

**‘Seven Devils’: Gerald Griffin’s ‘The Brown Man’
and the Making of Irish Gothic**

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‘... of the true Hibernian stamp, the genuine emanation of the mud cottage,
redolent of turf and whiskey...’

—an anonymous reviewer describing ‘The Brown Man’,
Monthly Review, April 1827

Gerald Griffin’s chilling short story ‘The Brown Man’ has been largely forgotten since its initial appearance in the collection *“Holland-Tide;” or, Munster Popular Tales* (1827), the writer’s fiscally-motivated fiction debut, and the volume that made his name after a long, unsuccessful slog as a playwright in London.(1) As the story is so little known, it may be useful at this point to provide a brief narrative synopsis. The scene is set in a remote part of West Munster, where a widow named Guare and her beautiful daughter, Nora, live in poverty and near-starvation. Their plight appears to improve when Nora is courted by and marries ‘a strange horseman’ known as the Brown Man, who promises to make his new wife ‘a lady, with servants at her call, and all manner of fine things about her’.(2) But on arrival at her new husband’s home, Nora finds that the Brown Man’s ‘estate’ is a ‘wild bog’ and his palace a ‘clay-hovel’, while the only food available is ‘a handful of raw white-eyes and a little salt’. The bride trembles at the sight of the marital bed, ‘a little straw in a corner’, but worse is yet to come.(3) That night, and the next, the Brown Man leaves the cabin, returning to bed ‘cold as ice’ half an hour later. On the third night he leaves again, and this time Nora secretly follows him, ‘winding through a lane of frost-nipped sallow trees’.(4) To her horror, she sees her new husband, his horse and his dog in the graveyard of Muckross Abbey, ‘seated by an open grave, eating something; and glancing their brown, fiery eyes about in every direction.’(5) The next day, a terrified Nora pleads to be allowed to visit her mother; the Brown Man refuses, ‘I didn’t marry you to be keeping you gadding’, but offers to fetch the widow himself.(6) In due course the widow appears and Nora confides to her the horrifying sight she has witnessed:

‘My husband by the grave, and the horse ... Turn your head aside, mother, for your breath is very hot ... and the dog and they eating.—Ah you are not my mother!’ shrieked the miserable girl, as the Brown Man flung off his disguise, and stood before her, grinning worse than a blacksmith’s face through a horse-collar. He just looked at her one moment, then darted his long fingers into her bosom, from which the red blood spouted in so many streams. She was very soon out of all pain, and a merry supper the horse, the dog, and the Brown Man had that night, by all accounts.(7)

For the most part, reviewers of *Holland-Tide* were favourable, focusing their attention on the lengthy opening story ‘The Aylmers of Bally-Aylmer’. Nevertheless there were those who were disturbed by the Gothic contours of the breviloquent ‘Brown Man’. *The Literary Chronicle* railed ‘The Brown Man we dislike, a child of six years would like it better’; and while the *Dublin and London magazine* described the stories of *Holland-Tide* as ‘highly entertaining’, the reviewer made an exception of ‘The Brown Man’, ‘which is too diabolical’.(8) The story still retains its bedevilling power, one that is enhanced by the uncharacteristic economy with which the story is told, yet its cool reception in 1827 proved a telling foreshadowing of the story’s eventual lapse into obscurity. While it is occasionally included in anthologies of Irish short stories, ‘The Brown Man’, like much of Griffin’s work, has been largely neglected by

literary criticism.(9) In this article I want to suggest that, contrary to being in accord with authentic Hibernian narrative or to bearing the ‘stamp’ of the mud cottage, turf and whiskey, as the epigraph of this article suggests, ‘The Brown Man’ is used by Griffin as a means of interrogating and ultimately subverting such essentialist constructions, even as the narrative confounds the generic boundaries of literary representation. Indeed, the narrative offers an intriguing opportunity for readers to reappraise the parameters of Irish Gothic writing, a trend that is currently underway in critical studies (notably, in the web-pages of this journal (10)). To this end, I will endeavour to demonstrate that ‘The Brown Man’ broadens our understanding of the complex and varying ways in which Irish writers used Gothic modes in their work. ‘The Brown Man,’ it will be argued, reveals Irish Gothic to be intensely and intentionally intertextual—a bricolage of national narratives which, taken together, transcend their constituent parochialisms, thereby participating in a markedly cosmopolitan cultural arena.

Such a reassessment may at first glance seem to be a contrary critical response to a story that strives to distinguish itself as specifically and regionally Irish. Following an epigraph from the English verse-satire ‘The Dragon of Wantley’ and an oddly academic-sounding opening paragraph (of which more later), the story’s geography (West Munster, the Mangerton mountains, the Gothic remains of Muckcross Abbey) and Hiberno-English dialect all pertain to a stereotypical Irish peasant setting:

In a lonely cabin, in a lonely glen, on the shores of a lonely lough, in one of the most lonesome districts of west Munster, lived a lone woman named Guare. She had a beautiful girl, a daughter named Nora. Their cabin was the only one within three miles round them in every way. As to the mode of living, it was simple enough, for all they had was one little garden of white cabbage, and they had eaten that down to a few heads between them, a sorry prospect in a place where even a handful of *prishoc* weed was not to be had without sowing it.(11)

The repetition of *lonely* establishes the childlike, fairy-tale feel of the narrative as well as the remoteness of the location (the mythical, mystical West so central to the imagination of the Revival writers later in the century), but the emphasis on food, and on the near-starvation of the women, sounds a note of realistic, material concern that is also the principal subject of the volume’s opening pages. ‘The Brown Man’, as noted by the *Monthly Review* in the epigraph to this article, flaunts an Hibernian bravura appropriate to a volume strategically marketed as part of the wave of regional fiction in vogue in the 1820s. The success of *Holland-Tide* (Griffin produced a second volume, *Tales of the Munster Festivals*, later the same year) suggests that the writer had garnered from his time in London a shrewd estimation of what his English audience expected in the way of local colour, although the graphic horror of ‘The Brown Man’ was a step too far for some, accustomed even as they were to themes of violence and the supernatural in ‘authentic’ representations of Irish life.

