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"This town is as full of enchantments as the White Cat's Palace": Whitby as a Locus for Writers' Inspiration

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Abstract: This article focuses upon the small North Yorkshire town of Whitby in Britain and analyses its prolific literary heritage. Most famous as the birthplace of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, recent research into the literary heritage of the area reveals that the town has proved an inspiration for a large number of texts across all literary genres. This paper focuses upon why Whitby is such a locus of inspiration for British writers. It analyses how often texts which claim a provenance to the town, link to other texts which make similar claims. This paper will explore this intertextuality, how one story is entwined with another, implying that one Whitby text seems almost inevitably to lead to another. It will also consider how the texts which come from the town tend to be outward looking, establishing links with other famous texts from the wider world.

Keywords: Whitby, *Dracula*, Victorian literature, place-based literature.

> Above the small and land-locked harbour of Whitby rises and juts out towards the sea the dark cliff where Hild's monastery stood, looking out over the German Ocean. It is a wild wind-swept upland, and the sea beats furiously beneath, and standing there one feels that it is a fitting birthplace for the poetry of a sea-ruling nation. (Brooke 18).

In October 2008, just before Whitby hosted the by then well-established Goth Festival weekend, journalist David Barnett asked, "Does location inform literature, or is it the other way around?" (1). His feature concentrates on Whitby as the birthplace of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. It is a well-known story: how Bram Stoker took his summer holiday in the town during the latter years of the nineteenth-century, discovered the name for his eponymous vampire during his esoteric research in the library of the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society, and settled on the town as the Count's landing place for his attempted invasion into England.

The town has much capitalised on its links with the famous novel. As Jane Gilbert observes: “The infamous Count is around every corner and in every shop window” (Gilbert 1). Barnett also agrees that “*Dracula* [...] has made Whitby famous beyond the catchment area of those who would normally holiday in a town that has, admittedly, much more going for it than merely vampires” (Barnett 1). “But,” he continues, “something captivated Stoker enough to make the place almost a character in its own right in *Dracula* and has done the same for other writers as well” (Barnett 1).

A natural starting point whilst conducting research into Whitby’s literary heritage is with the town’s most famous novel. However, subsequent research then led to an epic poem, a Victorian novel whose famous author described it as “the saddest novel I ever wrote”, a Victorian Bildungsroman, a play, a collection of poetry, a trilogy of children’s books, a Christian allegory in the guise of a fantasy novel aimed at children, a fictionalised travelogue, two collections of ghost stories, a war novel, a Victorian sensationalist novel, a romantic comedy aimed at the chick-lit market, an epic historical poem from 1909, a fictionalised autobiography, a family saga, an historical romance featuring Stoker as the love interest/hero, an historical romance which features heavily the romance of the sea, a series of crime thrillers, and a hefty multilayered novel concerned primarily with academic obsession (Gaskell 4). All of these were written by these other writers to whom Barnett refers, and central to all of them, are the town of Whitby. It is clear, even from just an overview of the texts encountered, that there is more to Whitby’s literary scene than just *Dracula*.

This paper will focus upon why Whitby is such a locus of inspiration for writers. What separates this small town “in the farthest part of Yorkeshire”, teetering on the edge of the North Yorkshire moors, with a population of circa 14,000, from any other British seaside town, which makes it such a source of inspiration for authors? (Linskill 89). What emerges is how often the texts which claim a provenance in the town have links to other texts which make similar claims. This paper will explore this intertextuality, how one story is entwined with another, implying that one Whitby text seems almost inevitably to lead to another. It will also consider how the texts which come from the town tend to be outward looking, establishing links with other famous texts from the wider world.

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The epigraph to this paper cites Stopford Brooke's "On English Literature" and refers to the legend of the creation of Caedmon's Hymn, one of the earliest poems in English literature, and a landmark in illustrating the early influence of Christianity. The legend relates the tale of Caedmon, a poor cowherd, who was visited by an angel whilst he slept, and who commanded him to "sing to me [...] sing of the origin of things" and Caedmon "at once (...) began to do so, and in verse he sang the praise of the Creator" (Parkinson 25). The legend situates the miracle of the creation of Caedmon's Hymn in the environs of Whitby Abbey, and for Brooke, (and Linskill, who quotes him in her Whitby novel, *The Haven Under the Hill*), it highlights the sentiment that this is a "fitting birthplace" for English poetry (Parkinson 25).

