*'Oh, my ties are distant...'*

Diaspora, Displacement and Disenchantment in the Work of Gemma Files

David Sweeney

April, 2019

6,433 words

Diaspora and displacement are central to both Gemma Files' collection of interlocking stories *We Will All Go Down Together* (2014) and her novel *Experimental Film* (2015), set in the same universe. The former focuses on time travelling refugees from sixteenth century Scotland who escape the witchfinders of their era by fleeing to the Ontario of 1904; in the latter, a forgotten figure from Slavic folklore, Lady Midday, attempts to manifest her presence in the modern world first through the daughter of Northern European immigrants living in early twentieth century Ontario, then later via a citizen of present-day Toronto, modelled largely on Files herself. Born in London, Files is also an immigrant to Canada, attaining citizenship at the age of three. Files' essay 'Under These Rocks and Stones', which provides the afterword to *WWAGDT*, acknowledges her British origins but begins with the assertion 'In case anyone still doesn't know, I'm Canadian' (374). Indeed, it would be surprising to discover otherwise given the attention paid in the preceding stories to the minutiae of life in modern Toronto: at the risk of deploying a cliché of literary criticism, the city is virtually a characterin *WWAGDT* (and also in *Experimental Film*). Files uses the essay to address the 'image of “Canadian-ness” we absorb through the media' which she takes issue with because it

most often applies to specifically to white Canadians of non-Indigenous and non- Francophone descent, with a vague sideline in well-assimilated “immigrants” to make ourselves feel better about the whole thing. (374)

Files makes it clear that *WWAGDT* is motivated by a desire to skewer this image and the attending mythology that Canada is, in the inevitable comparison to the United States, 'polite, clean and nice' (374). Instead her intention is to show that

Toronto and Ontario can be exactly as scary as anywhere more exotic, if you know where to look … scarier, maybe. Because, on the surface, it all seems so *pleasant* (375; original emphasis).

In this paper, I will discuss how Files uses the horror genre's capacity for estrangement generally, and the themes of diaspora and displacement specifically, to achieve her critique of 'Canadian-ness' by placing supernatural elements in a modern world which has been, in the words of sociologist Max Weber, 'disenchanted': a condition for which estrangement acts as a counter-measure.

***We Will All Go Down Together***

The title of this paper comes from a line spoken by the character Carra Devize in 'Helpless (2013)' the final story in *WWAGDT* (320)[[1]](#footnote-1). Carra speaks the line when another character, Josh Kim, expresses his astonishment that Carra is related to the Fae – i.e. fairy - being Enzemblance Druir, who has abducted a friend of his. Enzemblance's family, Clan Druir, is part of the Five-Family Coven, an alliance of Fae, human-Fae hybrids, and magicians which has its origins in sixteenth century Scotland, and which is active in present-day Ontario. While Carra's own relationship to the Druirs is, as she says, 'distant' – the result of decades of procreation and filial dispersal – Enzemblance is the daughter of the Clan's matriarch Glauce Lady Druir, a changeling who used her supernatural abilities to travel in time with her family from the Scottish Borders of 1593 to Toronto in 1904. Glauce does so to escape the persecution of James VI and his 'witchmen'. As such Clan Druir can be considered as refugees, who fled an oppressive regime. They are not, however, officially recognised asylum seekers. As Fae, the Clan exist on the fringes of a modern world which, for the most part, no longer believes in their existence apart from as figures from folklore. Based in a fairy hill or *brugh* adjacent to the small Ontario town of Overdeere, which they call Dourvale in honour of their original Scottish home, Clan Druir continue to practice their old customs and traditions. Or rather most of them do, particularly those who have come, like Enzemblance, directly from 1593 and 'Dourvale Prime' (320); some other, younger members of the Clan, born in the twentieth century, reject its traditions, including living in the *brugh*. This is the case for Enzemblance's sister Miliner who, seduced by images of the modern world provided by an Overdeere drive-in cinema, abandons not only the *brugh* but the Clan itself, becoming a fugitive from her family. Her cousins Gaheris and Ygerna Sidderstane also reject the *brugh* for the Toronto of the sixties but retain ties with the family.

