly more subtle appreciation of how we should conceive them. At the experiential level urban communities were formed from the connection with and interrelation between local spaces and the imagined (and imaginative) relations they fostered.[9] Rather than reflecting an atomised urban social existence the magical imagination informed a different order of urban sociability situated between the poles of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*. While based around a more diffused sense of association these communities were not 'modern' in the classic urban sociological sense but were nevertheless finding new ways of binding themselves together. Nineteenth-century urban communities were essentially 'narrated communities', communities not exclusively defined by their physical location within the city but ones that were nevertheless perceived through a narrated spatial experience of the city. It was the collectively imaginative means and codes of such narratives by which groups formulated and sustained themselves within those urban spaces. To

Images in Nineteenth-century London (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000), and Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity*, p. 7.

[7] See Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, and *Production of Space*.

[8] See Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', pp. 174–85.

[9] See Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, pp. 15–16.

view community as merely a spatial formation around which the city changed, leaving it an island of 'backwardness', is too narrow a conceptualisation. Rather, overlaying interrelations formed through local economic ties and social networks was a more nebulous web of cultural custom and exchange, one not based on g*emeinschaft* notions of mutual dependence but of shared narrated knowledge resources, resources that were traded voluntarily rather than at the dictates of neighbourly need. It was a form of communal sociality, but certainly a more fluid one than Tonnies' notions of community.

This chapter examines the mental mapping constructed by nineteenth-century urban dwellers, maps that retained not only a city's spatial dimensions but also its changing temporal existence.[10] Considering how these maps informed a range of communal responses to the developing urban environment it firstly explores the imaginative mapping of sites in the contemporary city. It then considers how retaining memories and narrative maps of the past city carried implications of resistance to its current development, a strong sense of localised associational identity offsetting changing urban configurations and their attendant potential to disrupt collective memories.[11] Finally it examines how an alternative interpretation of urban topography supplemented the city's dour functionalism while reclaiming sites within it. As in the last two chapters, these functions of the magical imagination intertwined elements of orientation, adaptation, and resistance to nineteenth-century urbanisation. At the same time it continues to question the extent to which historical realities support the idea of modern urbanisation as defined by upheaval, detachment, and fragmentation, a vocabulary of rupture informed by and seemingly intrinsic to the assertions of an ideological modernity.

Rereading the city: space

Urban space was never neutral, and, as seen in the last chapter, the nineteenth-century city possessed an element of social zoning, albeit one that was not as clearly defined as some commentators advocated. Given that urban expansion was sporadic rather than constant, concentrated in different decades of the century in different towns and

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[10] The existence of such maps was suggested by R. J. Morris. See Morris and Rodger (eds.), *The Victorian City*, p. 43.

[11] This engagement with the city as embodying multiple perceptual rereadings and as a site for memory formulation is best seen in Walter Benjamin's work. See for example *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London, Penguin, 2009), and *The Arcades Project*.

cities, it was arguably this socio-geographical segregation rather than an overt sense of urban sprawl which remained the dominant perception amongst urban dwellers. While conceptions of the modernising city have tended to foreground assertions of anonymity based on the sheer size of the urban conurbation it seems more likely that a sense of a lack of control over the urban environment arose from these longer traditions of communal division. Developing from the 'urban renaissance' of the eighteenth century, through into the construction of the public cultures of Victorian cities, one sees the invention of grand civic myths, narratives, and architectural symbols to help overcome this difficulty in evoking a shared historical consciousness within the city.[12] Yet alongside these overarching and supposedly inclusive 'top down' civic myths, segregated urban spaces also invoked more localised legendary narratives.

These narratives proceeded from the functional need to orientate oneself in the urban experience, their shared accounts, memories, and meanings helping to anchor individuals and local communities within the fabric of the city. Since most urban neighbourhoods only covered a relatively small number of streets, alleys, and courts it would only require a few of these potent supernatural mnemonic signifiers to foster a sense of a community's spatial identity and dimensions.[13] This did not arise solely in response to rapid growth as characterised by Manchester between the 1810s and 1840s and, to a lesser degree, Portsmouth from the 1860s. Even in Norwich's more evolutionary nineteenth-century transformation the physical city remained a text to be read, explored, and understood through tales.[14] While critics such as Lewis Mumford

[12] See Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, Gunn, *Public Culture*, T. Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2004), and Briggs, *Victorian Cities*.

[13] See Ellis, *The Georgian Town*, p. 110.

[14] Balshaw and Kennedy (eds.), *Urban Space and Representation*, p. 6. For more on the idea of the city as text see B. Highmore, *Cityscape: Cultural Readings in the Material and Symbolic City* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2005), N. Leach (ed.), *Hieroglyphics of Space: Understanding the City* (London, Routledge, 2001), G. Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London, Penguin, 1997), D. Frisby, 'The Metropolis as Text: Otto Wagner and Vienna's "Second Renaissance"', *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, vol. 40 (1998), pp. 1–16, and J. Donald, 'Metropolis: The City as Text' in K. Thompson, R. Bocock and S. Hall (eds.), *The Social and Cultural Forms of Modernity* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992), pp. 417–70. Conversely, Lefebvre has suggested that urban space 'is alive: it speaks', and as such it is less constrained than more literary or graphic accounts of the city such as maps and projects. See Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 42, and also R. Barthes, 'Semiology and the Urban' in N. Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London, Routledge, 1997), pp. 166–72, 168. The city then is not necessarily a text but a performance that exists, has influence, but can never be captured. The supernatural oral folktales explored in this chapter can be situated in this context.

may have dismissed the modernising city's eclectic architectural styles as representing 'the solidification of chaos', it was this very eclecticism that furnished the magical imagination with distinct landmarks upon which to fix and build its narratives.[15] As a means of mapping the local urban landscape supernatural accounts were located in the ongoing interplay between the physical configuration of buildings, spaces, and places, and the imaginative symbols, meanings, and fantasies that were woven about them. Shaped and shared between storytellers and their audiences, this body of communal lore brought a sense of comprehension to and influence over their local environment, reinforcing notions of communal continuity down through time.[16] As a strategy of spatial ordering, localised communities could draw upon a rich resource of supernatural tropes and narrative conventions that were familiar to all via oral and popular literary traditions.

While appreciating why communities may have told supernatural tales to one another we have to face the question of whether it was possible to create stable memory maps in an evolving cityscape, and, if so, how urban sites were highlighted and remembered through supernatural narratives. There was a long plebeian tradition of mapping tales onto the local environment as a means of memorising and ordering. During the early modern period the (rural) landscape had acted as a 'memory palace', with communities mnemonically storing collective, customary understandings of their locality through associations with prominent natural signifiers such as hills, trees, and rocks. While this investing of a considerable part of their collective identity in the landscape aided the perpetuation of shared knowledge the risk was that changes to the local environment effectively threatened the erasure of elements of local collective memory.[17] This would have arguably been intensified in the nineteenth-century urban environment, which was

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[15] Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, p. 201. Jacqueline Simpson has suggested that a key purpose of local legends is to grant the neighbourhood a certain 'glamour' by enveloping its more notable or unusual typographical features into memorable stories. See Simpson, 'The Local Legend', p. 27.

[16] See Finnegan, *Tales of the City*, pp. 178–79.

[17] Rollison, *The Local Origins of Modern Society*, p. 73. See also A. Wood, 'The Pedlar of Swaffham, The Fenland Giant and the Sardinian Communist: Usable Pasts and the Politics of Folklore in England, c.1600–1830' in F. Williamson (ed.), *Locating Agency: Space, Power and Popular Politics* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 161–92, N. Whyte, 'Landscape, Memory and Custom: Parish Identities c.1550–1700', *Social History*, vol. 32 (2007), pp.166–86, and for the classic study of memory theatres, F. A. Yates, *Art of Memory* (London, Routledge, 2010).

even more prone to ongoing alteration and erasure. Several histori-
ans have suggested that the constant reconstruction of towns meant
that physical and mnemonic reference points were continually being
changed and, according to David Vincent, even 'obliterated'.[18] Both
the pace and extent of these alterations would seemingly disrupt and
destroy a memory system dependent upon associations with familiar
topographical signifiers that maintained their assigned position.

However, as has been argued throughout this study, such statements
over-estimate the extent to which there was a rapid and continuous
wholesale transformation of the modernising city. In Portsmouth and
Norwich, change was generally more plodding, piecemeal, and spor-
adic. Writing in 1892, Walter Besant declared that in the 1860s The
Hard in Portsea 'was a place which seemed to belong to the previ-
ous century'.[19] This was echoed by William Gates in 1926 when he
described mid nineteenth-century Portsmouth as still resembling 'a
medieval fortress enclosed with moats and ramparts … [and] guarded
gates which were closed at night'. Only in the last third of the century
did it see more dramatic change, obtaining 'every modern improvement'
as it expanded across Portsea Island.[20] Even when the overall impres-
sion was one of great change in late nineteenth-century Portsmouth,
it was not a picture that would have been recognised by all inhabit-
ants. Father Dolling highlighted how the influence of modernising
changes in Portsmouth in the 1890s was far from ubiquitous. Noting
the building of the town hall and parks, the introduction of electric
lighting, the creation of schools, and initial efforts at slum clearance,
he concluded, 'all these changes have hardly affected our little dis-
trict', one in which 'every home had been built a hundred years ago'.[21]
Even Manchester did not witness changes in the way Vincent suggests.
Locals like Charles Roeder could record that few of Manchester's older
landmarks had been spared in its outlying districts but at the same time
the incursion of railways into the town supposedly stymied any desire
to develop new property in districts ghettoised by railway tracks, par-
ticularly in poorer areas like Ancoats.[22] J. R. Kellett has gone so far as

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[18] See Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity*, p. 119, and Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*,
    p. 25.
[19] Besant and Rice, *By Celia's Arbour*, p. 32.
[20] Gates, *Portsmouth in the Past*, p. 1.
[21] Dolling, *Ten Years in a Portsmouth Slum*, pp. 11 and 22. Others recognised the retarded
    pace of change in Landport. Despite the introduction of mains drainage by 1870
    parts of the area remained unchanged as late as 1914 when the district was still noted
    for its terrible living conditions. See Webb *et al.*, *Spirit of Portsmouth*, p. 88.
[22] See Roeder, 'Some Moston Folklore', p. 65.

to claim that in terms of urban improvement these areas had effectively become frozen in the 1830s, thus clearly refuting any notion of continuous transformation.[23]

Whatever the varying pace or extent of change in the nineteenth-century city, the urban environment was not itself anathema to the construction of mnemonic memory maps based on localised geographical features. In his pioneering study of the collective memory Maurice Halbwachs argued that homes and districts within cities were as effectively fixed in local memory as any natural feature in rural communities, suggesting that the urban milieu could indeed become a site for fashioning memory palaces.[24] More recently several historians have proposed that as growing cities including Manchester replaced natural points of reference such as hills and trees so urban dwellers increasingly orientated themselves via constructed ones such as streets, buildings, and squares.[25] Furthermore, David Vincent's statement about the inability to form urban memory maps also underestimates the imaginative capacity of local communities to remember without the aid of physical mnemonic reference points. While the existence of external signifiers was undoubtedly helpful, people were not completely reliant on them. To truly commit something to memory requires its internal encoding and one of the most effective means of doing this was by converting them into stories. Narratives' sequential elements encourage the easy mnemonic reconstruction of images and locations which enable both the retention and transmission of large amounts of information.[26] Physical reference points were a prompt to memory but the detail of association lay enfolded in the stories woven around them. Of key importance to the process of mnemonic encoding and retention was the power of concrete visual images and both specific urban locales and

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[23] See Kellett, 'The Railway as an Agent of Internal Change in Victorian Cities', p. 193, and also Roberts, *A Ragged Schooling*, p. 7.