The overarching fictional frame of *Holland-Tide* supports its commercially-sound ethnographic purpose: a story-telling session by a group of Irish peasants gathered together for a ‘most frolick November-Eve party, at the house of a respectable farmer in the west of Munster’.(12) ‘Holland-Tide’ (or Hallowe’en) thus summons a dominant context of Irish folklore, superstition, and the supernatural.(13) Such a narrative strategy might appear unusual coming from a writer who greatly admired (and indeed sought to emulate) the Banim brothers’ *Tales by the O’Hara Family* (1825) specifically for its ‘power of creating an intense interest without stepping out of real life, and in the very easy and natural drama that is carried through them’.(14) Griffin’s working title for his own collection was the less evocative, even mundane moniker ‘Munster Anecdotes’; the stories, he wrote to his brother, were to be ‘illustrative of manners and scenery precisely as they stand in the south of Ireland, never daring to travel out of perfect and easy probability... Reality you know is all the rage now.’(15) Yet, while the novella ‘The Aylmers of

Bally-Aylmer' features a ghost that turns out to be a mortal being, the rest of the stories repeatedly foreground supernatural phenomenon without even the 'loophole' of possible rational explanation. 'The Brown Man' deploys conflicting authorial modes and combines fantastical elements (such as talking animals) with realistic detail in a style that anticipates something of the controlled extravagance of magic realism. Taken as a whole, *Holland-Tide* is by turns Romantic, melodramatic, realist, Gothic, or a combination of all of these, suggesting either that Griffin changed his mind as to the tenor of his fiction, or that his conception of 'realism' was significantly different to how this genre was developing in English literary tradition. Griffin's 'The Brown Man', like much Irish writing of the period, challenges the boundaries of literary genres, to ongoing discomfiting effect. While readers in the 1820s found the story too diabolical, Vivian Mercier, in his 1964 anthology *Great Irish Short Stories*, worried that it almost wasn't diabolical enough: '[w]ith his facetious tone and phonetic spelling of Irish English, Griffin almost ruined a terrifying vampire tale.'(16)

To perceive Irish 'reality' as differing in substantial ways from its English equivalent was hardly exceptional; as is often remarked, the island was already securely established in British cultural consciousness as a place of extraordinary, anomalous difference, a site of romantic and Gothic adventure rather than 'real life'. The critic Siobhán Kilfeather has traced the 'wild' Ireland of Spenser and Milton, through the work of a variety of eighteenth-century writers and genres to reveal Ireland as 'one of the original sites of the Gothic [which] may help to explain the status of Ireland as a Gothic scene in the nineteenth century.'(17) A review in 1827 of the Banims' second series of *Tales by the O'Hara Family* (1826), expressed the widespread view that '[t]here is no country more fertile in the materials of romance than Ireland.' While the tenor of English life was 'even, dignified, and graceful', in Ireland,

on the contrary, common life is almost of itself a romance, requiring no foreshortenings, no artificial contrast, no dexterous excision of level passages, no heightenings of passion, fortitude, or crime. Pleasure and despair border as closely on each other as the chapters in a novel [...] There is not the unity and decorum requisite for tragedy; but there is precisely the variety which the exigencies of romance demand, thrown by nature into the strongest relief.(18)

Griffin's emblematic title *Holland-Tide* thus attests to the widespread perception of Ireland-as-living-romance (or Gothic), capitalizing on contemporary interest in folklore and regional fiction as markers of national culture and identity, even as the volume's generic muddlings exemplify the complex (and often critically problematized) texture of literary realism in nineteenth-century Irish writing.(19)

'The Brown Man' then, at first glance appears as a quintessentially 'Irish' story, channelling local folklore, redolent of traditional tales told by the fireside in 'the mud cottage', and overlaid with Gothic tropes of terror, horror, cannibalism and/or vampirism (both are possible readings of the story), as well as, more subtly indicated, the ways in which the past returns to haunt and torment the present. Yet, any reading of the story as narrowly 'Irish' is complicated by the teasing tone of the opening paragraph, which hints at a deeper meaning encoded in the narrative:

The common Irish expression of 'the seven devils' does not, it would appear, owe its origin to the supernatural influences ascribed to that numeral, from its frequent association with the greatest and most solemn occasions of theological history. If one were disposed to be fancifully metaphysical upon the subject, it might not be amiss to compare credulity to a sort of mental prism, by which the great volume of light of speculative superstition is refracted in a manner precisely similar to that of the material, every day sun, the great refractor thus showing only *blue* devils to the dwellers in the good city of London, *orange*

and *green* devils to the inhabitants of the sister (or rather step-daughter), island, and so forward until the seven component hues are made out, through the other nations of the earth. But what has this to do with the story? In order to answer that question, the story must be told.(20)

This dense prologue, ruminating on the relationship of nationhood and traditional culture, is in stark tonal and stylistic contrast to the story that follows, and demands attentive reading. Does Griffin's analogy, comparing the localized reception of superstitions or myths to refracted white light, reinforce national particularity or counteract it? At the very least, it provokes and problematizes the question of national difference in a period which placed much emphasis on the importance and validity of such distinctions (and within a volume seeking to profit as already noted, from its declared regionalism). By insisting on a communal aboriginal source for popular culture, Griffin arguably subverts essentialized notions of identity. What, though, as Griffin riddlingly asks, has any of this to do with the story? His culturally sophisticated frame (even before taking into consideration the epigraph, more on which below) immensely enriches the reading of 'The Brown Man' and the interpretations that we are prompted to make; the deeper meaning of the story, it could be suggested, is the fallacy of belief in national singularity, advancing instead a multicoloured cultural plurality suitably couched in that most hybridized and versatile of literary genres, the Gothic. Combining the colours of blue, orange, and green, as any art-school student knows, produces brown, and Griffin's brown man, I want to argue, becomes not only the figure for such transnational mythic dissemination, but the site of an Irish Gothic that is more heterogeneously intertextual, intercultural, and aesthetically studied than has previously been acknowledged.