Linskill will refer to the legend of Caedmon's inspiration within her novel upon numerous occasions, claiming that the same spirit of literary inspiration moves her heroine, Dorigen Gower, and as Dorigen herself is a Whitby girl, this entitles her to become an author in her own right. Within the novel, Dorigen, is born to a working-class family who are housed in one of the famous Whitby yards (tenement dwellings for the lower classes of the town). The only surviving daughter of a highly religious woman and a jet-worker father, it is clear from the outset that Dorigen will have to work for her living. The Rector of the famous St. Mary's Church which is sited at the top of the 199 steps adjacent to the ruins of Whitby Abbey, foretells her fate as follows:

> 'If I do not mistake, you have other work to do in this life – work which will need the utmost effort you can give.' Then he stopped a moment, looking out across to where the dark mystic sky seemed to melt into the darker and more mystic sea. 'Yes; you will have other work to do,' he said, standing there, and speaking as if he were but reading from the great book that was open before his eyes. 'You will live, and you will work, and your work shall live also, and *it shall do good when I am dead, and my sermons are forgotten.'* [....] So he spoke, standing on that self-same wind-swept headland, where the voice had spoken in the night, calling Caedmon from the herdsman's hut to be the first poet of England (Linskill 163-4, *emphasis in original*).

Overcome by mysticism, falling into modes of biblical and spiritual language, the Rector stands in the position of prophesying angel, whilst Dorigen herself stands in Caedmon's place, as it is revealed that her "other work" which is destined to live on after her death, like Caedmon's calling, is of a literary nature (Linskill 163). Dorigen, like Caedmon, is of humble origins, but her fate – like Caedmon's - has been foretold in the sheltering ruins of Whitby Abbey. Later, when Dorigen's first volume of poetry has been published to critical acclaim (if not commercial success), Dorigen herself recalls Caedmon's inspiration on the site of the ruined abbey, and the occasion on which her father had originally related the legend to her:

> She had not yet forgotten, nor could she forget, that Sunday morning when she had sat at her father's feet among the fallen masonry, and had listened there to the story of the royal and noble Hild, and the yet more impressive story of the Inspiration of Caedmon (Linskill 320).

Once more, Dorigen links Caedmon's calling to her own vocation: "and surely there was nothing in history so especially fitted to enchain and enchant a human soul that had in itself *something* of that same poetic fervour that Caedmon had" (Linskill 320). Enchained and enchanted by her upbringing in Whitby as the home of the first English poet, Dorigen is unable to escape her longing for a literary career, even though she is not always able to make sufficient money to subsist from it.

The legend of Caedmon's Hymn is just one which is reputed to have originated within the atmospheric town of Whitby, and Linskill's use of it in relating her heroine's destiny is a single example of how the rich folklore of the town has been plundered by authors and appropriated in the telling of their own tales. Within *Dracula*, Mina Murray will recount the legend that "a white lady is seen in one of the windows" of the Abbey (Stoker 69). This same legend, which pertains to the fable that St Hilda herself haunts the Abbey, is also appropriated by Linskill's Dorigen, when she attempts, one winter's night in her tiny attic room, "while the moon was sailing slowly over the Abbey towers" to commence an epic poem entitled "The Idyll of Saint Hild" (Linskill 320). The poem is ultimately burned in despair, when Dorigen is unable to find a publisher willing to pay her for it. As the poem she has laboured over is reduced to ashes, she consoles herself, "[s]ome one else will write it (…) Some one else will write that 'Idyll of Saint Hild,' but I shall not know it. I foretell it; but I shall never see it'" (Linskill 373). Indeed,

in a moment of art impersonating reality, someone else *did* write such a poem: Robert Tate Gaskin in his epic historical poem, "Old Seaport of Whitby" of 1909, which makes reference to the same legend:

Likewise the abbey now you see
I made, that you might think of me
Also a window there I plac'd
That you might see me as undress'd
In morning gown and nightrail, there
All the day long fairly appear (cited in Gaskin 55)

In Victoria Ann Roberts' romantic novel *Moon Rising*, which features Bram Stoker as the love interest and utilises the story of Stoker's famous visit to the town as the cause of an unlikely meeting between Stoker and a local fishergirl which will ultimately lead to a love affair, the heroine Damaris Sterne "attempts to impress" Stoker "by telling him the place was haunted by a white lady, thought to be the Lady Hilda" (Roberts 97). By exploiting the legend in this manner, Roberts makes use of two legends from Whitby's rich store: the traditional legend of the white lady, and the stories pertaining to Stoker's visit, which have almost become legendary in Whitby's history in themselves.