[24] Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, p. 131.

[25] See Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, p. 113 and Messinger, *Manchester in the Victorian Age*, p. 10. See also Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World*, pp. 177–209, and, more generally, S. Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London, Harper Perennial, 2004).

[26] Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, p. 50. For the links between urban social theory, group identity, and storytelling see Finnegan, *Tales of the City*, N. Thrift, '"Us" and "Them": Re-imagining Places, Re-imagining Identities' in H. Mackay (ed.), *Consumption and Everyday Life* (London, SAGE Publications, 1997), pp. 159–212, J. Bruner and C. Fleisher Feldman, 'Group Narratives as a Cultural Context of Autobiography' in D. C. Rubin (ed.), *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 291–317, G. C. Rosenwald and R. L. Ochberg (eds.), *Storied Lives: Cultural Politics of Self-understanding* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992), and R. Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

the supernatural figures associated with them provided such images (in terms of the signifier 'ghost' even if specific details remained vague).[27] Supernatural urban folktales could therefore act as narrative forms of memory palaces which were not necessarily reliant upon the physical existence of the landmarks they alluded to.

If it were indeed possible to construct narrative-based memory maps in the urban environment one can see the value of employing the supernatural. Ghosts played particularly well to the visual memory, their disordering influence in the mundane creating a more intense awareness of a physical location and thus serving as the key trope that allowed for the memory's semantic reconstruction.[28] This 'supernaturalising' of space is seen in an incident of murder just outside nineteenth-century Manchester. On 16 July 1823, William Wood was travelling from Manchester to Whaley Bridge when he was attacked by three thieves and killed, his skull being driven into the ground with such force that it left a deep impression there. The body was removed but from then on no grass would grow in the hole and despite numerous attempts to fill it the stones and sods were always found nearby the next day. The hole, like the memory of what had occurred there, refused to be covered up or buried.[29] Breaches of the moral code and taboos relating to treatment of the dead frequently encouraged associations with the supernatural, and through this imaginative encrypting, memory of both deeds and locations were enhanced.[30]

This 'tainting' of space with moral association was most obviously seen at execution sites. Such locations possessed a psychic significance, imbued with the collective energies of the crowd, a reference site for moral justice and macabre memories. People were known to loiter at execution sites once the scaffold had been removed, attempting

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[27] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, pp. 26–27.

[28] Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, pp. 34–35. The construction of 'memory palaces' had long placed an emphasis on the ease of remembering 'the grotesque, comical, hideous or ridiculous'. See Harpur, *Philosopher's Secret Fire*, p. 212 and also Trodd, Barlow, and Amigoni (eds.), *Victorian Culture*, p. 66.

[29] Hole, *Traditions and Customs of Cheshire*, pp. 158–59.

[30] Tales of indelible bloodstains in rooms are perhaps most reflective of the way the supernatural was literally imprinted onto locations, retaining the memory of some breach of moral code, most frequently rapes and murders. However, I have found no such examples relating specifically to Manchester, Norwich, or Portsmouth. The closest to Manchester was the bloody handprint in the nearby Radcliffe Tower. See Baines, *Baines History of Lancashire*, vol. 2, pp. 434–36, and Goffin (ed.), *The Diaries of Absalom Watkins*, p. 13. For a bloody footprint variation at Bolton see Portland, *Around Haunted Manchester*, pp. 69–71. In Norfolk there were relevant stories in smaller urban locations such as King's Lynn and Cromer. See *Norfolk and Norwich Notes and Queries* (2nd series) (Norwich, 1899–1904), pp. 96 and 98–99, and Dixon, *Folktales and Legends*, p. 22.

to absorb 'the aura of the crime and punishment within themselves – through their feet, into their bones'.[31] As such, it is not surprising to find that execution sites gave themselves to memory formation through the supernatural. Following the hanging of Martha Alden at Norwich Hill on 31 July 1807, the people of Attleborough destroyed the house in which she had gruesomely murdered her husband, possibly representing a rather forlorn attempt to erase the 'tainted' site. Alden's ghost was said to haunt the site of her execution, and these rumours created such excitement in Norwich that groups of people gathered there to catch sight of her, eventually creating such disorder that the castle authorities had to arrest some of them.[32] Similar cases can be found in Kingston, a Portsmouth district undergoing urbanisation in the nineteenth century. It was claimed that the ghosts of murderers hanged near Kingston gaol 'flocked to satanic revels on Velder Heath'. As a result the path that linked Kingston churchyard, the gaol, and the heath was locally known as 'Deadman's Lane'. This persisted until 1830 when the road was improved and was given the less evocative name of St. Mary's Road.[33] Given the lingering tenacity of place names in local communal memory it is highly unlikely that this transition was as neat or as abrupt as written accounts suggest.

As indicated in these accounts, supernatural urban legends tended to be very specific about their physical location, giving the tales' fantastical elements much-needed plausibility by rooting them in the familiarity of known local surroundings, a technique drawn from or mimicked by contemporary street ballads that recounted tales of fictional urban ghosts.[34] Writing in 1882, Augustus Jessop suggested that the sites used in narrative mapping were dictated by having to focus on the old since people had seen each new house in their street constructed before them so that there were no mysteries, 'no old closets, dim passages, and cranky holes and corners' in which to deposit ghosts.[35] While this was not wholly true, it does partially explain a tendency to associate supernatural legends with older sites, not least because they were already distinguished from their surroundings by their relative antiquity. Both Norwich and Portchester (located at the top of Portsea Island) possessed imposing castles which, as old, visually dominant landmarks, generated tales of ghosts. Both were used as prisons in the nineteenth century, the former

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[31] Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree*, p. 73.
[32] Great Yarmouth Library ref. L398, *Norfolk Folk-lore Collection*, vol. 3, p.93–94.
[33] Anon., *Parish of Milton, Portsmouth*, p. 3.
[34] For example see Hindley, *Curiosities of Street Literature*, p. 138. See also Simpson, 'The Local Legend', p. 25.
[35] Jessop, 'Superstition in Arcady', p. 737.

being officially reconstructed as such, the latter housing French prisoners during the Napoleonic Wars. The Portchester ghost was described as 'a tall whitish object' that loitered in dark corners and it was suggested that it was the ghost of a former prisoner.[36]

Lingering religious superstitions blended with the architectural distinction of churches to make them one of the most common features associated with supernatural urban memory mapping. Local legends tended to cluster around buildings that were central to communal life such as taverns, churches, and graveyards, and any unusual statue, tomb, or architectural feature tended to prompt a fantastical tale.[37] These features were a perpetual stimulus to keeping the tale alive while also being cited as evidence of its veracity. This appeal to verifiable 'proof' suggests the accommodating of the supernatural within a more 'modern' mindset, buildings imbuing a discordant blend of supernatural metaphysics and empirical 'evidence'. According to local legend, when the Church of St. Michael was being built at Ashton-under-Lyne a mysterious woman appeared and told some card-playing workmen that if they turned up an ace she would pay for several yards of the steeple. They turned up the ace of spades and she complied. The nineteenth-century folklorist John Harland believed this tale arose from the steeple's unusual trefoil-shaped carved tracery, which resembled the ace of spades.[38] The importance of a particular site was also emphasised by a sub-genre of supernatural folklore associated with church construction. Burnley Church was originally intended to stand on the site of the old Saxon cross in Godley Lane but however much the masons built it there during the day, the following morning they would supposedly find their materials and scaffolding had been relocated to the site where it was eventually built.[39] Portsmouth Cathedral had a less specific, more ambient sense of the supernatural. Its bells were linked to a legend that stretched back to a Roman pharo or lighthouse at Dover Castle. In the middle ages a Norman official had had five bells hung in the pharo but whilst having his coat of arms engraved into the entrance there were sounds of phantasmal battle heard within the building. The bells were long treated with superstition on account of this disturbance.

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[36] Stevens, *Hampshire Ways*, pp. 133–34.
[37] Simpson, 'The Local Legend', pp. 28.
[38] Crosby, *Lancashire Dictionary of Dialect*, p. 7, and Harland and Wilkinson, *Lancashire Legends*, pp. 52–53.
[39] Axon, *Folk Songs*, p. 92. For other examples of supernatural labourers and the mysterious relocating of materials to the site where churches eventually stood see Bowker, *Goblin Tales*, p. 249 and 'Early Recollections of Middleton' in *News Cuttings*, MLA ref 942.72 M6), p. 58. John Roby collected such tales together under the chapter 'The Goblin Builders' in his *Traditions of Lancashire*.

Admiral Sir George Rooke eventually had them removed and brought to the church of St. Thomas a'Becket (later Portsmouth Cathedral) where the five bells were melted down and recast into eight new ones. While no similar ghostly accounts appear to have subsequently plagued the church the supernatural association lingered.[40]

Secular buildings and individual lanes were also mapped into the communal memory through supernatural associations. Unusually for an urban ghost, in Norwich a spectral stag or horse was said to have issued from a public house at St. Augustine's Gate.[41] In Portsmouth a more familiar anthropomorphic 'grey lady' haunted a house located near the King's Bastion, part of the town's defences and a location 'particularly favoured by ghostly visitants'.[42] The Old Blue Inn also stood in this vicinity. Popular with officers of the Royal Navy, this had been one of Portsmouth's key coaching houses prior to the advent of the railways, and it obtained additional local significance through its association with a ghost. Local legend told of an early nineteenth-century guest who had been forced to sleep in a double room though he had been promised the other bed would be unoccupied. Awoken during the night by noise outside, he was annoyed to find the landlady had placed someone else in the room. However, upon closer inspection the guest was horrified to find that the other occupant was the ghost of a sailor wearing rather antiquated clothing, his head bound in a bloodstained handkerchief. The sailor had supposedly died in a drunken brawl with some marines, his head having been split open by a blow from a pewter pot. The Old Blue Inn burned down in 1870 and, although it was subsequently rebuilt, the ghost disappeared with the original building. Despite this, and demonstrative of the power of narrative spatial mapping, local knowledge of the former inn continued in part due to this supernatural association.[43]