While critical assumptions as to the constitution and function of Irish Gothic have recently received some sustained and fruitful interrogation, the overwhelming scholarly convention has been to decode Irish Gothic writing as a vehicle for class anxiety, finding in the texts of writers such as Charles Maturin, Sheridan Le Fanu, and Bram Stoker, a fitful literary tradition that allegorized the troubled subconscious of the Protestant Anglo-Irish in the nineteenth century.(21) The work of Griffin, a Catholic raised in post-1798 Limerick, whose father reportedly assisted the Irish peasantry in the severe repression that followed the rebellion, provides an opportunity to widen the parameters of criticism to explore what Richard Haslam has postulated as 'an Irish-Catholic-nationalist Gothic mode'.(22) Taking a cue from the historical bearings of Anglo-Irish Gothic criticism, which aligns the supernatural with either the oppressed (and vengeful) Irish or the oppressing (and guilt-stricken) Anglo-Irish, it is tempting to read 'The Brown Man' in the first instance as a sort of Gothic aisling which allegorizes the structures and practices of colonialism. Such an arch, meta-textual framing may be signalled even in the choice of epigraph: an extract from 'The Dragon of Wantley', a well-known satire allegorizing a dispute over tithes in a seventeenth-century Yorkshire village.(23) The dragon in question referred to an ecclesiastic with an unreasonable appetite for tithes, and the knight of the piece, 'More of More-Hall', versified the lawyer who brought a successful suit against the cleric on behalf of the Wantley parishioners. In an analogous allegorical manner, it could be argued that Griffin's story symbolizes the oppression of Ireland (textually figured as Nora Guare) by an exploitative, alien aristocratic class (the Brown Man). The trope of Ireland as a beautiful, vulnerable maiden was well established even by the nineteenth-century; one of the earliest, most famous proponents of the aisling tradition was Aogán Ó Rathaille, buried, according to popular legend, in the churchyard of Muckross Abbey (where Griffin's Brown Man carries out his midnight raids). The Gothic ruin of Muckross Abbey and its violent history is itself a symbol of centuries of religious persecution and civil strife in Ireland and, pursuing this historical line further, the Brown Man himself could originate in the person of particularly loathed Anglo-Irish landlords: Denis 'the rope' Browne (so-called for his alacrity in hanging suspected rebels during 1798) and vividly castigated in Antaine Raiftearaí's 'Amhrán na bhFrannach'.(24) Alternatively, and more specifically related to the

precise topography of the story, another candidate is Valentine Brown (1695-1736), a scion of the great landowning family of west Munster and subject of Ó Rathaille's most notoriously scathing satire, 'Vailintín Brún'.

A mist of pain has covered my dour old heart
 since the alien devils entered the land of Conn;
 our Western Sun, Munster's right ruler, clouded
 --there's the reason I'd ever call on you,
 Valentine Brown.(25)

This reading of 'The Brown Man' would seem to fulfil the rubric of a Catholic-nationalist Gothic, with the emphasis perhaps on the latter half of the equation. Equally, it speaks to the anxiety-inducing paradox at the heart of the post-Glorious Revolution British state which preached democracy at home and elsewhere, in Ireland and the Empire, practised despotism. 'The Brown Man' could thus reflect upon the barbarism which became, as Luke Gibbon has argued, 'intrinsic to the maintenance of colonial rule.'(26)

While it is tempting to see the Brown Man, fortified with the usual gentry accoutrements of horse and hound, as a prefiguration of the vampiric Anglo-Irish landlord, there are textually embedded problems with such a reading. The Brown Man's estate is revealed to be 'a wild bog', and his big house 'a clay-hovel' (27); moreover, fittingly to these domestic arrangements, the Brown Man speaks Irish:

'Whogh! whogh!' said the horse as they drove off, 'that was well done. Are we to have a mail [sic] of her?'
 'Easy, ma-coppuleen, and you'll get your 'nough before night,' said the Brown Man, 'and you likewise, my little dog.'(28)

This complicates the notion of the Brown Man as an alien, post-Cromwellian Anglo-Irish landlord, associating him rather with a more ancient Gaelic world and, more circuitously, its damning representation by Elizabethan and Jacobean English colonialist writers as a place of savagery, barbarism, and cannibalism (a tradition founded much earlier by Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hiberica* [1187] and *Expugnatio Hibernica* [1189]).(29) This colonial counterpoint is immediately signalled in the text's opening line; while the expression 'the seven devils' is 'fancifully' linked to the seven colours of the rainbow, the allusion has other possible origins: the New Testament story of the seven demons cast out of Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2), and, more ominously, John Temple's influential propagandist history on the 1641 Rebellion, *The history of the general rebellion in Ireland*, first published in 1646, and frequently re-issued thereafter. The phrase occurs as Temple details a horrific scene of Irish rebels triumphantly parading and mutilating the severed heads of seven English soldiers, which are then unceremoniously dumped in a hole outside Kilkenny:

And to make the manner of their burial, and the heads themselves yet more contemptible; the rebels (over the hole where the heads were laid) set up a long stick, whereto they fixed papers, that all may take notice of the place: and after, and from that time, the rebellious roguish boys, took up, and frequently used the oath, 'by the cross of the seven devils heads buried on St James's-Green.'(30)