Stoker exploits the legend of Whitby's white lady which is said to haunt the Abbey himself. First Mina Murray tells the reader about it, as noted earlier, but then Lucy, the Count's first victim, will come to embody it. Finding Lucy missing from her bed, Mina sets out in search of her through Whitby's darkened streets. Searching for sight of Lucy among the ruins of the Abbey, Mina informs: "Whatever my expectation was, it was not disappointed, for there, on our favourite seat, the silver light of the moon struck a half-reclining figure, snowy white" (Stoker 96).

Similarly, Stoker will access an alternative Whitby legend and exploit it within *Dracula.* The barghest was a demon which appeared in the form of a monstrous hound, stalking the night-time streets. Sometimes called a "padfoot" or a "gytrash" "its huge eyes glow[ed] like the fires of Hell" and all who heard its terrible howl was doomed to an imminent death (McDermott 43). As Scott describes the barghest in his poem *Lay of the Last Minstrel*:

His blood did freeze, his brain did burn,
'Twas feared his mind would ne'er return;

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For he was speechless, ghastly, wan,

For him of whom the story ran,

Who spoke the spectre-hound in Man (Cited in Parkinson 129).

A typical Yorkshire legend, Whitby has its own barghest, which is said to haunt the vicinity of Henrietta Streets (Chapman 39). When Dracula leaps ashore in the sinister form of a large black dog, bringing with him warning of imminent death, he is in a form which would resonate fearfully with superstitious locals of the town.

The legend of the barghest is also exploited in Robin Jarvis's *The Whitby Witches*, when the villain of the piece adopts the form of a large black dog in order to stalk her prey through the streets of Whitby, and also in W. M. Hollins's fictionalised travelogue *Whitby*, when the protagonist hears an unnerving howl as he walks through the night-time streets whilst on his own literary inspired pilgrimage to the town.

With such a rich folkloric history as a source, it is little wonder that authors continue to be drawn to the legends of the town and feel compelled to reinterpret these into their own stories. The pages of many Whitby texts are rich with boggles, hobs, barghests, serpents miraculously driven out to sea or transformed into coils of stone, white ladies, will o' the wisps and bells which ring beneath the sea foretelling disaster. However, there is more to Whitby's history than just folklore, and local stories and news items which must have been considered to have been momentous in the town, have also found their way into the literature which claims a provenance in the area.

Chapman argues that Stoker could just as easily have been citing a local incident when he has the Count come ashore in the guise of a dog, rather than referring to the barghest legend: "More prosaically," Chapman writes, "he may also have read of the wreck of the brig *Norwich Merchant* on Whitby Rock in 1850, in which the crew left only a dog aboard" (Chapman 39). Indeed, many historians and critics assert that Stoker conversed extensively with the locals of the town, gaining inspiration not just for his famous vampire tale, but also for a short adventure story "The Red Stockade: A Story Told by the Old Coastguard" which was published in the American *Cosmopolitan Magazine* in September 1894, and was reputedly related to Stoker by the Whitby coastguard (Chapman 23). The waters

surrounding the coast of Whitby are notoriously perilous and "the whole town", as Gaskell notes in her Whitby-based novel, *Sylvia's Lovers*, has "an amphibious appearance, to a degree unusual even in a seaport" (Gaskell 5). The sea, and tales of the sea heard from local mariners had a profound effect on Stoker's novel. During the week 21st October to 28th October 1885, for example, there was a period of fierce storms which lashed the coastline of Britain. Records indicate that during that week 38 ships were either lost or seriously damaged in British coastal waters (Dalby 15). One such ship was the *Dmitry* which washed up near Tate Hill Pier in Whitby, just below St. Mary's church and the ruins of the Abbey. The ship was from Narva in Estonia, but was called Russian at the time by local reporters:

> On 24 October 1885 the Russian schooner Dimetry about 120 tons was sighted off Whitby about 2pm. Wind northeast Force 8 (fresh gales) strong sea on coast (cargo silver sand – from mouth of Danube ran into harbour by pure chance avoiding rocks (Cited in Chapman 38 (*Sic*)).