Parts of Manchester shared similar correlations in the popular imagination. In Gorton a particular cottage linked to Bridge House was locally known as the 'boggart house', a place where ghosts reportedly 'bred and swarmed'.[44] In Droylsden certain places were 'notorious as the rendezvous or favourite promenades of boggarts and feeorin', particularly 'th'owd Green Lone', a place conspicuously avoided by locals

[40] See Esmond, *Charm of Old Portsmouth,* pp. 39–40, and also Gates, *Free Mart Fair*, pp. 20–25.
[41] Gerish, *Norfolk Folklore Collection*, vol. 3, p. 88.
[42] Moutray Read, *Highways and Byways in Hampshire*, p. 351.
[43] See Gates, *Free Mart Fair*, p. 29, and D. A. Parr, *Ghosts of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight* (Derby, Breedon Books, 1997), pp. 73–75.
[44] *Newspaper Cuttings*, 1845–66 (MLA ref. F9427389 M1), p. 171.

after dark.[45] The supernatural virtually branded parts of the township into the collective memory through conflating the mundane and the fantastical, the result of which was to invoke a sense of spatial dissonance which aided mnemonic mapping. According to local legend, the spectral black hound that pursued a Manchester tradesman called Drabble from the Collegiate Church down Deans Street in 1825 was eventually laid beneath one of the arches of the old bridge that spanned the Irwell.[46] Emphasis was given to the fact that this exorcism occurred on the Salford side of the river. This hints at a distancing technique by Mancunians who sought to safely relocate the stigma of the supernatural across the town's natural boundary of the Irwell. It was one small way of mentally mapping a distinction between Manchester and Salford as they gradually blurred into one large conurbation. In a slightly different manner, one that was indicative of the urban community's acute awareness of its spatial environment, unoccupied urban spaces were inclined to be filled with stories of supernatural squatters, particularly ghosts.[47] Such accounts seemed to have derived from an unsettling sense of absence within the community's otherwise intensely active use of its local space. As Robert Roberts memorably recorded in his autobiography about growing up in a slum in Edwardian Manchester, 'few houses in our district stood vacant for longer than a fortnight before ghosts got in'.[48]

Supernatural folktales could also map associations between sites within the city and beyond, their narratives serving to link, organise, and relate disparate sites in the mind, a process akin to what De Certeau termed the operation of 'spatial syntaxes'.[49] In Norwich tales of the headless horseman drew mental connections between two distant locations. The legend of William Blennerhassett (or more evocatively, 'Old Blunderhazard'), the phantom horseman, had its narrative root in

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[45] See Higson, *Historical and Descriptive Notices of Droylsden*, pp. 67–68, and Harland, *Ballads and Songs of Lancashire*, pp. 536–39. While more commonly associated with frightening supernatural manifestations, some locations were mapped by their positive 'magical' qualities. In Didbury, Manchester, a well in Stenner Lane developed a reputation for possessing health-giving properties. Supplying nearby houses which were locally known as 'Old Folk's Corner', it was believed to grant longevity because so many of the residents who dwelt there 'lived to a good age'. Enhancing a belief in its magical properties, it was claimed that the water supply in Stenner Lane had never ceased to flow, being unaffected by drought and all but the harshest frost. See 'Well Dressing' in *Newspaper Cuttings*, MLA Box 537 (Custom and Folklore 3).

[46] Hardwick, *Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore*, p. 172. A similar creature, known as 'Skriker', frequented the Burnley neighbourhood. See p. 173.

[47] Davies, *The Haunted*, p. 47.

[48] Roberts, *A Ragged Schooling*, p. 148.

[49] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 115.

the collective memory of an intermarriage between wealthy Norfolk and Suffolk families. This union left Blennerhassett with Hassett Manor in Norwich and property in Barsham, near Beccles in Suffolk. One version of the legend had it that every Christmas Eve, just before midnight, the phantom horseman rode out from Barsham to Hassett's Tower (Cow Tower) in Norwich, returning to Barsham before dawn. In another version the route was reversed, the phantom horseman riding out from Hassett Manor in Norwich to 'the lone tower at Barsham'. Such tales show the popular imagination linking places beyond those visible or known within Norwich itself, in this case mapping and remembering features in a neighbouring county too.[50]

A slightly different legend around Manchester performed a similar function. On the major highways leading to Manchester were several 'plague stones' which had represented specific limits beyond which those within the area could not go so as to avoid spreading the plague. According to local legend one at Streford had been hurled nearly two miles from Castlefield near Manchester by the Giant Tarquin, two cavities in the rock supposedly being caused by the indentations of his finger and thumb. Another account claimed that it had been thrown there from the Old Bridge at Manchester, a way of both explaining the unusually large stone and simultaneously linking a bridge in Manchester with an outlying feature via legendary explanation.[51] Through supernatural and folkloric narratives people scored lines and drew imaginary associations between locations on their mental maps of the city and beyond, obtaining a sense, if not control, of at least vicarious influence and order over the urban environment.

Supernatural narratives were but one of many adaptive spatial strategies employed by nineteenth-century urban dwellers to locate themselves in their environment, and to isolate this single strand is to artificially detach it from a rich network of colloquial mnemonic techniques. Cheap street literature played a role in enriching the supernatural mapping of the city in the local memory. Manchester street

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[50] Gerish, *Norfolk Folklore Collection*, vol. 3, p. 98. Knights suggests that the phantom horseman was not William Hassett himself but rather his villainous half cousin, a soldier-adventurer known as 'Black Hassett', who was supposedly involved in the defence of Norwich against Kett's rebels and was decapitated by a scythe-wielding peasant. See Knights, *Norfolk Stories*, pp. 20–23. Since many of these legends were only recorded in the last quarter of the nineteenth century we have to consider that printed anthologies of local folklore may have artificially extended the distance over which people could map sites and stories, possibly even conflating similar tales in two distant locations into the opposing ends of a single route traversed by some restless phantom.

[51] See Harland and Wilkinson, *Lancashire Legends*, pp. 53–54.

ballads such as 'Dean Church Ghost! A Recitation' seemed to have had no grounding in the city's oral folklore but nevertheless reinforced an awareness of particular locations. This ballad recounts a drunkard's encounter with a ghost in the grounds of Dean Church one winter night. Interestingly in the context of spatial mapping, the ghost insists that the man 'Mark this spot … for here something awful has been done'. The drunkard marks it with a nightcap he had bought that day and when he flees home his route is clearly described, running up Snig Hill, crossing a bridge over the railway and on to Chorley Gardens. He awakes believing it was all a dream, except his nightcap is gone.[52]

Inn signs provided another mnemonic aid to urban spatial mapping. As late as 1907 the *Manchester Evening News* noted that 'we still keep to one old-fashioned landmark, and in some neighbourhoods it would really be difficult to obtain any coherent directions without the aid of various well-known hostelries'. Navigating the city by reference to public houses did not necessarily provide the most direct route but the paper assured readers that 'they will infallibly bring you to your destination'.[53] Inn signs also demonstrate how urban dwellers had long been used to orientating themselves using fantastical visual and semantic memory aids. Early nineteenth-century Norwich's streets were said to have been filled 'with blue boars, black swans, and red lions … flying pigs [and] hogs in armour'. Amongst others there was also 'The Green Dragon', 'The Mermaid', 'The Great Unicorn', and 'The Phoenix'.[54] Proverbs and adages were yet another form of mnemonic tool. A Norwich example included 'if you don't count the chimney pots when you first visit Norwich, you will have to pay homage to the shoe-makers', suggesting the need to locate oneself using visual signifiers.[55]

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[52] See 'Dean Church Ghost! A Recitation'. For a fantasised social investigation into one of the poorest areas of Manchester see Tomlinson, *Bye-ways of Manchester Life*, pp. 75–83. For a Norwich version of supernatural narrative mapping see the ballad 'Window Smashing in Norwich'. Norwich resident and author George Borrow 'created' a local legend relating to Norwich Castle in his novel *Lavengro*, claiming the castle hill was the burial mound of 'an old heathen king'. This was a local, literary adaptation of European-wide legends of sleeping saints or kings who will awaken at some fateful time in a nation's future. The question of whether Norwich castle mound was natural or artificial generated considerable debate among local antiquarians and this ambiguity seems to have encouraged, and been encouraged by, the legend promoted by Borrow. See G. Borrow, *Lavengro* (London, Oxford University Press, 1904), p. 99, NRO ref. MC1398/1, p.8, and *Norfolk and Norwich Notes and Queries* (Series 1 1896–1899), p. 232. For more on the interrelation between local folklore, oral, and print cultures see Fox and Woolf, *The Spoken Word*, p. 29.

[53] *Manchester Evening News*, 18 September 1907.

[54] See Knights, 'Some Old Inn Signs of Norwich', pp. 75–81.

[55] Dew, *Dyshe of Norfolke Dumplings*, p. 65. See also Andrews (ed.), *Bygone Norfolk*, p. 222, and Obelkevich, 'Proverbs and Social History', p. 45.

A proverbial saying relating to Ashton in Manchester declared, 'proud Ashton, poor people, ten bells, and an old crackt steeple'. It summarised the character of the locality (Ashton being renowned as a predominantly poor working-class district) but more interestingly it shows how proverbs could accommodate change and focus on unusual urban features. Ashton Church was damaged in a thunderstorm in January 1791 and the tower was rebuilt in 1820–1821. Clearly this proverb was relatively new in the nineteenth century, originating after the 1791 incident.[56]

These various mnemonic aids appear to have been so subtly interwoven into the actions and thoughts of everyday life as to be virtually invisible to historical records but it is within this vital yet seemingly ephemeral web of spatial memory techniques that the supernatural narratives considered above should be situated. In constructing these mnemonic frameworks they were implicitly, and perhaps during the telling of tales, explicitly, giving spatial dimensions to the communal boundaries explored in the previous chapter. While there has been a sociological emphasis on the atomising tendencies of modernising cities, the supernatural stories that circulated amongst the local populations of nineteenth-century Manchester, Norwich, and Portsmouth all indicate the persistence of communal ties constructed in part from a collective fantastical memory that imprinted itself onto the neighbourhood's buildings and spaces. Yet narrative memory mapping was not just a form of spatial orientation and adaptation to change. It also contained an element of resistance to that change, something most obviously articulated when one considers it from a temporal dimension.

Rereading the city: time

The passage of time was visible in the very fabric of the urban streetscape; the present city was always haunted by its past architecture in unending renewal. These temporal distinctions resulted in jarring juxtapositions of old and new. Older areas of Georgian towns long remained unchanged, their warren of streets often standing in marked contrast to the newer parts of town with their more linear streets and rows of housing.[57] With more recent developments intersecting earlier, more organic formations the conflation of past and present took both physical and narrative form. Mapping by temporal references complimented and informed attempts to map by topographical signifiers since past

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[56] Axon, *Lancashire Gleanings*, p. 365.
[57] Ellis, *The Georgian Town*, p. 100.

legendary associations further distinguished a place from its surrounding geography. Supernatural urban folk narratives helped maintain a collective memory of the past city as its older sectors were gradually reconfigured by or hidden behind the new. Such tales acted as mental vehicles that enabled access to the (imagined) past, and often to several different time periods simultaneously. Given this temporal transference and the imprinting of the past upon the present city it is little surprise to find that ghosts were the most frequently employed supernatural tropes in such accounts.