The popularity of Temple's work was durable and, as Kathleen Noonan argues, 'played a particularly powerful role in fixing a negative image of the Irish in the minds of the English,' finding an enthusiastic audience in London where its frequent re-publications marked periods of heightened public fears about the security of the state: '[w]ars with the French, Jacobite rebellions, even the Home Rule agitation of the

late nineteenth century'.(31) Jarlath Killeen has demonstrated how Temple's text and its 'imagology of horror' were crucial components in the formulation of Irish-Anglican Gothic, and its subsequent evolution in the eighteenth century in the work of William Molyneux, William King, Jonathan Swift, Edmund Burke and Maria Edgeworth.(32) The spectre of Temple in 'The Brown Man', though, is at best equivocal in its historical resonances. By echoing Temple in its opening line, the story positions itself in relation to the well-established colonialist view of an island that was self-consuming in its irredeemable savagery, but, given the teasing tone of the opening paragraph and its pert questioning of originary national narratives, the relation is more likely than not an ironic one which points to how history, like any other fiction, may be consumed and cloaked by myth. Thus, one outrageous, extravagant Irish fiction points to another, initiating a sub-current of self-reflexive anxiety over the very act of writing—the ways in which textual representation might compromise or jeopardize the integrity of the self—that may be discerned in other aspects of the narrative (a point that will be returned to presently).

'The Brown Man,' then, draws upon varying and various perceptions of Irishness without committing to one variety (or colour), retaining an underlying ambivalence that is apropos to the opening paragraph's exposition of misguided claims to national distinctiveness. If Griffin is pointing to an allegory, it may be towards a more Swiftian satire on the dreadful plight of the Irish poor, paralleled in the child-eating Dragon of Wantley. Far from confirming Ireland as a place of extraordinary difference, the story finds common ground between English and Irish in the callous, cannibalistic exploitation of the poor by the rich, as well as the creative ways in which traumatic experience is memorialized and transmitted within given communities. Returning to the problem posed by the opening paragraph, we might infer that 'The Brown Man' is less a national tale than a narrative archetype whose appearance varies or refracts according to the localized context in which he appears. Even more destabilising to the thoroughgoing Irishness of the Brown Man, however, is the surprising array of 'brown men' that may be summoned from adjacent cultures and traditions. While the trope of cannibalism is common in the Gothic (though the motif of grave-robbing seems to have held a particularly personal resonance for Griffin (33)), its function in 'The Brown Man' can be seen to go beyond creating the sensation of horror—or the metaphorical figuration of colonial oppression—to symbolise the piecemeal, bodysnatching nature of the genre itself. More obliquely, this trope may also be seen as a vehicle for Griffin's own anxieties about literary creativity, writing, and originality.

Most clearly 'The Brown Man' draws on folklore and the Gothic. Mercier describes it as a vampire tale which, he speculates, was 'brought to Ireland by the Vikings, for it seems to be an example of Aarne-Thompson Folktale Type 363, "a story almost entirely confined to the shores of the Baltic and of Norway."'(34) One might also describe 'The Brown Man' as a grim fairy tale, following the broad critical consensus that a fairy tale is 'traditional folklore adapted and written down for the entertainment of children, usually featuring marvellous events and characters, although fairies as such are less often found in them than princesses, talking animals, ogres, and witches.'(35) In Romantic-era Europe, traditional folklore and fairy tales were the subject of increasing interest and were already becoming strongly associated with children (as indicated by the censorious reaction to 'The Brown Man' in *The Literary Chronicle*). In the 1820s, books on national folklores were enjoying something of a boom with London publishers eager to take advantage of an emerging mass market; such folkloric works, Jennifer Schacker argues, took on transnational resonance because 'the books' status as displaced, representative now of both foreign orality and domestic literacy, gave them a new depth of meaning.'(36) Folklore and fairy tales, in short, were becoming key cultural components in the formation of national identities and the associated socio-political relations therein. Griffin's story relates to this wider context in a number of ways. As well as recreating, with a deeply sinister twist, the typically inoffensive brownie of Scottish and Northern English folklore, 'The Brown Man' draws on darker tales such as Charles Perrault's 'Bluebeard'

and ‘The Robber Bridegroom’ of the Grimms’ collection, the latter being having become recently available in English. (37) One might also perceive in the English translation and publication of Adelbert von Chamisso’s *Peter Schlemihl* in 1824—which disconcertingly blends fantastical events with realist narrative in its story of a young man who sells his shadow to a mysterious grey man—a source for the disconcerting behaviour of Nora Guare’s shadow in ‘The Brown Man’:

Looking down towards her shadow on the earth she started with horror to observe it move, although she herself was perfectly still. It waved its black arms, and motioned her back. What the feasters said, she understood not, but she seemed still fixed in the spot. She looked once more on her shadow; it raised one hand, and pointed the way to the lane; then slowly rising from the ground, and confronting her, it walked rapidly off in that direction.(38)

A brown man also features in the work of the linguist and poet John Leyden (1775-1811), who contributed a ballad, entitled ‘The cout of Keeldar’, to Walter Scott’s hugely popular *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802). In the preface to ‘The cout of Keeldar’ there is an explanatory note relating to ‘The *Brown Man of the Muirs* [...] a fairy of the most malignant order’—a malignant dwarf who attacks any mortal hunters who trespass on his domain.(39)

“Brown dwarf, that o’er the muir-land strays,
Thy name to Keeldar tell!”
“The Brown Man of the Muirs, who stays
Beneath the heather-bell.(40)

Another, and perhaps the most obvious, intertext for ‘The Brown Man’ is Thomas Crofton Croker’s *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (1825), ‘the first book purporting to contain material collected from oral tradition in the British Isles’.(41) Any comparison between the work of Croker (the so-called ‘king of the fairies’) and the fairy tale quality of the shorter tales in *Holland-Tide* (a point made by at least two contemporary reviewers) is intriguingly problematized by Griffin’s horrified reaction to the correlation. Griffin’s brother recorded the writer’s fury on his work being likened to Croker’s:

He crumpled the paper in his hand, raised it high above his head, stamped violently, and almost dashed it to the earth in the excess of his feeling. “Oh!”—he said—“oh!” with a prolonged, and deep, and painful emphasis on the word—“this was just what I feared. I told—these tales were like Crofton Croker’s.” I was perfectly astonished, and said, “Why, what signifies it?” “Oh!” said he again, “you don’t know the effect of these things. *Only think,*” he repeated, with the utmost vehemence, “*only think of being compared with Crofton Croker.*”(42)

How is such fury to be explained? A comparison would surely have been to the struggling young writer’s benefit, as Croker’s volume had been well received by critics (a second edition appeared within a year, and he published second and third volumes in 1827 and 1828).(43) Tempting as it may be to ascribe Griffin’s horrified reaction to his distaste for Croker’s highly stereotyped tales of Irish folklore and culture (comparisons of *Holland-Tide* to the work of the Banims do not seem to have caused any such angst), the more likely immediate reason was an authorial anxiety of originality, suggested by the writer’s brother.