The stricken vessel was photographed by local photographer Frank Meadows Sutcliffe and despite the fact that it made the harbour, the gale subsequently abated and "it was supposed she would be safe", the following morning "the seas beat over her with great force. Her masts fell with a terrific crash, and the crew were obliged to abandon her. She is now a complete wreck" ("No. 44, The Dmitry").

Stoker transforms the "*Dmitry* of Narva" into the "*Demeter* of Varna" as the ship carrying boxes of earth from the Count's native Transylvania to British shores. Roberts, in her romantic novel, *Moon Rising*, has the heroine watch the destruction of the *Dmitry* with Stoker, and has both characters participate in the rescue of the crew, once again utilising both a local story of a shipwreck, in addition to tales surrounding Stoker's visit to the town and the part Whitby played in the genesis of *Dracula*. Later, Roberts's heroine, Damaris, will report:

> During the hours of darkness, the lashing tail of the storm had beaten the *Dmitry* of Narva almost to matchwood, denuding her of her masts and spars, stripping her decks and holing her below the waterline so that her cargo of silver sand spilled out, shining, in the morning sun (Roberts 43).

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> Echoing the rhetoric of the newspaper report contemporaneous to the event, Roberts shows her research through the narrative of her romantic novel, although there is no evidence to suggest Stoker was actually present to witness the wrecking of the *Dmitry*.

Stoker will recreate his own newspaper report of the event, framed in "the cutting from the Dailygraph" which is pasted into Mina Murray's diary (Stoker 83). In this, the reporter alleges that "one old salt" watching the wrecking of the ship determines "she must fetch up somewhere, if it was only in hell" (Stoker 84). His somewhat macabre vow is echoed in the fate of the Whitby whaling ship, the *Esk*, which was lost in 1826 near Redcar whilst attempting to reach Whitby. The master of that vessel is reputed to have made the ominous vow to reach "Hell or Whitby tonight". The story is so famous in the area, that Linskill also uses it in her novel, *The Haven under the Hill*. In a story related by Dorigen's godfather, he narrates "the tale o' the wreck o' the *Narwhal*", where when "t'gale sprang up" the "mate's words" are "'Hell or Hild's Haven afore midnight, my lads!' An' he never reached Hild's Haven" (Linskill 44).

Linskill, an author native to the town, peppers her novel with many local stories and incidents. For example, the shifting and unstable nature of the cliffs demarcating the edge of the town is just one famous aspect of the natural geography of Whitby which appears in many texts from the area. That the cliffs are dangerous and unpredictable is well known within the locality. Bones interred within the cliff-top churchyard have been known to emerge from out of the side of the cliff and rain down on the paths below, and cliff collapses in the town have been documented from the early nineteenth century right up to present day. Most recently, a *Yorkshire Examiner* article warned hikers about the dangers of walking close to the cliff edges because of the instability of the land (Guillot & Gray 1). An article from 1833 reports:

> A singularly melancholy occurrence of this kind happened nearly twenty-five years ago, about ten miles north of Whitby. Whilst two girls, sisters, were sitting on the beach, a stone, which, by striking against a ledge, had acquired a rotary motion, fell from the cliff, and hitting one of the girls on the hinder part of the neck, severed her head from her body, in a moment. The head was thrown to a considerable distance along the shore ("The Abbey, Port and Lighthouse of Whitby 69).

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Linskill appropriates this macabre story and works it into her own text. As Dorigen's friend, Mrs Salvain advises her:

> The cliff looks frightfully dangerous when you look up from below; indeed it *is* dangerous. You must never sit down under it, my dear. Once – it was in the year 1808 – two young Staithes girls, sisters they were, sat down on the scaur – I'll show you the exact spot when we go down – and while they were sitting there talking quietly together and looking out over the sea, a sharp splinter of rock fell from the top of the cliff, spinning round and round as it fell, and it struck one of the sisters on the back of the neck, so that it took her head quite off. The other sister saw it rolling away over the scaur to a great distance before it stopped. Think of that, my dear, whenever you are tempted to sit down under the cliffs. It is quite true, and what has happened once may always happen again (Linskill 89).