For Enzemblance, Fae tradition includes the practice of abducting humans. The friend of Kim's she has taken is Galit Michaels, a Toronto-based folk-singer who enters into a dalliance with Enzemblance's cousin Ganconer Sidderstane, a human-Fae hybrid. Enzemblance takes Galit for the same reason Ganconer is drawn to her: because of her music. As Ganconer explains to Galit, the Fae 'love to be sung of' because it 'reminds us of what we are' in a world which denies their reality (40). For the Fae, the modern world is 'iron-touched' which refers both to humans increasing use of the metal, which is hazardous to the Fae, but can also be taken as a reference to Max Weber's concept of the 'iron cage' of rationalisation. For Weber, rationalisation in Europe led to a change in the motivation for 'social action' which resulted in secularisation and, with it, a 'disenchantment' of the world which banished 'supernatural' creatures such as the Fae to the realms of fiction and/or superstition.

Ganconer is particularly impressed by Galit's rendition of 'Tam Lin' a16th century ballad from the Scottish borders in which the titular character is rescued from the Queen of the Fairies by a mortal woman. Ganconer is drawn to Galit because he finds her rendition 'so *true'*, an appraisal which baffles her as she understands it to be 'a *fairy tale*' by which she means fiction (18-19; original emphases). In a sense, Galit is correct: the song is a story of the Fae and in part it is Ganconer's own story. Enzemblance is fiercely passionate about upholding her family's traditions and in her belief of the Fae's superiority to humans, as is evidenced in the story 'Strange Weight (2004)' in which another member of the clan, Miliner's son Maccabee Roke, who has not only left the clan for the 'iron world' but has become a Catholic priest in order to seek the church's protection from the Druirs, makes a brief return to the *brugh*. Enzemblance labels him a 'traitor' who 'threw yuir heritage away with both hands' and who 'cannae e'en shield yuirself from harm wi'out their Almighty's skirts tae hide yuirself behind' (262). Maccabee has inadvertently brought a child with him to the *brugh* which his 'grandmere' Lady Glauce assumes is intended as a tribute to appease her for Maccabee's long absence. It is Maccabee's refusal to proffer the child – in line with Fae tradition -which so angers Enzemblance.

 Maccabee knows what the child's fate would be if he was taken in by the clan:

they'd just raise him in a dark hole, feed him on leaves and glamer, use him as a go- between whenever they wanted news of the human's Iron World (261)

'Glamer’ - an archaic Scottish version of 'glamour' - is the Fae's ability to ensorcell humans, including manipulating appearances so that the interior of the *brugh* looks palatial when in reality it is, as Maccabee recognises, much less impressive:

[T]apestries of dead leaves hung slack as skins in every direction, a thousand variegated shades of decay sewn each to each with spiderweb, then stuck fast to the roof with luminous mould. Half the furniture was stolen, while the other half seemed cobbled together from anything handy – shells and muck, living tubers, long-scraped bones. (259)

Similarly, Gaheris Sidderstane understands that his sister Ygerna, who, like him, can 'pass' for human but is undergoing a transmogrification which will result in her becoming an amphibious creature reminiscent of the aquatic 'Deep Ones' from HP Lovecraft's 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth' (1931), will end up having to 'squat forever in the dark, eating raw fish by the light of glowworm-infested moss' (78). By contrast the 'bright, strange world' of humanity is much more appealing (237). In order to walk amongst humans, Ganconer, Enzemblance and other Fae, use their powers of ''glamer'. The ability to warp reality is a motif in the story and throughout *WWAGDT*: Glamer is the name of Galit's band; Enzemblance uses the name 'False Face' on ICQ messenger and the email handle 'guizer', a reference to 'guising', in her luring of Galit to the *brugh*. That the Fae have such powers is of course to their advantage but, as with their desire to be sung about, there is also something poignant, even pathetic, about it: glamer hides the crude reality of their traditions and living conditions which some younger Fae come to resent and reject. This poignancy is particularly evident in Ygerna who, her transmogrification complete, devours Gaheris and, following the collapse of the cottage she shared with him, retreats to her 'nest of bile and bones'. Ygerna's transformation has made her 'strangely beautiful: skin a-glow, limbs like eels, lidless eyes deep-set and hard, like stones' (372) and the implosion of the *brugh* which has buried Lady Glauce and Enzemblance, has left her 'queen' of Dourvale. Nevertheless, she is alone 'a monster born of monsters' without the glamer to pass for human and with only either the ghost of Gaheris or the delusion that his spirit speaks to her for company (373).