Just as we have wrongly come to assume that an atomised anonymity defined social relations in expanding modern cities so too have we become overly comfortable with the narrative of a dramatic pace of change that contributed to a sense of psychic and social dislocation for its inhabitants. In the English provincial cities and towns which form the focus of this study one sees a far more gradual, evolutionary rather than revolutionary change that gave urban dwellers plenty of time to accommodate themselves to the city's slow metamorphosis into 'modernity'. Writing about Portsmouth in 1959, Richard Edmonton believed the town in the 1890s had been closer to the spirit of 'Nelson's days' than it was to the 1950s, a view aided by the fact that ships from the Napoleonic Wars were still slowly rotting at the top of Portsmouth Harbour into the late nineteenth century.[58] As such the rhetoric of dynamic rupture and temporal dislocation appears to be more the product of an ideological modernity perpetuated by those who were attempted to shape a perception of the nineteenth century, and particularly its cities, as self-consciously 'modern'. The reality of a more pedestrian modernity suggests this was not the norm experienced by those living in Norwich, Portsmouth, or even Manchester.

Nineteenth-century cities were marked by their topographical schizophrenia, but their growth was not constant. Sporadic and specific urban developments such as slum clearances and the decision to build beyond medieval walls (in Norwich's case) or fortifications (in Portsmouth's case) undoubtedly swept away swathes of old buildings and medieval markets, yet while this changed certain localities others continued unaffected. Even when there were conscious attempts to modernise the urban environment, frequently as a result of public health issues in the second half of the nineteenth century, there was not a wholesale replacement of old for new. As seen in Chapter 3, the past was a

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[58] Esmond, *Charm of Old Portsmouth*, p. 64. For the broader cultural context of changing, 'modernising' ways of conceiving time and space in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*.

necessary foil for an ideological modernity's sense of self-definition and so representative landmarks of the past were often conserved 'as … a counterpoint to the truly modern'.[59]

Stories became a reservoir of memory of the city's transformation, with supernatural legends providing a way of mapping past significance upon sites in the present. Halbwachs suggested that to retain a sense of the past city amidst the physical changes that gradually transformed it people did not doggedly retrace the sequence of its alterations in reverse. Rather they retained a mental schematic of its general order and dimensions in the collective memory.[60] Urban folktales served to both preserve selective elements of that general plan and act as an imaginative vehicle by which people were mentally conveyed there. In doing so they helped offset a sense of a transitory present by seeking more meaningful communal associations rooted in the past.[61] In particular ghost stories could offer a sense of stability over time since the tales and their phantoms, both being simultaneously ephemeral and timeless, were untouched by the city's physical transformations. Evoked by storytelling, ghosts traversed the boundary between past and present with the same ease that they can penetrate spatial boundaries such as walls. The local ghost story not only connected past and present; it was an expression of the past *in* the present. This temporal conflation rendered urban sites into a palimpsest, serving as powerful memory aids to the city both as it was and as it had been.

In Portsmouth local legend surrounded memories of James Aitkens, better known as John or Jack the Painter, who notoriously tried to destroy the dockyard in 1776 by setting fire to the rope house. Following his execution his corpse was left to hang at the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour. While the remains were eventually taken down in the early nineteenth century the absence of the body did not stop the area where he had hung becoming associated with him in local memory. Blockhouse Point, at the mouth of Portsmouth Harbour, became locally known

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[59] Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, p. 113.

[60] Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, p. 123. See also A. Gell, *The Anthropology of Time: Cultural Constructions of Temporal Maps and Images* (Oxford, Berg, 1996). The fictional ordering of the city was perhaps best represented by the rise of the nineteenth-century urban detective story. See Dentith, *Society and Cultural Forms*, p. 118.

[61] For more on this see Finnegan, *Tales of the City*, pp. 175–76. See also Marcus, 'Past, Present and Emergent Identities'. Anthony Vidler has argued that modernity is accompanied by a sense of temporal anxiety, not so much about the past or future as the present. Yet his claims about temporal anxiety or estrangement seem overstated, the result of working within a grand narrative of generalised modernisation. In reality none of the three urban centres in this study witnessed the dynamic, abrupt, or absolute upheaval indicated by his assertions that the past was swept away. See Vidler, *Architectural Uncanny*, p. 5.

as 'Painter's Point' and 'soon gained an unenviable reputation as the haunt of ghosts and devils'.[62] 'Painter's Point' was distinguished by it being a lonely, uninhabited strip of land that jutted into the harbour. In 1878 Walter Besant claimed that the issue of whether this desolate place was haunted or not 'was not a fact open to doubt … Jack had been seen by a crowd of witnesses, respectable mariners, whose testimony was free from any tinge of doubt. It walked after nightfall … backwards and forwards, up and down the narrow tongue of land. It walked with its hands clasped behind its neck, and its head bent forward as if in pain', the result of its body having hung in chains for so many years.[63] As late as the 1870s older locals could still recall the blackened, featureless remains of Aitkens' body swaying in the gibbet, buffeted by the breeze.[64] While convicts' bodies were usually secretly removed by friends or family after a short time nobody came to remove the traitorous Jack the Painter and it was this prolonged period of being left there that firmly infused his memory with the Blockhouse Point.

Some urban folktales could retain the memory of several periods at once. Norwich's phantom horseman had its origins in the local memories of Robert Kett's rebellion in the city in 1549 whilst the ghost's demise was linked to urban redevelopment in the 1790s, the horseman disappearing once Bishops Gate Tower was demolished in 1791. Interestingly, the planned destruction of the city's medieval gates and other sites in the 1790s seems to have been motivated less by the demands of urban expansion and more by a desire of the city's corporation to generate symbolic statements of Norwich's advancing modernisation.[65] Hassett's Manor House, from where the ghost was said to originate, was also pulled down in 1792 to make room for a cavalry barracks. With the loss of these two sites in the 1790s the ghost was robbed of both the start and end of its traditional route. In this particular case the loss of past buildings through urban development meant an end to the ghost too, though the memory of both the phantom and the edifices were sustained by the tale. In Portsmouth there is evidence of local memory conflating hauntings from different periods on a single site. The Theatre Royal, which opened in Commercial Road in 1856, was built over an old racquet court which had previously been used for

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[62] Moutray Read, *Highways and Byways*, p. 347. See also Warner, *John the Painter*, p. 241, Besant and Rice, *By Celia's Arbour*, pp. 164–66, and Boase, *Folklore of Hampshire*, p. 165. An 1828 account relates a tale of how a group of sailors left his remains in a sack in a public house in Gosport.

[63] Besant and Rice, *By Celia's Arbour*, p. 165.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 166.

[65] Knights, *Norfolk Stories*, pp. 9–23. I would like to acknowledge my debt to Professor Andy Wood for his insight into Norwich's 1791 demolitions.

plays. These had eventually been stopped because actors complained that a ghost continually appeared when the troupe gathered on stage at the end of the play.[66] By the end of the century it was claimed that the Theatre Royal was also haunted, this time by an actor who had supposedly slit his throat in the 1880s. In this way memory of a former supernatural site reasserted itself; the taint could not be erased simply by building over it.[67]

In terms of temporal mapping, historical accuracy was not as important as emotional resonance and it was arguably misremembering that made both the tale and location memorable. Accounts of past deeds in ghost stories were fictionalised not historical 'memories', an imaginative vehicle that did not access the past so much as allude to its powerful resonance in the present. Whether true or not 'memories' associated with these supernatural signifiers often proved tenacious. Such accounts can be seen to have performed a similar function to the early modern custom of making boys stand on their heads or throwing them into nettles at certain points on a parish perambulation. They simultaneously fused the past and present upon a single site through use of a memorable tale. As with parish perambulations, such stories sustained a collective memory of past geography that could be passed on to newcomers and subsequent generations, helping to incorporate them into a sense of shared neighbourhood identity.[68]

Memories of the past city were implicitly linked to a tacit resistance to change, with supernatural narratives representing an imaginative holding of element of the past in stasis.[69] Local communities invested much of their collective memory and identity in their surrounding buildings and the popular conservatism this engendered tacitly opposed an ideological modernity that defined itself through chronological notions of 'progress' away from the past.[70] Both the totality and impregnability

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[66] Gates, *Portsmouth that has Passed*, p. 342.

[67] *The News* (Portsmouth), 24 December 2005.

[68] See Simpson, 'The Local Legend', pp. 25–35. Popular memory could conflate different periods inaccurately, frequently confusing Thomas Cromwell's role in Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries with Oliver Cromwell's actions in the Civil War. See Hardwick, *Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore*, p. 290, and Dew, *Dyshe of Norfolke Dumplings*, p. 108.

[69] Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, p. 135. These memories were reinforced and revived by compilations of local folklore in the 1880s, helping later generations to reimagine the city of their parents and grandparents. For example, see Knights, *Norfolk Stories*, and Culyer, *Old Norfolk Inns*, pp. 10–13. See also P. Osbourne, 'The Politics of Time', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 68 (1994), pp. 3–9.

[70] For a more direct expression of popular resistance to urban development in Norwich see the 1862 Norwich street ballad 'Strange Alterations or More Wonders Still' in *Norwich Songs, Ballads, Etc*, vol. 2, p. 189. Interestingly in the context of this study it begins with an imaginative act of necromancy, stating, 'Oh could our forefathers but

of a memory map of the past city, constructed from the interrelation between buildings, spaces, and their stories, helped offset the sense of disruption encouraged by physical changes that gradually transformed the neighbourhood's spatial configurations. Local community's commitment to a 'fixed' urban landscape is illustrated through an early nineteenth-century dockyard worker in Portsmouth. By the 1810s St. Mary's Church was an aging, dilapidated building and parish officials, weighing whether it was best to pay for repairs or demolish it and build a new church on the site, met considerable resistance from the parish community. In his diary for 3 September 1813, the worker recorded that 'the people of the [dock]yard, great number, lost their half-day work and went and opposed it'.[71] This plebeian conservatism was also expressed through local superstitions in other parts of the town. Mounted in a niche in the Great Square Tower in Portsmouth's old town, an edifice that formed part of its seaward defences was a bust of King Charles I. Having been placed there in 1635, expressing the King's gratitude for the warm welcome he had received in Portsmouth, a local legend had developed that as long as the bust remained in place the popular Free Mart Fair would continue. Other elaborations on this legend extended beyond the fair to the belief that if the bust were moved then great misfortune would befall the whole town. In 1848, the year the bust was temporarily removed to conduct repairs on the tower, the Free Mart was abolished by an Act of Parliament and such unintended incidences of synchronicity could only have served to reinforce local superstitions.[72]

Ghosts served well as intrinsic agents of conservative resistance and dissent to urban change. They defied alterations to their surroundings, rejecting or revoking the solidity of physical transformations by walking through walls on predetermined routes that did not take account of subsequent developments.[73] Most importantly, with rare exception urban ghosts were identifiably human. This contrasted sharply with rural spectres, which were just as likely to take the form of animals,

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rise from the dead, and see what alterations in Norwich are made.' Voicing a plebeian conservatism, it states that 'for all that's been done t'would have been better without it'. For a Manchester example see 'Manchester's an Altered Town', *Madden Collection*, vol. 18, no. 820.