His great aim in all his efforts was to obtain a character for originality. Besides the natural vigour and truth of his writings, he wished that they should be distinguished as new. He could not bear to be blended with other writers as merely one of a class, still less could he tolerate the thought of being considered a copyist of any, even the greatest of them.(44)

Still, a comparison of Croker's and Griffin's respective representations of Irish folklore is telling. While the *Fairy Legends* sometimes deals with violence and disturbing supernatural occurrences (fairy theft of human children, for example), Croker's condescending style and generally benign tone largely neutralises the sense of terror created by such events. Read against *Fairy Legends*, the pared-back and fast-paced narration of 'The Brown Man' is striking, as is its unmediated, horrific conclusion—'an effective piece of rustic Grand Guignol', as John Cronin described it.(45) Moreover, the strange shift in narrative tone in the opening of 'The Brown Man' may perhaps be better understood by reference to Croker. Indeed, one might posit a reading of 'The Brown Man' as a satire or parody of a Croker tale, the academic-style peroration on the particularity (or otherwise) of national myths in the opening paragraph of Griffin's tale serving as an ironic point of contact and contrast to the elaborate ethnographical notes Croker appended to his stories. Croker declared that his collection was proof of a distinctive national character and psychology, and the comparative perspective in his notations invited English readers 'regardless of education, class or age,' as Schacker argues, 'to direct a critical and patronizing gaze on their Irish objects.'(46) As noted earlier, 'The Brown Man' reflects ambiguously at best upon this type of associative, instructive reading between folklores and national characters, and though the narrative voice invokes elucidation ('But what has this to do with the story?') it refuses in the end to provide it, leaving the reader instead with the horrific image of Nora Guare's drained, lifeless body, unrelieved by Croker-style anthropological footnotes. The connection between local folklore and essentialist socio-political meaning is pointedly withheld; in this context 'The Brown Man' reflects upon and ultimately rejects the intellectual and literary contrivance of Croker's project, formulating a point stated more bleakly by Griffin in his next volume, *Tales of the Munster Festivals* (1827), that 'a ruined people stand in need of a more potent restorative than an old wife's story'.(47) Placed in the middle of the sequence of stories, 'The Brown Man' constitutes the dark heart of *Holland-Tide*, instilling a central, destabilising ambivalence into a volume marketed as authentic regional fiction, and is indicative perhaps of Griffin's increasing frustration with the fraught complexities of the Irish writer in London, forced to make a living by writing about Ireland for a largely indifferent English audience.(48)

In addition to folklore, the fairy tale, and the Gothic, another more unlikely genre lurking behind the awful figure of the Brown Man is dramatic opera, which infuses the paratext of the story in a variety of ways. To begin with, 'The Dragon of Wantley' was the basis of a 1737 burlesque of the same name by Henry Carey and John Frederick Lampe, which became one of the most successful stage productions of the eighteenth century. Griffin's title 'The Brown Man' itself conjures arresting echoes in the recent productions of the English Opera-House, which, on 26 July 1817, premiered 'a new grand melo-dramatic Romance' entitled *The Wizard; or The Brown Man of the Moor*.(49) This was an adaptation of Walter Scott's historical novella *The Black Dwarf*, included in his series *Tales of My Landlord* (1816). The play was scathingly reviewed as a 'romantic perversion of poetry and common sense, but it was sufficiently successful to be revived briefly the following year (September 1818).'(50) Two years after the first staging of *The Wizard; or, The Brown Man of the Moors*, the same opera house was again advertising a production entitled *The Brown Man*.(51) This, however, seems to refer to an altogether different piece, described in *The Theatrical Inquisitor* as 'a melo-drame which is translated from the French piece, "L'Homme Brun", by Mr. Arnold', and it was poorly received on account of its 'inculcation of the dreadful crime of suicide, in the last scene'.(52)

Griffin's preoccupation, in his own career, with stage-writing, and his connection with the English Opera-House in particular, invests these echoes with peculiar resonance. As a teenager Griffin had been inspired by a meeting with John Banim (whose play *Damon and Pythias* had recently been staged at Covent Garden in 1821) to become a playwright, and with this intention he moved to London in 1823 at

the age of 19, with his tragedy *Aguire* in hand.(53) On arrival, he made the dismaying discovery that ‘another play of the same name, and founded on the same story, had already been presented’.(54) Griffin persevered, assisted in part by the kindly Banim (who introduced him to Samuel Arnold, manager of the English Opera-House), but three years later he still had not found success, and was scraping a living as a journalist and reviewer. Even as he turned to regional fiction in 1826 (writing at a tremendous pace the tales that would become *Holland-Tide*), he continued to write dramatic pieces and submit them to Arnold, though he was increasingly despairing that his ambitiously conceived style of high-minded, poetic drama could be successful, out of step as it was with popular taste and its ‘rage for spectacle’, as he phrased it. (55)