Here, the reader can observe first-hand the sensation of local gossip, coupled with the narrative drama with which Linskill enhances this story to make it worthy of inclusion in her novel. The head is not just "severed from the body" by the falling rock; "it took her head quite off", before "rolling" to "a great distance" along the beach, all before the horrified gaze of both the sister and the reader (Linskill 89). As a local author, Linskill claims the privilege of reporting this gossip to her readers, weaving fact and fiction together.

Linskill and Stoker are not unique in their appropriation of Whitby history and local tales. In Joel Toombs's novel set during the first world war, the famous bombing of the town by German ships *Derflinger* and *Von der Tan* which took place on 16 December 1914, forms the impetus for the hero, Howie, to enlist in the army whilst still underage. Similarly, Jarvis, in *The Whitby Witches*, employs this episode in Whitby's history, when the witch Rowena, conjures the German ships from the past to bomb the town once more. Whitby, it is clear, is a town which is rich in history, both maritime and connected to the geological and geographical positioning of the town. The setting conjures drama, which, it seems, proves irresistible to many authors in the construction of their own tales.

The allure of expressing the town in the work of many writers is clear from just how many texts have emerged which exploit Whitby as a setting. For Linskill's character, Dorigen Gower: "[t]he one

thing she was conscious of was the passionate desire for expression – the passionate sense of something to be expressed" (Linskill 216). That "something to be expressed", Linskill explicitly informs the reader, is bountiful in this small town on the edge of the Yorkshire coast: Whitby is a "place to be seen and long remembered" (Linskill 152). Phyllis Bentley, in a study of why so many novelists have roots or connections within the county of Yorkshire, argues that the county has its own tradition of fiction, which "has eased the path of subsequent writers" (Bentley 514). She continues: "[t]o become a novelist is a rash design anywhere, but in Yorkshire it has at least been done before, both of old and within living memory" (Bentley 514).

Writers, such as Linskill, who consciously invokes Whitby writers such as Caedmon, within her work, seemingly gain inspiration from each other's works in the pursuit of their literary endeavours. This becomes clear, if one spends a concentrated amount of time reading the works of authors which all have Whitby in common. Each text seems to call on other texts which have their provenance in the town, with some texts obviously employing imagery and potentially owing a debt of gratitude to other Whitby texts. This intertextual relationship can be demonstrated in Stoker's use of Walter Scott's poem, which is partially based in Whitby, *Marmion*. Mina introduces the subject upon her arrival in the town: "Right over the town is the ruin of Whitby Abbey, which was sacked by the Danes, and which is the scene of part of 'Marmion', where the girl was built up in the wall" (Stoker 69). As with his use of the legend of the white lady, however, Stoker puts *Marmion* to more subtle uses within his novel. Consider the following from Scott's poem:

Danger, long travel, want, or woe,
Soon change the form that best we know –
For deadly fear can time outgo,
And blanch at once the hair; (Scott LL25-28, Canto the First).

Jonathan Harker, who has experienced "danger, long travel" and "woe" during his visit to Dracula's Transylvanian castle, is changed almost beyond Mina's recognition: "I found my dear one, oh, so thin, and pale and weak-looking. [...] He is only a wreck of himself, [...] He has had some terrible shock" (Stoker 109). Later, when more "terrible shock[s]" ensue and Mina falls victim to the Count's evil machinations, his hair is "blanch[ed] at once":

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> Harker was still and quiet; but over his face, as the awful narrative went on, came a grey look which deepened and deepened in the morning light, till when the first red streak of the coming dawn shot up, the flesh stood darkly out against the whitening hair (Stoker 292).