[71] Webb, *Early Nineteenth Century Dockyard Worker*, p. 12.

[72] See H. Sargeant, *Portsmouth in History and Literature*, The Library Association Record, May 1938, pp. 218–22, at p. 220, and Gates, *Free Mart Fair*, p. 47.

[73] See Cavallaro, *The Gothic Vision*, p. 85. This boundary crossing could be stopped by the intriguing practice of ghost-binding which involved imprisoning ghosts in a cupboard with symbolic objects. For a nineteenth-century case in Norwich see Madders, *Rambles in an Old City*, p. 285.

particularly dogs and hares. The fact that urban ghosts were anthropo-
morphic arose from the popular imagination's need to semi-rationalise
them; however given to the fantastical, only human ghosts seemed to be
acceptable in cities.[74] While this suggests self-imposed limitations upon
the magical imagination in an urban context, a restriction on what could
and could not be deemed credible in urban supernatural accounts, the
emphasis on human spectral transgression can be read as a powerful
assertion of individual human agency over the urban environment. As
an act and product of the present rather than the past, telling stories of
human ghosts transgressing the changed physical environment spoke
to contemporary assertions as much as any genuine attempt to recap-
ture the past. Such tales enabled both narrators and their audiences to
vicariously resist the seeming rigidity of the present. Whilst mapping
and therefore 'solidifying' physical locations ghost narratives' conflat-
ing of past and present simultaneously introduced a sense of ambiguity
between the material and the metaphysical. Such tales disrupted cul-
tural and psychological assumptions about the power of the familiar
and the irrevocable nature of change. As Halbwachs observed, 'even if
stones are moveable, relationships established between stones and men
are not so easily altered'.[75]

Yet while ghosts could function as an expression of conservative
resistance they could also offer imaginative ways of easing adaptation
and ultimately coming to terms with change. As representatives of
the past ghosts acted as anchors which communities dropped to tem-
per the flow of change, enabling them to retain and, where necessary,
reassert a sense of communal cohesion in the face of transformation.[76]
Communal perceptions of the past which incorporated the nostalgic,
imaginary, perhaps even the fantastical, did not merely disrupt mod-
ernity's emphasis on temporal rupture but also provided a source of
succour. If supernatural narratives altered local architecture from the

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[74] For examples of the differing form of rural and urban ghosts in Norwich and Norfolk
see Gerish, *Norfolk Folklore Collection*, *vol. 3 'Ghosts'*, Kent, *Land of the 'Babes in the
Wood'*, L'Estrange (ed.), *Eastern Counties Collectanea*, p. 2, and James, *Bogie Tales*,
pp. 9–11. For the phantom Black Pig of Cley see NRO ref. HMN 6/216. For rural
animal phantom around Manchester see *Newspaper Cuttings 1845–66* (MLA ref.
9427389.M1), p. 171, Bamford, *Early Days*, p. 47, Hardwick, *Traditions, Superstitions,
and Folklore*, pp. 172–73, and Harland and Wilkinson, *Lancashire Folk-Lore*, pp. 52–56.
For urban anthropomorphic manifestations in Manchester see 'The Boggart o'
Gorton Chapelyard' in *Ballads* (MS f821.04.B25), p. 46, and also Portland, *Around
Haunted Manchester*.

[75] Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, p. 133. See also Ackroyd, *Albion*, p. 376. For people's
loyalty to houses built in an older style, and their reluctance to occupy newer dwell-
ings which were outwardly different, see Goodwin, *Town Swamps*, pp. 65–66.

[76] See Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, pp. 102–03.

heimlich or familiar to *unheimlich* or uncanny, then the resultant sense of unease paradoxically served as a collective act of transmutation.[77] The psychological impact of change was mitigated through entering into a comforting relationship with local supernatural legends, fostering a sense of slower temporalities in those urban communities which retained a stronger association to their past on account of their folklore. In the ghost, an entity of both the past and present, the urban dweller, especially the newly arrived rural migrant in Norwich, the Irish immigrant in Manchester, and the itinerant sailor in Portsmouth, could find something to resonate with his or her own sense of initial displacement and atomisation prior to becoming incorporated into local communities. The spectral also served as a useful metaphor for the local community's response to urban development, the trope of the ghost articulating their sense of being haunted by collective memories of loss and nostalgia. At the same time this gravitation back towards the reassuring solidity of the past provided a balm for the anxieties of the present. In this ghost narratives acted as the temporal opposite of contemporary engagement with prophecies and fortune-tellers' divinations which sought solace in the promises of the future.

These simultaneous yet seemingly contradictory applications of resistance and accommodation meant that contemporaries neither wholeheartedly internalised nor stood in direct opposition to more dynamic, ideological formulations of modernity. Alan Marriott has claimed that a multitude of temporal and spatial orderings was itself a key characteristic of modernity, suggesting that these narrative strategies can be read as yet another expression of its paradoxical, antinomial nature.[78] In an urban context the homogenising agenda implicit within ideological assertions of a 'progressive' temporality arguably galvanised an awareness of local communities as different because they were not 'modern'. Concurrently, advocates of a progressive modernity may have asserted its claims to have broken from the past but for an appreciation of itself as progressive it was still dependent upon those more sluggish and, in this case, localised temporalities.

Altered and alternative geographies

Those elements of tacit resistance indicative in the temporal dimensions of supernatural tales took a more subversive form in the appropriating

[77] For more on *unheimlich* and the uncanny see Freud, *The Uncanny*, pp. 121–62.
[78] Marriott, 'Sensation of the Abyss', p. 97. This interpretation furthers recent urban theory's increasing appreciation of a plethora of mismatched and sometimes competing temporalities and spatialities in urban life. See Amin and Thrift, *Cities*, p. 8.

of parts of the urban environment through an altered rereading of its topography and sites. Rather than simply mapping points in the city this localised, communal practice represented the empowering, transgressive force of the magical imagination to render physical spaces supernatural and ultimately reconfigure them into a (re-)enchanted terrain. In doing so it undid the orthodox meaning and functions of certain locations and granted them additional connotations for those initiated by the narrative act. This construction of local meanings necessarily excluded outsiders who were not privy to such hidden knowledge and interpretations.[79]

The nature of these spatial manipulations can be read as nineteenth-century expressions of psychogeography, an approach to the urban experience that attempts to find new ways of conceiving the environment. In its twentieth- and twenty-first-century applications this is often done with the intention of looking afresh at what has become monotonously familiar, thereby seeking to counter an instinct to read our surroundings as banal.[80] Here one has to remain sensitive to anachronistic applications for while contemporaries were clearly rereading their urban environment it was not necessarily being done to offset a jaded familiarity. Urban dwelling was a new and vitalising experience for those large numbers of rural migrants who moved into cities during the course of the century. Even those who had long been resident urban dwellers witnessed their environment gradually alter, evolve, and expand during the course of their lives.[81] In such circumstances psychogeographic readings seemed to derive less from a sense of the banal

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[79] This alternative geography's ability to create 'counter-sites' has considerable parallels with Foucault's idea of 'heterotopia', a site where ordinary spatial logic and social behaviours are 'contested and inverted'. See M. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', pp. 22–27, 24, and also Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, pp. 132–35.

[80] As an approach urban psychogeography has emerged from a blend of literature, cultural theory, political radicalism, and avant-garde art. See Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (London, Rebel Press, 1992), J. G. Ballard, *Crash* (London, Harper Perennial, 2008), Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Ackroyd, *London – A Biography*, and I. Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory* (London, Penguin, 2003), and his *London Orbital* (London, Penguin, 2003). See also R. Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London, Verso, 2006), M. Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Harpenden, Pocket Essentials, 2006), and P. Woodcock, *This Enchanted Isle: The Neo-Romantic Vision from William Blake to the New Visionaries* (Glastonbury, Gothic Image Publications, 2000).

[81] In trying to remain open to the sense of novelty in the contemporary urban experience the historian can seek to protect him/herself against the over-simplistic, derogatory caricature of modernising, industrial cities best encapsulated in Dickens' depiction of Coketown. See Dickens, *Penguin Popular Classics – Hard Times*. This static stereotype was employed with little sense of historical individuation or sophistication by Lewis Mumford in *Culture of Cities*.

and more from a need to come to terms with the experience of urban modernisation. As seen in Chapter 1, the social and spatial nature of the nineteenth-century urban environment variously encouraged a sense of the phantasmagoric, the urban Gothic, and *unheimlich*, suggesting people were very much alive to their cities and the way they made them think and feel. If the modernising city possessed an unknown, unstable, shapeless, and even spectral quality then magical mapping became a way of forming connections, coherence, and a sense of control. The idea of the imagination being projected onto and simultaneously influenced by such an environment is clearly evident in contemporary writings, especially the visionary urban poetry of William Blake, Thomas De Quincey's C*onfessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and Arthur Machen's *The Three Imposters* (1895), although all notably focused on London rather than smaller provincial centres.

Norwich seemed to have had particularly functional reasons for constructing an alternative, supernatural mapping of its streets. Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century visitors tended to draw attention to the city's profusion of 'winding streets' and its 'veritable feast' of courtyards.[82] In 1898 the *Norfolk Chronicle* reported that Norwich had so many streets with identical names that it had become imperative that some were renamed so as to avoid confusion and restore a sense of individuality.[83] If Norwich and Portsmouth remained relatively small but densely packed urban centres, a similar need could be found in Manchester's considerably larger conurbation, though for slightly different reasons. Here it was noted that many buildings had been rendered indistinguishable from one another as a result of high levels of pollution staining them black by the early nineteenth century.[84] Investigating the town in 1849 the journalist Angus Reach described it as possessing 'many mean and distressingly monotonous vistas of uniform brick houses'.[85] Such a bleak cityscape denied local neighbourhoods a sense of physical distinction, thereby fostering a need to create discernable differences between localities. In this, supernatural tales arguably performed a similar role to street entertainment, marketplace chatter, or the camaraderie of the pub, all aspects of local cultural life which helped colour and invigorate the drabness of poorer urban districts. As Leigh Hunt observed in 1831, 'Imagination enriches everything … even brick

[82] NRO ref. MC1398/1, pp. 47–48.
[83] *Norfolk Chronicle*, 28 May 1898.
[84] Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 89.
[85] Ginswick (ed.), *Labour and the Poor*, pp. 3–4.

and mortar are vivified … A [city] becomes no longer a mere collection of houses.'[86]

This imaginative rereading disrupted the city's functionality, hollowing out the practical meaning of specific locations and imbuing them with supernatural or superstitious significance which detached them from their surroundings by rendering them qualitatively different.[87] In an environment predominantly given to material expressions of secular rather than spiritual awe (best represented by Manchester's cathedral-like warehouses and, from 1877, the domineering presence of its neo-Gothic town hall) these supernatural narratives informed what Mircea Eliade referred to as 'the construction of sacred space'.[88] Rather than articulating a Christian orthodoxy, the magical imagination employed folkloric supernatural tropes and superstitions to foster the sense of spatial dislocation and individuality that arose from more conventional expressions of the sacred. This granting of uneven importance to local physical space was sometimes promoted less by a specific narrative, or at least not by one that existed there and then, and more by a diffused awareness of spatial difference. A contributor to *Norfolk and Norwich Notes and Queries* observed in 1897 that 'a very real and substantial belief exists in Norwich with regard to the ill-luck that attaches to two or three houses which I could name'.[89] At this stage differentiation was sustained by superstition, although the distinction made by the sufferings of a series of unfortunate tenants formed the core of nascent urban folktales that could gestate over time.