In these intertextual echoes and dramatic doublings, as well as its central theme of cannibalism, ‘The Brown Man’ may be read as performing the characteristically Gothic function of exercising or exorcising repressed anxiety; in this case, over the very act and nature of writing itself. Two incidents, recorded by Daniel Griffin, cast interesting light on how his brother was curiously subject to such apprehensions, and testify to the pressure they exerted in the period that he was writing *Holland-Tide* alongside other compositions: ‘two or three operas’ as well as ‘a new comedy’. On reading parts of the new comedy, Daniel Griffin recalled that he was

struck with the similitude of the scene between the father and daughter, and that between Mr. Vere and his daughter in the Black Dwarf. The contrivance, situation and interest of both were indeed so like, that I thoughtfully said, “Why, Gerald, this scene is in the Black Dwarf.” He seemed incredulous, and said it was impossible, but on my persevering in my assertion, he sent out for the book (which I believe he had never read,) to the nearest circulating library. When on perusal he came to the scene which I referred, he laid down the tale in perfect dismay, acknowledging that it was the very same scene, and that all his labour was gone for nothing. (56)

Whether Griffin had read the novella or attended a stage production, the anxious adjacency of Scott’s black dwarf and brown man to the writing of *Holland-Tide* is intriguing. Daniel Griffin’s thoughtfulness is open to question, and indeed his accidental sabotage of his brother’s work was even yet not complete:

I returned from a walk, with Peter of the Castle, a new tale by the O’Hara family. Gerald was engaged in writing one of the tales of Holland-tide, and had at the moment just concluded an amusing description of Shrovetide. Anxious to see his friend’s new work, he laid down his pen and glancing at the commencement, found the very first chapter contained a description of Shrovetide much more ample than his own. He at once tore out the latter from his tale, and I am not certain that he ever completed it. (57)

These instances of near, unintentional plagiarism, even as Griffin was self-consciously authoring a work conceptually indebted to the work of Scott and the Banims, create a charged context for the composition of ‘The Brown Man’ by a writer desperate to be thought of as original and *new*, but afflicted by a fatal sense of belatedness. As Daniel Griffin reported of his brother:

There appeared to be almost a fatality in the many instances in which he had been thus anticipated by contemporary writers. We have already seen that on his first arrival in London, and after he had sent his tragedy of ‘Aguire’ to the theatre, he found that another play of the same name, and founded on the same story, had already been presented; that Mr. Banim had anticipated him in the play of the Prodigal Son, and that in another piece of his, which he afterwards showed him, he discovered the counterpart of Canabe, a character in an unfinished play of his own. These coincidences he came at length to look upon as

occurrences rather to be anticipated than wondered at. There is after all in the human mind very little individuality in the power of originating what is new.(58)

The anxieties of indebtedness that inflected Griffin's ardent attitude to his own writing provides a compelling context for 'The Brown Man', a story that on the one hand invites its own deconstructive analysis, and, on the other, discourages the privileging of any one interpretation. While it masquerades as a turf-scented tale 'of the true Hibernian stamp', Griffin's 'The Brown Man'—with its disconcerting tonal and stylistic shifts; its historical allusiveness and interrogation of originary sources; its disinterring and cannibalization of Irish, British, and European folklore and fairytales, as well as a microgenre of dramatic opera—is equally suggestive of the interiorized Gothic landscape of a writer haunted by recurring worries of originality, plagiarism, and the inevitability of belatedness. One begins to perceive unsuspected correspondences with Griffin's exact contemporary, James Clarence Mangan, whose prose fictions such as 'The Man in the Cloak' (1838) as well as his *Autobiography* similarly resonates an uneasy preoccupation with literary influence and ingenuity, cloaked in the sophisticated use of Gothic modes. While scholarly analyses of Irish Gothic have tended to focus on larger historical and national currents to compass the ambit of their critiques, for Griffin the Gothic seems more a means of moving inwards, purposefully rejecting the slide from the personal to the political. While the monstrous Brown Man can be construed as a colonial revenant, he can also, and perhaps more accurately, be read as a distorted and disturbed figuration of the alienated artist—that Byronic archetype of the Romantic period—doomed to recycle the moribund tissue of other textual bodies. Returning to Griffin's opening analogy, 'The Brown Man' becomes an illustration of how literary originality, or the possibility of uncontaminated aesthetic provenance, is as misleading a notion as the purity of national culture. In addition to the seven devils and seven colours of the rainbow, we might speculatively add seven archetypal myths or narratives, which are similarly dispersed in prismatic refractions 'through the other nations of the earth.'(59)

1 Griffin put inverted commas around the first part of his title, probably to stress the national and cultural subject-matter of the book, thus connecting it to the regional, historical fiction that became very popular in the 1820s with the work of Sir Walter Scott and, in the case of Ireland, the Banim brothers' *Tales of the O'Hara Family* (1825). For references to Griffin's collection, hereafter *Holland-Tide*.

2 *Holland-Tide*, p. 299.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 300.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 301.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 302.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 304.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 306-7.

8 *The Literary Chronicle* 405 (17 Feb.1827), p. 99; *Dublin and London magazine* 1 (March 1827), p. 257.

9 Vivian Mercier included 'The Brown Man' (though without the epigraph) in his *Great Irish Short Stories* (London: Souvenir, 1964); the story also appears in William Trevor, ed. *The Oxford book of Irish short stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). While 'The Brown Man' has also been included in Rosemary Gray's recent expansive collection *Irish Ghost Stories* (Wordsworth editions, 2011), the text has been silently abridged to jettison both the epigraph and introductory paragraph, both of which, as I will argue here, are essential to understanding the full implications of the story.

10 See Jarlath Killeen, 'Irish Gothic: A Theoretical Introduction', *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* vol. 1 (2006); Richard Haslam, 'Irish Gothic: A Rhetorical, Hermeneutics Approach', *IJGHS* vol. 2 (2007); and Killeen, 'Irish Gothic Revisited', *IJGHS* vol. 4 (2008).