From *Dracula*, other writers employ Stoker's imagery within their more recent novels. Jarvis's evil witch Rowena, in *The Whitby Witches*, for instance, adopts the same modes of travel as Dracula. The Count "crawl[s] down the castle wall [...] *face down* [...] just as a lizard moves along a wall" (Stoker 41). Similarly, she "cling[s] to the vertical cliff face like a spider on a wall" (Jarvis 179). Whilst Stoker's vampires form from shafts of moonlight and dissolve into motes of dust in the ancient castle, in G. P. Taylor's Christian allegory, *Shadowmancer*, set in Whitby, the supernatural beings form from "millions of tiny sparks jumping in a fire" before beginning to "draw closer together" in a vampire-esque style (Taylor 41). In addition, James Whitworth's crime thriller, *Death's Disciple,* uses similar sinister imagery as Detective Frank Miller investigates the crime scene, struggling to resolve the case of the *Dracula*-inspired serial killer who stalks the streets of Whitby in his novel: "Shards of dust mote-filled light were broken and then reformed as he moved towards the dulled windows" (*Death's Disciple* 43) Then there are the writers such as Roberts, with her romantic novel, *Moon Rising*, and Hollins, with his fictional travelogue *Whitby* which relates the tale of a man upon a literary pilgrimage to the town, who, along with Whitworth, use either the figure of Stoker or *Dracula*'s links to the town to create their own stories.

In Whitworth's crime thriller *Death's Disciple*, a serial killer is on the loose on the streets of Whitby, murdering his victims in a variety of *Dracula*-inspired methods. One victim is found strangled (like the ancient fisherman Swales), her body arranged with a copy of *Dracula* in hand. The next is impaled upon a wooden stake. Whitworth, like Stoker, exploits the mysterious atmosphere of the town, with huge banks of fog obscuring the killer's misdeeds, and winter evenings closing in early on the town, giving it a palpable Victorianesque ambience.

Whitworth, in the second novel in his "Detective Frank Miller Yorkshire Mystery" series, *Bidding to Die*, then moves on to use Mary Linskill as the source of inspiration for his next case. In this episode, a bundle of letters is found from Mary Linskill to an unknown other. A murder is then

committed by someone who is seemingly desperate to acquire the letters. As well as discussing Linskill's work this novel also accesses A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance*, which features scenes local to Whitby, informing that the only reason the murdered tourist's wife was in the area was "to browse Whitby jet in W. Hammond's. She had seen the shop in the film *Possession* and its presence had been the deciding factor in her agreeing to visit the town" (*Bidding to Die* 15). The premise for the crime also bears remarkable similarities to the themes in Byatt's novel. As Whitworth has the academic (and latterly the chief suspect in the case) in his text explain: "[m]odern day academics find a series of letters that reveal a love affair that not only shines a whole new light on his poetry, but also adds a whole new dimension to her work. She is essentially rediscovered as a writer" (*Bidding to Die* 43). The possibility of rediscovering Linskill as a writer and gaining new insight into her work ostensibly forms the impetus for the murder in this case, until it transpires that the letters are fake, and the murder has been perpetrated for other reasons.

From Byatt's *Possession*, featuring scenes in Whitby and nearby Boggle Hole, and which, incidentally, also makes reference to that other famous Whitby novel, Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers,* the Whitby reader can progress onwards to Roberts's *Moon Rising*, whose heroine, Damaris, also finds a similar disturbing need for a "sense of *possession*" when reliving her past (Roberts 266). From an obsession with Victorian authors and their connection with the town, one can proceed almost effortlessly to the Whitby as experienced by another famous Victorian author, Wilkie Collins. His sensational novel *No Name* was reputedly written whilst Collins was staying at the Royal Hotel in Whitby and features scenes "in the secluded village of Ruswarp, on the banks of the Esk about two miles inland from Whitby" (Collins 97). From there, it is but a short step from Collins's Captain Wragge's "party-coloured eyes." to Kirsty Ferry's 2014 chick-lit novel *Some Veil Did Fall*, with its fixation upon Victorian authors and featuring the hero and his sister, each with "party-coloured eyes", "one dark blue and one dark green" of their own (Ferry 14). The list is almost endless. From Linskill quoting the poetry of Caedmon to David Agnew using *Dracula* as a character in his own poetry collection, it seems that one can walk directly from the birth of English poetry right into the present, stepping only on texts with a Whitby connection.