Expressions of an alternative geography are most evident in Norwich and Portsmouth. In Norwich Nether Westwick Gate was colloquially

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[86] Hone, *The Table Book*, vol. 1, p. 16. Scattered accounts of the imaginative rereading of their environment by children suggest how this altered urban geography could be created and sustained. For an example from Manchester see Bamford, *Early Days*, pp. 90–91.

[87] In this one finds resonances with Simmel's references to the spatial individualisation that arose from larger nineteenth-century urban houses usually having names rather than numbers. By contrast with this sense of qualitative uniqueness, numbered houses, duplicated in each street, possessed a far less powerful quantitative distinction. See Frisby and Featherstone (eds.), *Simmel on Culture*, p. 149. This urge towards qualitative uniqueness and individuality was explored by Simmel as a defensive reaction to the nature of living in an urban environment. See pp. 183–85.

[88] Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, p. 29. Eliade viewed an emphasis on 'spatial non homogeneity' as the perception of the religious man and a product of the sacred although he recognised that it also found vestigial expression in the 'profane space' of modern industrial societies. See pp. 21 and 24. In this context it is interesting to note an account of early nineteenth-century Manchester by Robert Southey, in which the poet claimed the town's buildings were 'as large as convents without their antiquity … without their holiness'. See Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 89.

[89] *Norfolk and Norwich Notes and Queries*, 9 October 1897, pp. 230–31.

known as Hell's Gate. This was supposedly because all roads to it led downwards, but Mark Knights, a nineteenth-century local writer, also suggested it was due to the plebeian character of the area. St. Benedict's and the Westwick districts of the city were known to be 'the home of the toilers' and the emotive relabelling of Hell's Gate may have been intended to differentiate it from Over Westwick Gate, a more respectable part of the city.[90] The local tenacity of this altered name is indicated by the fact that for years after, the place where the gate had stood was still referred to by this name. In a similar vein, William Gerish, a local antiquarian, noted that as late as 1917 one of Norwich's old towers, on the towing path near Carrow Bridge, was sometimes called the 'Devil's Tower'.[91] At night mid nineteenth-century Norwich youths had used to dare one another to pass through a dark lane they had renamed Devil's Alley.[92] As such, one can see how many of these supernatural stories may have had their origin in children's make-believe, games, and tests of mettle. Used to reinterpreting and reinventing the urban environment, the instinct did not automatically perish upon adulthood. Nor did the city that had once possessed mystery and malleability in the minds of the young necessarily harden into a dull grey environment, a point plainly evident from the environmental influences on the magical imagination explored in Chapter 1. To give a most literal example of this 'magical' malleability, the unusual figures of Samson and Hercules, two statues that flanked the door to a merchant's house in Norwich's Tombland, prompted local folktales shared by old and young alike. In 1885 John Varden claimed that most local people were familiar with the story that when the statues heard the city clocks strike midnight 'they come down from their pedestals, and do something or other, according to the fancy of the narrator'.[93]

In Portsmouth, The Hard at Portsea was known as the 'Devil's Acre', a name that derived from the depravity associated with the area's links to heavy drinking and prostitution.[94] In this particular example the renaming and attendant moralising of an urban locale tended to have its origin in a bourgeois rejection rather than a local

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[90] See Knights, *Highways and Byeways*, pp. 60 and 62. See also NRO MC1398/1, pp. 40–41.

[91] Gerish, *Norfolk Folklore Collection*, vol. 4, p. 295.

[92] *Ibid.*

[93] Varden, 'Traditions, Superstitions, and Folklore', p. 85. These two statues were often called Gog and Magog, two famed giants from English folklore. See Knights, *Highways and Byeways*, p. 94. Gunn has noted how the 'magical' animation of civic statues became a familiar trope in local literary tales related to Manchester and Birmingham. See Gunn, *Public Cultures*, p. 53 and footnote 80, p. 59.

[94] Gates, *Portsmouth that has Passed*, p. 443.

reclamation of the area. While not as overtly linked to the diabolical as in Norwich, Portsmouth's renamed places still carried superstitious associations. Penny Street, off the High Street in Old Portsmouth, was thought by some to be an abbreviation of 'Penitent Street', a name supposedly derived from the murder of Bishop Moleyns of Chichester by a Portsmouth mob in 1450. This act resulted in the excommunication of the entire town of Portsmouth and for fifty years local legend asserted that its denizens were beset by endless misfortunes which were credited to their expulsion from the Church.[95] The town was eventually reprieved, the people of Portsmouth having to perform a public act of penance by constructing a chapel on the spot where the murder had taken place.[96]

As such an altered and even alternative geography was insinuated into the ordered text of the visible city.[97] In the process its more supernatural associations undid the readable surfaces of functional urban spaces and deposited within them elements of the fantastical.[98] Ruth Finnegan has observed how telling stories in urban communities contributes to both the construction and contestation of received social realities and in this context supernatural tales should not be dismissed as mere passive entertainments or whimsical gossip. Rather they actively shaped a symbolic and metaphoric world which informed and helped constitute part of people's lived experience in nineteenth-century towns and cities.[99] However, as illustrated in the previous chapter, the locally circumscribed application of the various functions explored here prevented them from having a broader significance, especially a class-based one. Urban communities tended to function at the level of neighbourhoods

[95] Esmond, *Charm of Old Portsmouth*, pp. 46–47.
[96] These acts of narrative rereading and acquisition had their physical counterpart in the customary (re-)possession of parts of towns. In addition to the examples cited in the previous chapter see Bushaway, *By Rite*, pp. 178–80.
[97] These 'concealed' geographies also took more mundane expression. Norwich's main thoroughfares had been publicly labelled since 1777 but the numerous courts and yards that housed the city's poorer inhabitants were not. Rather their denizens relied on the oral transmission of more informal (and imaginative) names from generation to generation, suggesting that they possessed a colloquial, 'floating' communal memory of geography that excluded outsiders through the vernacular naming and claiming of the city's more hidden corners. See *Norfolk and Norwich Notes and Queries*, 28 January 1899, p. 434, Suffling, *The Land of the Broads*, p. 97, and Doyle, 'Mapping Slums in a Historic City', pp. 52–54. In 1842 William Cooke Taylor observed that Manchester's courts and cellars had also been claimed by the town's poorest inhabitants who lived 'hidden from the view of the higher ranks by piles of stores, mills, warehouses and manufacturing establishments'. See Coleman (ed.), *The Idea of the City*, p. 83.
[98] See Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 19.
[99] See Finnegan, *Tales of the City*, p. 172. See also Amin and Thrift, *Cities*, p. 23.

and therefore any altered 'supernatural' rereading of the environment was likely to have been known and appreciated by the multifarious subdivisions of classes within one locality, while remaining unknown to others of similar classes within another.

Even when conceived at this smaller, communal level there are several issues that are difficult to answer with any degree of certainty, not least of which is: How conscious were these tactics of adaptation, resistance, or subversion? The minor acts of resistance against the planned, ordered city conducted by Certeau's wandering pedestrians were characterised by their unconscious nature and there is little to suggest that the weaving of supernatural tales in the nineteenth-century city possessed any more self-awareness.[100] A more awkward question to resolve is the extent to which this alternative reading of the city was genuinely believed or merely a self-consciously fictional communal mnemonic device. Such questions highlight the limits to which a history of mentalities can be pushed before launching into wildly unsupported assertions. Indeed, as recent antinomial developments in the historiography of magic and enchantment remind us, the issue may not be a clear cut divide between belief and non-belief so much as a rather tense, complex, and seemingly contradictory interrelationship between these two poles. Like magic and modernity, the reception of such narratives was not necessarily based on an either/or dichotomy; supernatural associations which variously mapped or disrupted the urban environment could obviously be told, enjoyed, and communally employed without having to be wholly believed.

Finally, this ability to reinterpret and thereby remake the mundane cityscape in terms of the supernatural should not be that surprising. Throughout this study it has been shown that one of the magical imagination's most vital aspects was its transformative qualities, a capacity to imbue the material world with special meaning and significance beyond its usual function, be it specific objects or features of the urban landscape. This was the essence of magical rituals in many cases: a witch bottle contained nothing intrinsically supernatural; it was the magical intention associated with its symbolic contents that made it potent. This could inform a way of articulating otherness that was not necessarily a conscious form of resistance; rather it acquired a tacit element of challenge merely through its alterity.[101]

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[100] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 93.
[101] See Ward (ed.), *The Certeau Reader*, p. 100. See also M. Keith and S. Pile (eds.), *Geographies of Resistance* (London, Routledge, 1997), S. Pile and N. Thrift (eds.), *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation* (London, Routledge,

Implicit subversion rather than explicit opposition appears to have been the favoured approach of urban narrative expressions of the magical imagination. Part of this came from the inherently subversive way such accounts were propagated, for while the individual narrator had temporary ownership of them in the moment of telling they always possessed a decentred, diffused, and more fluid existence in the community beyond. Being potentially everywhere and nowhere in particular it was virtually impossible to control or restrict either the movement of the narrative through a community or the supernatural ideas such accounts conveyed.[102] At the same time, while this chapter has adapted Certeau's ideas on the role of everyday practices in negotiating urban spaces, it has to ultimately diverge from his focus on the mundane. Storytelling itself may have been an everyday act (ranging from neighbourhood gossip and local rumour to more formal communal storytelling in public houses or at home), but in this case the subversive power of its supernatural subject matter resided in local claims to knowledge of and even interaction with forces beyond the mundane. Imposing supernatural associations onto the official context of a building may have had no external influence on the powers responsible for its original construction and purpose, but it served to vicariously empower those initiated by its narrative, allowing them in effect to perform an act of mental graffiti. Unlike graffiti supernatural associations left no visible mark, making their act of rereading or reclamation even more subversive. Yet this was more than mere graffiti for by adding altered or supplemented meanings to certain locations the magical imagination permanently changed perceptions of places within the city, causing particular sites to be looked upon in a new way once one was aware of their associated stories. Such places became twice haunted, firstly by a narrative's specific ghost or superstitious taint, and secondly by its association with a transformed, phantasmal urban typography.