11 *Holland-Tide*, p. 298.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

13 In his collection *Fairy and Folk tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), W.B. Yeats described November Eve as one of the three yearly festivals of the Irish fairies: 'On November Eve [the fairies] are at their gloomiest, for according to the old Gaelic reckoning, this is the first night of winter. This night they dance with the ghosts, and the pooka is abroad, and witches make their spells, and girls set a table with food in the name of the devil, that the fetch of their future lover may come through the window and eat of the food. After November Eve the blackberries are no longer wholesome, for the pooka has spoiled them.' Yeats, *Writings on Irish Folklore, Legend and Myth* ed. Robert Welch (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 9.

14 Daniel J. Griffin, *The Life of Gerald Griffin*. 2nd ed. Dublin: Duffy, 1857. p. 142. As John Cronin has noted, the second edition of *The Life of Gerald Griffin* contains important revisions, corrections, and additional letters not included in the first edition (1843). See 'Textual Note' in Cronin, *Gerald Griffin (1803-1840): A Critical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. xix-xx. For this reason, all reference in the present article to *The Life of Gerald Griffin* will be to the second edition.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 154-5.

16 Mercier, *Great Irish Short Stories*, p. 25.

17 Siobhán Kilfeather, 'Origins of the Irish Female Gothic', *Bullán: An Irish Studies Journal* vol.1, no.2 (Autumn 1994), p. 37.

18 *The New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 19 (1827), p.21. In an oft-quoted passage, Charles Robert Maturin described Ireland as 'the only country on earth where, from the strange existing opposition of religion, politics, manners, the extremes of refinement and barbarism are united, and the most wild and incredible situations of romantic story are hourly passing before modern eyes.' Maturin, *The Milesian Chief*[1812] NY & London: Garland, 1979. Vol 1, p. v.

19 There has been much critical comment on the question of the nineteenth-century Irish novel and realism, specifically the perceived 'failure' of literary realism in Irish writing; see David Lloyd, 'Violence and the Constitution of the Novel', *Anomalous States: Irish writing and the post-colonial moment* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993); and Terry Eagleton, 'Form and Ideology in the Irish Novel', in *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (London: Verso, 1995).

20 *Holland-Tide*, pp. 297-8.

21 The body of such criticism is too extensive to list fully here, but for key exponents of this view, in addition to Killeen (2006), see Julian Moynahan, 'The Politics of Anglo-Irish Gothic: Maturin, Le Fanu, and the Return of the Repressed', in Heinz Kosok, ed. *Studies in Anglo-Irish Literature* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1982); W.J. McCormack, 'Irish Gothic and After (1820-1945)', in Seamus Deane, ed. *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (3 vols., Derry: Field Day, 1991); III, pp. 831-40.

This canon is now coming under critical scrutiny from a variety of perspectives. Seamus Deane first posited, on the basis of James Clarence Mangan's *Autobiography* a 'Catholic-nationalist Gothic'; *Strange Country* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 126, and the importance of Mangan as a Gothic writer is illuminated further in James F. Wurtz, 'Scarce More a Corpse: Famine Memory and Representations of the Gothic in *Ulysses*', *Journal of Modern Literature* vol. 29, no. 1 (2005) 102-117; and notably Richard Haslam, "'Broad Farce and Thrilling Tragedy": Mangan's Fiction and Irish Gothic', *Éire-Ireland* vol. 41, nos. 3-4 (2006) 215-244. For a useful summary of criticism in the field, see Haslam, 'Irish Gothic', in Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Gothic* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 83-94.

22 Griffin's father reportedly 'felt acutely the sufferings of the peasantry in the disastrous period of 1798, and did everything in his power to mitigate them. During these unhappy times, his endeavours to avert punishment, prevented or softened many instances of individual hardship wherever he had influence.' *Life*, p. 34. Following on from Deane, Haslam proposes the category of an 'Irish-Catholic-nationalist Gothic mode' in his article "'Broad Farce and Thrilling Tragedy'", pp. 240-1.

23 'The Dragon of Wantley', along with a decoding 'key' to the satire, was included in Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (3 vols., 1765); perhaps tellingly, the verse Griffin selected for his epigraph was singled out for particular analysis in the *Reliques*. For further commentary on 'The Dragon of Wantley', see Jacqueline Simpson, 'Fifty Dragon Tales: An Analysis', *Folklore* vol. 89, no.1 (1978), pp. 79-93.

24 'The Song of the French'; according to Guy Beiner, verses from this poem were common in collections of folklore in counties Mayo and Galway. Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish folk history and social memory* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), pp. 88-9.

25 Seán Ó Tuama, *An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1981), p. 161.

26 Luke Gibbons, *Gaelic Gothic: race, colonization and Irish culture* (Galway: Arlen, 2004), pp. 23-4.

27 *Holland-Tide*, p. 300.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 304-5. Myles-na-coppuleen, or Myles of the ponies, was later the name of a loquacious Irish peasant in Griffin's very successful and influential novel *The Collegians* (1829); as is well-known, this character was also the source for Flann O'Brien's penname, Myles na gCopaleen.

29 For a discussion of such predominant tropes in English representations of Ireland, see Michael Neill, 'Broken English and Broken Irish: Nation, Language, and the Optic of Power in Shakespeare's Histories', *Shakespeare Quarterly* vol 45, no. 1 (Spring 1994) 1-32. For the long-lasting influences of Giraldus Cambrensis, see Andrew Hadfield and John McVeagh, *Strangers to That Land: British Perceptions of Ireland from the Reformation to the Famine* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1994), especially Chapter 1, 'Giraldus Cambrensis and English Writing about Ireland'.

30 Sir John Temple, *The History of the General Rebellion in Ireland*. 7th ed. (Cork: Bagnell, 1766), p. 202.

31 Kathleen M. Noonan, "'Martyrs in Flames": Sir John Temple and the Conception of the Irish in English Martyrologies', *Albion* vol. 36, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 224, 225.

32 Killeen, *Gothic Ireland: Horror and the Irish Anglican Imagination in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), p. 29.

33 Griffin's *The Rivals* (1829) features a lively scene of grave-robbing medical students, who extract some grisly humour from their grim pursuit, engendering some discomfiting comments, pp.110-111.