Furthermore, these texts are not just limited to the small town of Whitby in their aspirations. As a coastal town, Whitby is a place filled with seagoing folk. As Taylor writes in *Shadowmancer*: "You can get a boat from Whitby – take you anywhere in the world" (Taylor 163). Small town it may be, but it is filled with outward-looking folk. As Gaskell observes:

> But for twenty miles inland there was no forgetting the sea, nor the sea-trade; refusing shell-fish, seaweed, the offal of the melting-houses, were the staple manure of the district; great ghastly whale-jaws, bleached bare and white, were the arches over the gate-posts to many a field or moorland stretch (Gaskell 6).

As a community with a heritage of being heavily involved in the dangerous whaling industry, it is unsurprising that Gaskell's visit to the town inspired her to create a specksioneer (chief harpoonist) on a whaling vessel for her romantic hero. Sidney Brown, Arthur Credland, Ann Savours and Bernard Stonehouse, in their analysis of whaling log books dating from 1772 to 1913, found that a third of all whaling expeditions to either the Greenland Whaling Ground or the Davis Straits, embarked from Whitby (311-320). Benjamin S. Lawson argues that Gaskell's novel forms a link between Melville's novels *Moby Dick* (1851) and *Billy Budd* (1891, published 1924), in that both Melville and Gaskell used similar sources in the whaling journals of William Scoresby (also a Whitby resident) (37-57). Linskill's novel (1886) similarly sits between *Moby Dick* and *Billy Budd*, and is as much of a link between Melville's two novels, as *Sylvia's Lovers*. It is evident from *The Haven under the* Hill that Linskill has also accessed Scoresby's journals as a source. Whilst Dorigen's Godfather Nathaniel ("Than") narrates the story of his whaling days to his Goddaughter, he describes how he came to break his leg during a voyage and ended up lamed for life: "T'season was aboot ower'd, when one mornin' we heard a great shoutin' an' stampin' owerhead, an' guessin' 'at there was a fall,..." (Linskill 42 *Sic*). At this point in the text, Linskill inserts a footnote as follows: "According to Scoresby, from the Dutch *val*, implying 'to jump or to drop,' and considered expressive of the movements of the sailors when manning the boats after a whale has been sighted" (Linskill 42). When the accident occurs, Than's "leg were't worst mashed" (Linskill 43). As a young man he is devastated when the ship's carpenter presents him with "a pair o' wooden crutches" and learns he will be disabled for life (Linskill 43).

Like Captain Ahab, Than is similarly dependent upon his artificial aids to remain mobile; and like Ahab's artificial limb, Than's crutches similarly become part of the man himself, almost gaining sentience at one point in order not to be separated from him. When the whaling vessel is wrecked with all hands lost, excluding Than, he tells Dorigen:

> Eh, but it were straange te think o' me bein' saved – me 'at was sa lame, an' sa weak, an' sa wicked! An' t' cur'ousest part on it all was my crutch – that same crutch 'at stands aside my bedhead te this daay – it washed up all t'way alongside o'me, close te the davit. It was like a livin' thing 'at knew... Ay, Ah've written it doon on paper 'at that crutch is to be buried wi' me – laid on my coffin, an' happed up wi' me i' my graave (Linskill 46 *Sic*)

As Lawson notes, within Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers*, all the action takes place within Monkshaven (Gaskell's name for Whitby), excluding some very brief episodes descriptive of Philip Hepburn's injury abroad and his trek home to the town. It is essentially a landlocked novel, with the best that certainly the female characters can aspire to being a wistful longing gaze out to the surrounding sea. Sylvia, whose "only comfort" is to escape the narrow confines of her home and to listen to "the sound of the passionate rush and rebound of many waters,..." which "lull[s] her for an instant", can only experience the pleasures of the sea vicariously (Gaskell 285). As Lawson observes, Sylvia is "forced to inhabit a world of reaction" (Lawson 53). Dorigen Gower, in Linskill's work, similarly feels the lure of the sea but can only experience it vicariously through the tales offered to her of the whalers' exploits in the Greenland seas. Yet the tales she hears from her Godfather "Than" are much more detailed than any of those offered within Gaskell's. Than relives his whaling days with his Goddaughter at his knee, and by inference, the reader too, experiences the uncanny environment of the Greenland seas:

> 'They like the thin bay ice, them whales,' the old man murmured. 'Then they can break it easy, an' come up to breathe. Eh, I'd like thee to see a whale crackin' a sheet of ice wi' the crown of his head, an' comin' up to the surface... I'd like thee to see it all, honey, but thee'd be despert frightened... It's all so strange i' them Greenland seas; an' it's cold, despert cold (Linskill 371 (*Sic*).