Conclusion

As illustrated throughout the last three chapters, the magical imagination did not represent an escapist rejection of the real world but rather facilitated attempts to orientate oneself within, and interpret

1995), and M. Keith and S. Pile (eds.), *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London, Routledge, 1993).

[102] Benson, *Cycles of Influence*, p. 19. See also Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 106.

the experience of nineteenth-century urbanisation. Operating at the confluence between an awareness of developments within and beyond the urban neighbourhood and a desire for local coherence and legibility the magical imagination helped communities culturally and spatially define a local identity. Forged from the interaction between the material environment and the more durable imaginary spaces of supernatural accounts, by mapping the dimensions (both past and present), boundaries, and alterations to their environment they mapped themselves.[103]

While this emphasis on adaptation and conformity to imposed changes lacks a heroic dimension of oppositional struggle from 'below' it would be wrong to read these functional applications of the magical imagination solely as an expression of conservative insularity.[104] Importantly, these supernatural narratives also operated as discursive spaces in which the nineteenth-century city was culturally constructed and (potentially) contested. Imagined geographies informed communal assertions for ownership of local space in a period that was increasingly marked by the efforts of police forces, boards of health, and other governmental authorities to impose a degree of surveillance and control from 'outside' and 'above'. This escalating level of intrusion could only heighten a pre-existing local sensitivity towards the alteration of streets, buildings, and other spatial configurations.[105] There was an inherent nonconformity in the magical imagination's ability to alter the meaning of spatial signifiers and thereby undermine 'official' interpretations of urban structures. In disrupting and undoing the solidity of the material environment what may have appeared oppressively structuring in terms of physical urban (re-)development could become fluid and elusive. The ability to enchant the mundane through fantastical readings of the environment effectively created evasions, new spaces, and places which were beyond the means of official surveillance, suggesting that communities were neither passive nor wholly powerless in the face of change.

Given the antinomial nature of supernatural tropes that could be used by communities without necessarily being unanimously believed, the radical and conforming applications considered above were given greater or lesser emphasis depending on the circumstances in which they were employed. As such, the magical imagination's adaptive

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[103] See Balshaw and Kennedy, *Urban Space and Representation*, p. 12.
[104] For more on this see O'Shea, 'English Subjects of Modernity', pp. 11–12.
[105] See Vidler, *Architectural Uncanny*, pp. 167–68, and Halbwachs, *Collective Memory*, p. 131.

and oppositional aspects co-existed rather than forming an either/
or schism that cleaved local communities into two separate camps.
Yet in these various communal functions one notices quite a distinct
divergence between Norwich and Portsmouth on the one hand, and
Manchester on the other. This is made all the more noticeable by the
fact that despite their markedly different histories and experiences in
this period, they have generally proven to be surprisingly similar with
regard to other applications of the magical imagination. Evidence of
these supernatural mappings and rereadings of the urban landscape
are frequently referenced in an oblique or marginalised manner. It
is therefore reasonable to assume that there were far more supernat-
ural accounts in circulation than have managed to be captured and
recorded in print. That these accounts are generally thinner and more
sporadic in Manchester than Portsmouth and Norwich would imme-
diately suggest that its relative newness as a large urban centre was an
influential factor. Offset against this is the expectation that that very
situation would have encouraged an intensified need for construct-
ing and setting down communal markers and signifiers. While having
to account for possible deficiencies in the written record, one is left
with the impression that Manchester's relatively more rapid expansion
meant urban legends had fewer long-established communities within
which to root themselves. New supernatural legends did eventually
develop and became embedded into the local community but there
was something of a time lag, as if those communities first needed to
develop a sense of their own maturity and permanence. As a result
one is more prone to finding urban folktales relating to Edwardian
rather than Regency or early Victorian Manchester.[106] By contrast, the
existence of Norwich and Portsmouth's longer established urban com-
munities enabled an easier accommodation of the supernatural, their
rich histories, relative antiquity, and more modest urban development
across the century providing ample context and sources from which
local legends could be more frequently constructed.

As in the early modern period, the continuing role of the spoken nar-
rative in shaping the mental world of an increasingly literate population
should not be underestimated. While ballads, broadsheets, and news-
papers undoubtedly helped disseminate supernatural accounts fur-
ther, local urban communities continued to be constructed and bound
together by their oral cultures throughout the nineteenth century and

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[106] See for example, Roberts, *A Ragged Schooling*, p. 148–51, and, for the 1920s, Lynch,
'The Devil in Ancoats', pp. 105–07.

into the twentieth. Rather than retreating from gradual modernisation, the magical imagination helped facilitate the adjustment to the new through the use of supernatural tropes, associations, and narratives that possessed a comforting cultural familiarity.[107] Such pragmatic if largely subconscious applications ensured that the magical imagination retained its vitality and relevance to the nineteenth-century urban experience.

[107] Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, pp. 91–92.

Conclusion

This book's examination of the various ways magic, the supernatural, and the fantastical remained integral to the modernising, urban experience has encouraged us to re-evaluate how we think about modernity. Simon Gunn has claimed that the heuristic value of modernity lies in its ability to bestride local and national dimensions, its grand narrative allowing us to make transnational connections between large-scale processes and changing structures.[1] Yet working upon such a broad canvas we are prone to overlooking the localised experiences of modernity; in its focus on specific English cities and towns this book has attempted to reconnect with 'modernity' as lived historical reality rather than abstract concept. In doing so it has fostered its own particular criticisms of the increasingly discredited Weberian notion of a rational, secular, disenchanted modernity.

At the same time its emphasis on a phenomenological evaluation of modernisation, inspired by Baudelaire's association of modernity with experiential urban living, has resulted in the refutation, or at least the tempering of modernity as the dislocating, atomising experience we have become familiar with.[2] Rather I have argued that this 'dislocation' was a consciously constructed sense of rupture, a form of perceiving rather than of experiencing, a representation rather than a reality. This was less a struggle between the familiar dichotomies of 'tradition' and 'modernity' than the interaction and disjuncture between two conceptualisations of modernity; a 'soft', slower-paced, experiential 'pedestrian' modernity and a 'hard' ideological modernity largely propagated via the classroom, press, and pulpit. The persistent gap between these two formulations meant the former tacitly challenged the rhetoric of the

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[1] See Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, p. 108. This approach is exemplified by C. A. Bayley, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2004).

[2] This view is best summarised by Berman's *All That Is Solid*.

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latter, even when they obtained their most antinomial juxtapositioning within the contemporary educated elites.[3]

Modernity's ideological promotion as rupture from the past was not only self-conscious but self-determining, making hegemonic assertions about the forward dynamism of self, society, and time. In doing so it sought to encourage a consensus that would enable greater alignment between social realities and its own grand rhetoric.[4] It is this that has conditioned us into looking for modernity as dramatic, or at least as recognisably different, and this study has sought to question how obvious or ubiquitous a popular sense of modernity was in nineteenth-century cities. The emphasis on rapid expansion and turmoil seems to have been a retrospectively applied impression that arose from staring back over the vista of the nineteenth century in general. The material features of what we might identity as urban modernity was to most nineteenth-century urban dwellers piecemeal and uneven. Portsmouth's dockyard undoubtedly witnessed a shift from working with sail and wood to steam and iron between 1815 and 1860, and Manchester's skies may have gradually filled with a pall of factory smoke as it expanded, but these were cumulative developments over several generations, even a lifetime. Such a pace meant contemporaries did not witness a nineteenth-century version of what Alvin Toffler termed 'future shock'.[5] The transformation of structures and institutions were generally too big and too abstract to be conceived by most people. If 'modernity' was represented by the slow accrual of details rather than dramatic upheaval then urban dwellers' shift into becoming 'modern' was largely unconscious. It was modernity's contemporary advocates who imposed the conceptual scenery around them while their attention was on the struggles and minutia of daily life. As such, modernity's ideological rhetoric long preceded its manifest reality. Only as the material (predominantly technological and architectural) symbols of this ideology gradually became more apparent in the late nineteenth-century city did a more pervasive, popular, and permanent sense of 'modernity' become both culturally self-aware and internalised, the former process preceding the latter. This study would suggest that such a condition did not convincingly arrive until the early twentieth century.

Historians have been enchanted by the rhetoric of this ideological modernity and have generally continued to act as its agents. Having been

[3] For more on the intersecting nature of modernity's multiple discourses see O'Shea, 'English Subjects of Modernity,' p. 19
[4] See Meyer and Pels, *Magic and Modernity*, p. 30.
[5] See Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York, Random House, 1970).

indoctrinated into looking for the dramatic, at the popular level we find ourselves necessarily frustrated with the pace and extent of modernity's manifestation. We have tended to draw the very real and deep changes that were taking place in nineteenth-century English society (a statement that could equally be applied to the previous 200 years) to the surface of our historical consciousness in our efforts to identify and, less successfully, explain the emergence of modernity.[6] In doing so we artificially speed the pace of change and give an illusory sense of shape and coherence to developments that frequently lacked it at the experiential level.[7] Perhaps more distorting is the way this grants 'modernity' a historical visibility it did not necessarily possess for most contemporaries.

With regard to magical mentalities, historians have long remained compliant to the dominant, more vocal nineteenth-century emphasis on decline rather than an existent counter-narrative of contemporary bafflement at its persistence. As a result historiographical interpretations have tended to reiterate the former's ideological agenda, the decline of magical mentalities aiding their vision of a society accelerating away from a past that was perceived (or reconstructed) as being weighed down by a supposed adherence to 'tradition' and 'superstition', both loaded terms employed by 'moderns'. It has become something of a cliché that we were enchanted by disenchantment, a perspective that distorts our interpretations of both the nineteenth century and much of the early modern period that preceded it, a sense of 'progress' necessarily rereading the past as well as the future in its conformity to a linear development. It is as part of this ongoing project that historians have searched for evidence of the 'modern' further and further back in history, effectively enacting a colonisation of the past by the concept of modernisation. Historians' neglect of popular magical beliefs in the modern period represents the continuing success of hegemonic conceptions advanced by earlier promoters of a 'progressive' modernity. This book has advocated the need to bring what have been posited as 'traditional' modes of thinking forward, thereby breaking through the bulwark that hegemonic notions of modernity set against them. To continue to exclude such beliefs is to allow nineteenth-century critics to persist in obscuring the broader range of modes of thought possessed

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[6] While allowing for differing scales and rates of change such perceptions had become a familiar experience from at least the seventeenth century. See for example Wrightson, *English Society 1580–1680*, especially pp. 119–221, and J. A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History, 1550–1760* (London, Edward Arnold, 1990).

[7] This is best seen in the ongoing dismantling of the Industrial Revolution as a national 'event'. For a concise summary see S. King and G. Timmins, *Making Sense of the Industrial Revolution: English Economy and Society 1700–1850* (Manchester University Press, 2001).

by their contemporaries, to accept the word of the aggressor in their attack on and manipulation of popular mentalities.