***Experimental Film***

Set in the same universe as *WWAGDT*, *Experimental Film* deals with the attempts by Lady Midday, an obscure demonic entity from Slavic folklore, to re-enter the world via the medium of film. In her folklore, Lady Midday appears at noon in rural settings to punish those she considers to be lacking in purpose or calling. For Weber, such purposelessness is also characteristic of modern capitalism under which vocation has been replaced by a desire for 'external goods' i.e. commodities. Nevertheless, as Weber observes in *The Protestant Ethic,* 'the idea of duty in one's calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs' (109). Lady Midday also prowls the margins of rational, secularised modern society.

Like the Fae in *WWAGDT*, who love to be sung about, Lady Midday requires – demands – human recognition, but has been marginalised, reduced to a mere figure from folklore, and as such her reality has been denied. Entities like Lady Midday, as the character Safie puts it

don't know how to do anything except repeat their old patterns, so they wind up harming the very people whose attention they're trying to get in order to […] keep going. Stay alive. Intact. (129)

This description could apply equally to militantly traditionalist members of Clan Druir such as Enzemblance and her son Saracen whose refusal to adapt to their new environment (beyond the use of glamer as a disguise) has the result that their 'past identity is a ghost version of the self they have become', as Kaya Didem wrote summarising Zygmunt Bauman's views on the diasporic status of immigrants who similarly wish neither to 'assimilate nor dominate' (2017). However, given the Druirs' marginalisation both physically and metaphysically, we might invert this claim to say they have become phantasmic versions of their former selves.

Lady Midday becomes marginalised after the destruction of Dzengast, a village in Northern Europe and home to her strongest believers the Wendish, during World War I which 'busted [her] back down to a fairy tale by the 1920s, one unlikely to be told outside Wendish circles, with fewer and fewer people identifying as such' (278). Lady Midday also resembles the Druir Clan in that she too exists 'outside the boundaries of time' (248); however, where the Druirs use magic to travel in time from the 16th century to the 20th, Lady Midday is dependent upon a human 'key' to facilitate her entry to the earthly plane. Her first attempt to re-enter the world involves, in an action reminiscent of the child-stealing practices of the Fae, the abduction of Hyatt Whitcomb, the infant son of Iris Whitcomb née Giscela Wròbl, the daughter of nineteenth century Wendish immigrants to Canada from Dzengast. Midday follows the Wendish diaspora and punishes Iris's father, Handrij, who has abandoned his old religion, including belief in Midday which he now considers to be 'old wives' tales, witches' prattle' (137), to become a Millennialist Anabaptist, convinced that the apocalypse is imminent. Because of this conviction he has neglected his duties as a farmer which angers Midday who, as far as she is concerned, has delivered the Wendish to safety and prosperity, if they are prepared to fulfil their purpose, in Canada (137).

After she has punished Handrij, Midday establishes a connection with Giscela which she will later exploit when she coerces Giscela, now Iris, in to using her skills as an innovative film-maker in the 'wildly flourishing new international church of cinema' to proclaim Midday's existence to 'millions without Her [Midday] ever having to open Her mouth' (278). Iris ultimately thwarts Midday's plans which leads her to make a second attempt, this time using Lois Cairns, a film critic and teacher living in twenty-first century Toronto who narrates the novel, as her new key. Modelled in part after Files herself, Lois also shares some personality traits with Iris and, like her, has a devoted husband and a child with special needs (her son Clark is autistic). Midday does not abduct Clark but when Lois finally confronts her, she offers to make him 'normal'. Lois rejects Midday's offer, and her promise to make Lois, whose career is floundering, successful because she does not want to be 'responsible for everything you'll do after, sitting on a throne made from the bones of other people's kids – whoever you think is useless – to save yourself from being forgotten' (295). Like the Fae in *WWAGDT*, who love to be sung about, Lady Midday seeks human recognition, but, as with the Fae has been marginalised, reduced to a mere figure from folklore through the disintegration of the Wendish faith, and as such her reality is denied in the modern world. Lois sees Midday's offer of favours in return for veneration as 'medieval' (293) and considers her and other similar 'small gods' – a phrase she borrows from Stephen King's novel *Desperation* (1996) – to be essentially robber-barons who 'take what's already ours then offer it back to us at twice the price'