- 34 Mercier, *Great Irish Short Stories*, p. 25. Aarne-Thompson describe type 363 as ‘*The Vampire*. The bridegroom eats corpses in three churches. He appears to his bride in the form of her father, her mother, etc, and when she tells about his habit he devours her.’ Antti Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale*. Second revision. Trans, and enl. Stith Thompson (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1961), p. 126.
- 35 Chris Baldick, *The Oxford dictionary of literary terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 124.
- 36 Jennifer Schacker, *National Dreams: the remaking of fairy tales in nineteenth-century England* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2003), p. 4.
- 37 Perrault, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (1697), more commonly known as *Les Contes de ma Mère l’Oye*; and the Brothers Grimm, *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (1812). Edgar Taylor published the first English translations of a selection of the Grimms’ stories under the title *German Popular Stories* (1823), and a two-volume translation soon followed. See Ruth Michaelis-Jena, ‘Oral Tradition and the Brothers Grimm’, *Folklore* vol. 82, no. 4 (Winter 1971), p. 270.
- 38 *Holland-Tide*, pp. 302-3.
- 39 *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), vol. II, p. 356.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 360.
- 41 Maureen Murphy, Thomas Crofton Croker, *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (CUP, 2009).
- 42 *Life*, p. 199. Griffin was reading the review in *The Literary Gazette*, which remarked that ‘Persecutions of Jack-Edy’ ‘is almost Crofton Croker-ish’ (*The Literary Gazette*, issue 527 [24 Feb.1827], p. 115). Another reviewer commented that the shorter tales in *Holland-Tide* possessed a type of merriment ‘much more a-kin to the wit and pleasantry of the collector of the ‘Fairy Legends,’ than to the melo-dramatic muse of M.Banim.’ (*Monthly Review*, n.s. 4 [April 1827], p. 382.)
- 43 Positive reviews appeared in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. XVIII, no. CII (July, 1825), p.55; *The Dublin and London Magazine* (April, 1825); *The Monthly Review*, Vol. II (1826), pp. 447-8.
- 44 *Life*, p. 198. In a letter of 1824, Griffin wrote of his new play *Gisippus* that ‘what gives me greatest satisfaction respecting it is the consciousness that I have written an original play.’ *Life*, p. 92.
- 45 Cronin, *Gerald Griffin*, p. 40.
- 46 Schacker, *National Dreams*, p. 57. For further comment on the problematic perspective of Croker, see B. G. MacCarthy, ‘Thomas Crofton Croker 1798-1854’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* vol. 32, no. 128 (Dec., 1943) 539-556.
- 47 Croker prefaced *Fairy Legends* with a statement that his stories were written ‘in the style in which the are generally related by those who believe in them’ and that it was his intention thereby to illustrate ‘the Superstitions of the Irish Peasantry—Superstitions which the most casual observer cannot fail to remark powerfully influence their conduct and manner of thinking.’ Griffin, *Tales of the Munster Festivals* (1827), vol.1, p. xviii.
- 48 Commenting on Daniel O’Connell’s visit to England in 1825, Griffin wrote to his brother ‘As to the general opinion here, the whole affair is very little talked about at all, and it is a doubt to me if one man out of ten (take Englishman as they are) ever heard of [John] Lawless. You have a queer notion on the other side of the water, that your concerns are greatly thought about here. It is a doubt to me if the “dear little island” were swallowed by a whale, or put in a bag and sent off to the moon, if the circumstance would occasion any further observation than a “dear me,” at one end of the town, and a “my eyes!” at the other’. *Life*, p. 148.
- 49 Advertisement in *The Times*, Thursday 24 July, 1817, p. 2; Issue 10206; col C.
- 50 *The Theatrical Inquisitor and Monthly Mirror*, vol. XI (July-Dec. 1817) pp. 147-8. H. Philip Bolton suggests that this adaptation was written by Samuel Arnold and Samuel Beazley. Bolton, *Scott Dramatized* (London: Mansell, 1992), pp. 158-9.

51 Coincidentally, the Royal Coburg Theatre production listed below *The Brown Man* in *The Times* advertisement is *Bluebeard, or Female Curiosity*; *The Times*, Saturday 4 Sept, 1819; p. 2; Issue 10716; col A.

52 *The Theatrical Inquisitor*, Vol. XV (July to Dec. 1819), p. 108. Samuel Arnold was the manager of the English Opera-House; he was noted for often giving foreign works their first showing in England. The French piece in question appears to have been the melodrama *L'Homme brun; ou, le billet doux* (Paris: Barba, 1818) by Jean-Toussaint Merle, first performed at the Théâtre de la Gaîté, 9 December 1818. From the summary of *L'Homme Brun* provided in the *Theatrical Inquisitor* supplement to vol. XV, the plot of this melodrama bears no other resemblance to Griffin's brown man, or the play based on Scott's novella.

53 In a letter of 1822 to his sister, Griffin remarks on the positive critical reception of *Damon and Pythias*—'the best historical tragedy which the age has produced'—and this, combined with his regret that he 'could not obtain possession of many London or Dublin' newspapers to send her, suggests that he was doing his best to keep up with the London theatre scene, and knew of its seasonal schedules. *Life*, p.

64. In this period he had also been working as a journalist, chiefly for the Limerick *General Advertiser* (which, however, he disliked, describing it as 'a painted sepulchre' which was 'quite dependent upon the government.') *Life*, p. 61.

54 *Life*, p. 174.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

56 *Ibid.*, pp. 173-4.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 174. 'Peter of the Castle' was a story in the Banims' *Tales by the O'Hara Family*. Second Series. (3 vols, London: Henry Colburn, 1826).

58 *Life*, p. 174.

59 *Holland-Tide*, p. 297. In fact, the English journalist and writer Christopher Booker makes exactly this claim in his book *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (New York: Continuum, 2004).