Of course not all amongst the educated elites were advocates of an ideological modernity though this was generally the background of its key promoters. In their eagerness to encourage allegiance to modernity's rational 'norms' the various aspects of the plebeian magical imagination provided an essential component in sketching out divisions between a 'superstitious' past and an enlightened present, between the ignorant masses and forward-thinking 'moderns'. Presenting magical practices and supernatural beliefs as anachronistic curiosities helped rob them of any potential counter-hegemonic alterity they could mount in defiance of modern ideals. However, the mercurial nature of the magical imagination meant modernity's promoters could never be assured of the victory or even the dominance of their project. Proof that the progressive drive towards modernity was not deeply rooted in popular culture was evident in people's instinct to frequently resort 'back' to 'superstitious' practices at the onset of sudden misfortune, potentially and perpetually undermining this particular aspect of modernity's hegemonic construction and forcing the same struggle to be repeatedly fought anew. Modernisers were partly responsible for their own failure here, for their effort to position the magical imagination as a divergent 'other' against which modernity could define itself granted it new potency. Furthermore, by making explicit something that, for the most part, remained concealed, they helped perpetuate and disseminate knowledge of such beliefs, the respectability of the written word in the minds of the newly literate yielding it credibility. Despite this, popular magical mentalities offered only tacit resistance to this ideological modernity, for they were neither sufficiently collective, nor self-conscious enough in that resistance to form a counter-hegemonic force. Unlike recent formulations of fin-de-siècle occultism, the popular magical imagination was not part of a consciously 'modern' revolt against scientific positivism, nor a yearning for religiosity in an age without God.[8] It lacked the self-awareness that attends recent arguments that late nineteenth-century occultism resonated with modernity's emphasis on 'self-expression and self-discovery', and it arguably had to remain so, for magic's potency in the popular imagination lay in the inexplicability of its workings.[9]

The magical imagination was a cultural tool forged in the pre-nineteenth-century period and effectively represents the popular con-

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[8] For a summary see Laqueur, 'Why the Margins Matter', p. 112.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 127.

tinuation of links to the past even as advocates of modernity attempted to persuade their contemporaries that they had irrefutably broken from it.[10] Rather than a reiteration of contemporary criticisms of 'backwardness' this suggests that a robust and adaptive 'early modern' mentality should be considered the norm over which our notions of 'the modern' have been grafted. This is not to deny the very real processes of modernisation, or to simply commandeer the nineteenth century as a viable extension of the early modern period, though there are undoubtedly valuable insights to be gained from continually disrupting the periodised divisions we arbitrarily impose on the past. It is to argue that mentalities that were pertinent to the early modern period still had relevance and application for far longer than has generally been assumed. From the perspective of popular magical mentalities, long-ingrained modes of thinking and ways of perceiving the world were not and could not be swiftly jettisoned to embrace modernity, not least because, as suggested above, modernity as a 'thing' was a long time in becoming apparent.

The urban environment continued to sustain and generate manifestations of the magical imagination regardless of differing socio-economic character, size, or pace of growth. It appears to have made little difference whether it was the sprawling streets of Manchester, the medieval lanes of Norwich, or the environs of Portsmouth Harbour. The 'modernising' urban world did not provide wholly dependable 'rational' solutions to the basic concerns addressed by magical mentalities and therefore people continued to resort to practices, techniques, rituals, and beliefs that had always served them, albeit with increasing silence about one's own personal belief in their efficacy. Rather than phenomenological factors, the most marked differences between the three urban centres seem to have arisen from the rhetoric of civic self-image, these self-perceptions influencing the local reception and tolerance of expressions of the magical imagination. 'Official' civic narratives frequently eclipsed the other histories (and stories) that thrived in their shadow. If nineteenth-century Portsmouth's dominant narrative was that of the modernisation of the Royal Navy then Manchester's was its adoption of the mantel of the first industrial city of the 'modern' age. Defined by the dynamism of industrialisation, technological innovation, commerce, and political reform, Mancunians viewed themselves as 'industrious, frugal, sincere [and] practical'.[11] Only Norwich failed

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[10] See Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

[11] Dellheim, 'Imagining England', p. 221. See also D. Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination* (Manchester University Press, 2004). One Mancunian blatantly accused the prophetess Mother Shipton of being 'a thorough

to develop a readily identifiable self-image in this period, leaving it harking back to previous glories as a former second city of the kingdom. Lacking this hard veneer of a dominant civic narrative Norwich has frequently proven itself a somewhat easier locale through which to explore the concerns of this study. Walter Rye's *Tourist's Guide to Norfolk* even used local folklore to add colour to his depiction of the county's 'natives', highlighting their beliefs in ghosts, hyter-sprites, and Jack o' Lanterns.[12] By contrast, in Manchester one frequently had to scratch away the obfuscating gloss of educated contemporaries' praise for their own modernity before it was possible to reveal that the magical imagination was still at work.

In rather different contexts Dror Wahrman and Alexandra Shepard have both recently emphasised the need to distinguish between social and cultural change as a way of appreciating apparent continuities in periods of equally obvious change.[13] The pace of social change in the three cities varied considerably during the nineteenth century yet all developed at a relatively faster rate than their cultural transformations. If social change formed the transforming historical context then cultural continuities and evolutions were the means by which people adapted to it. While modern magical beliefs and practices continued to perform their 'traditional' function of aiding control over one's life the types of control being sought in this period were increasingly being applied to the evolving, modernising city. Instead of being static or eroding 'survivals' from a former period, expressions of the magical imagination demonstrated a mercurial ability to sculpt themselves to the changing urban cultural terrain. This quality informed its social applications too. Resonating with the antinomial pluralities and contradictions often associated with modernity, the magical imagination could be simultaneously conservative, offering a means of adaptation to urban living, and radical, providing a means of articulating protest against specific aspects of imbalanced urban power relations.[14] These applications were heavily rooted in socially diverse, localised communities that do not easily conform to our neat sense of nineteenth-century urban class divides. Of course power relations did not just cut horizontally but vertically too, and beyond issues of class this

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old humbug, and her so-called prophecies sheer nonsense'. See *Manchester City News Notes and Queries*, vol. 4, 26 March 1881.

[12] See Rye, *Tourist's Guide to Norfolk*, pp. 19–22.

[13] See Wahrman, 'Change and the Corporeal' in Shepard and Walker (eds.), *Gender and Change*, p. 173, and Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, p. 7.

[14] See K. Wilson, 'Citizenship, Empire, and Modernity', pp. 70–71, and also Felski, *Gendering of Modernity*, p. 212.

study has sought to indicate ways in which the magical imagination also reinforced other cultural fractures such as regional, gender, and generational divides.

Given this, the magical imagination can be read as a nineteenth-century example of what Anthony Giddens has termed modern 'reflexivity', a capacity to adapt to an increasingly complex society by reinforcing and recreating a sense of personal and collective selves.[15] It tempered feelings of powerlessness evoked by urban living through allowing people to assert themselves over individual difficulties and their local environment. Supernatural accounts helped (re-)define and map their neighbourhoods and therefore their local identity. As such, the magical imagination was not simply escapist make-believe. As a coping mechanism escapism implicitly acquiesces to given circumstances while the tropes and powers that constituted the magical imagination were more transgressive than this. While modernity's promoters sought to define the fantastical in opposition to 'reality' the magical imagination warped reality's rigidity and subversively challenged its authoritative (scientific) interpretation.[16] For all its fantastical expressions, the magical imagination remained a pragmatic tool by which individuals and local communities orientated themselves within and adapted to the realities of the nineteenth-century city.

Challenging the ideological assertions that expressions of the magical imagination were marginalised and subordinate to modernity's rational, progressive tenets, I have presented it as an equal, valid, and co-existent mindset. It was neither intrinsically inferior to reason, nor less necessary to modernisation. Modern rationalism uncompromisingly promoted either/or binaries while the magical imagination encourages a more antinomial formulation embodying contradictions and seeming oppositions. While my own division between experiential and ideological modernities may appear to foster yet another dichotomy it has been argued throughout this study that expressions of the plebeian magical imagination acted as both a cultural locale and a form of agency in negotiating the gaps and interrelationships between them. This did not demand belief in all its aspects, although it certainly contained a more genuine element of belief than the ironic distance required when engaging with 'manufactured' commercial enchantments. Ethnographic magical mentalities did not necessarily conform to the 'delight but does not delude' formulation of re-enchantment proposed by Michael Saler, for while they could take the form of entertainment they were never solely

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[15] See Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, pp. 52–55.
[16] See Jackson, *Fantasy*, p. 25.

that.[17] Wedded to their implicit faith in a rational modernity, most antinomial formulations of modern enchantment have been unwilling to think in terms of genuine belief. Rather they have imposed their own implicit binaries through people having one set of propositions for engaging with fiction, another for reality.[18] In exploring the operation of magical mentalities in everyday life I have argued that this division can be collapsed without sacrificing the useful tensions within the antinomial approach, for they offer us further insight into the hybrid and heterogeneous qualities of modernisation.

While modernity can obviously be defined, in part, by (gradually) evident structural changes over the course of the long nineteenth century, it was also a perception and a mindset. The antinomial tensions generated by this did not arise so much from the juxtaposition between co-existent material and mental formulations as in the experiential gap that existed between them for much of the period of this study. Modernity as perception ran ahead of its developing material manifestations, possessing its own spectral insistence, its own prophetic convictions, simultaneously awaiting and insisting upon the reality of its vision. Any number of previous historical epochs, including the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the scientific and the industrial revolutions, had laid claim to a sense of their own 'modernity', thereby making it a concept that was necessarily and repeatedly made, unmade, and remade in 'new' configurations. (Contrary to Bruno Latour's provocative assertion that we have never been modern, the past five centuries would suggest we have been repeatedly modern, albeit through an ever-shifting conceptualisation of what we take 'modern' to mean.[19]) This metamorphic quality meant it was far closer to the magical mindset than promoters of its nineteenth-century ideological formulations would have cared to accept. That said, it would be overstating the case to claim that the existence of the magical imagination as an expression of an adaptive pedestrian modernity in nineteenth-century cities represented magic as modernity; a more modestly accurate appraisal would be that magic provided ways of navigating the experience of modernisation.

In this role the magical imagination remained robust, for despite rational condemnation and denial of its manifestations and powers it only required the possible rather than the explicable to sustain it. Logic proved far easier to cast off than magical mentalities, and imagination was embraced more willingly than reason. Through a

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[17] See Saler, 'Modernity and Enchantment', p. 714.
[18] For example, see During, *Modern Enchantments*, p. 50.
[19] See Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.

powerful blend of desire and necessity the magical imagination was maintained, rendering any adherence to modern rationalism provisional. It was not that nineteenth-century urban dwellers craved glimpses of (re-)enchantment in a disenchanted world but rather that the modernising environment and the urban experience encouraged numerous ways for the magical imagination to persist, thrive, evade, transform, and endlessly return.

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