Later, when Than is dying, he returns once more to the Greenland seas, losing himself in "snow-fog" which is "so despert thick" before reaching the point of death which is celebrated by him in his dying visions with "tremulous [...] gladness":

> 'At last! at last, there's the oppen water! ... Ay, it's yonde, the clear blue oppen water; shinin' again' the glitterin' ice; and surgin' up upon the edges o' the floe!... Eh, but I've looked a lang time for the sight o' that! It's dolin' to be closed in i' the thick ice so long, an' at last! I'm fain to reaach yon blue water. Eh, I'm fain to see you shinin' oppen water!' (Linskill 373-4 (*Sic*).

The sea is a source of inspiration for both Sylvia and Dorigen, as it is for many who, like Ishmael and the other whalers, feel the "luring power" of the sea; "nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land" (Cited in Lawson 52). As Dorigen observes:

> It is ever musical: and the music is for ever changing. You shall live within the sound of it for a whole long lifetime, and it shall never sing you twice the same song; or soothe you twice with the same sense of the nearness of the Spirit that broods upon the face of the waters; or strike your whole soul through twice with the same imperious inspiration (Linskill 50).

During the time of Linskill's 1886 novel, the glory days of whaling in Whitby were far behind the town, with records indicating that the last vessels left Whitby just before the 1820s, and whalers beyond that time favouring departure from Hull, Aberdeen, Dundee and Peterhead instead of Whitby (Brown, Credland, Savours and Stonehouse 311-320). However, Whitby is a small town with a long memory and significant events of historical importance such as the glory days of the whaling industry and including other matters such as cliff collapses leading to fatalities, would live long in the town's collective remembrance. This is perhaps why Linskill includes these stories, despite the fact that they occurred some sixty years ago, in the case of the whaling stories, and nearly eighty years in the past, in the case of the story of the young woman who was decapitated during a cliff collapse and relates them as if they are contemporary tales.

In reality, Whitby is a town which has changed little over many years. This is the case, even in spite of Linskill's complaints in her novel of the town progressing through "years of quick change" and

becoming "covered with rows of red-brick houses, roofed with blue slates, and looking like the excrescences they were" (Linskill 152). As Barnett observes in his 2008 article on the town, it is "one of the few places remaining in Britain today with genuine, palpable atmosphere" (Barnet 1). Many authors note that travelling to Whitby is like, as Jarvis's character Jennet observes "taking a journey back to the age of steam" (Jarvis 7). Similarly Michel Faber's character, Sian, in his novella *The Hundred and Ninety-Nine Steps* will note that the town appears "distinctly Victorian" (Faber 3). Whitworth agrees: "[o]ften the town had to make little effort to appear Victorian..." (Whitworth 147). For Byatt's characters: "[h]ere everything seems primaeval – the formations of the rocks, the heaving and tossing of the full sea, the people with their fishing boats (called cobles in the local speech) which I imagine are not much changed from the primitive if versatile little craft of the early Viking invaders" (Byatt 232).

In many ways, Whitby has preserved its heritage beautifully, rendering it into a town which is, as Jameson describes it in her romantic novel, *The Lovely Ship*: "as full of enchantment as the White Cat's palace" (Jameson 62). It is a town where the past feels as immediate as the present. The antiquated streets, the many literary references harking back to early English poetry, the rich folkloric traditions and history of the town, peppered with its unique geographical location in its proximity to the wild remote landscape of the North York Moors coupled with the lure of the sea, ensure it is a magical place to visit and be inspired by. To determine precisely why Whitby has been and, it seems, always will provide such a locus of inspiration to the many writers who visit and recreate the locality as a setting for their work is difficult to attribute to any one factor. Indeed, it should more correctly be accredited to the "infinite variety" within the town (Linskill 152). As Linskill argues, providing an artist's viewpoint of her hometown:

> Whether you be a poet or artist, historian or antiquarian, a student of things natural above the earth or beneath it, you shall find enough to engage your closest attention. While, should you be a mere student of humanity, you shall find here, sooner than in most places, that contrast, diversity, and extreme of unusualness which is the interesting material for your researches (Linskill 152).

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