Which means the best they can do for us […] is to force us to make our own distinctions between right and wrong. To discover what we truly value, by asking for it as payment. (295)

 At the novel's climax, as they head for the venue – a bohemian/hipster media centre - where Lady Midday will stage her return to the world, Safie, Lois's assistant, disagrees with Lois's view that the 'small god' will be angered by the 'level of disrespect She's going to face on a daily basis' (289):

“I don't think it's about disrespect,” Safie replied. “Not really. I mean, yeah, She doesn't *like* it, but it's more people who aren't … doing what they're supposed to, neglecting their responsibilities. People with no vocation.” She paused. “Then again, how many people in that room – any room – know exactly what they're *meant* to be doing?” I heard her swallow. 'I mean, *I* sure don't” (289, original emphasis)

This lack of purpose, or 'calling' in Weber's terms, can be seen as an indictment of the absence of meaning in post-Enlightenment, secularised society. It recalls too Zygmunt Bauman's distinction between the lives of individuals under modernity and postmodernity: in the former, for Bauman, people had 'life projects', ambitions or plans which they intended to fulfil; under the latter circumstances, such projects are replaced by the desire for 'self-constitution', the formation of an identity which will be recognised, and admired, by others (1992: 193-194). Bauman attributes this shift to a decline in religious belief under, first, modernity then postmodernity, both which also saw the rise of 'quasi-religious movements' (203) such as the worship of, in the phrase Lois appropriates from King, 'small gods. For Bauman, modernity and postmodernity are also distinguished by the attitude towards individual responsibility prevalent in each era. Bauman sees modernity as a 'gigantic exercise in abolishing individual responsibility other than that measured by instrumental rationality and practical achievement' (xxii); as a result, individuals were expected to follow the rules and laws of 'power-supported structures' which proclaimed universal truths. Postmodernity, on the other hand, is characterised by a 'privatization' of morality and an emphasis upon individual choice. While this may appear more intuitively desirable than being subject to a monolithic external authority, such 'exhilarating freedom to pursue anything' is, in Bauman's view, essentially a consumerist experience, a 'life-long commitment to the shopping mall' which can also bring 'the mind-boggling uncertainty as to what is worth pursuing and in the name of what one should pursue it' (vii).

That Safie, who as a film-maker is a 'creative' individual admits to a lack of vocation suggests that her activities are largely a way of constituting her self-hood. Lois is similar: at the outset of the narrative she identifies herself as the protagonist of her story but insists she is 'not the hero, never that' (15). Lois insists on the distinction in part because of her personal flaws – particularly in her fraught relationship with, and often negative feelings towards, her autistic son Clark – but also because her motivations for undertaking an investigation into Iris's mysterious disappearance are driven more by status anxiety and the need for self-constitution, than by the feminist motives she proclaims.

In her final confrontation with Lady Midday, Lois addresses the power dynamics involved in religious worship, quoting Zora Neale Hurston's adage, 'All gods who receive homage are cruel' (295). Safie, grandchild to immigrants of Yezidi origin, contrasts the seven archangels tasked by god with stewardship of humanity in Yezidi belief with:

other things […] which fools without true religion sometimes choose to worship or trick themselves into worshipping. Small gods for small minds, trapped in small places. (99)

Although such entities 'scope is narrow', as we have seen they do have a degree of influence over human events 'just so long as their names are still known in this world, so they may hear them whispered somewhere, recognise themselves and come calling' (99), again indicating their requirement on human acknowledgement.

Unlike the demons of Platonic thought, which were essentially benign nature beings who looked over mankind, to which they were superior, in Yezidi belief the seven archangels are neither wholly good nor wholly evil. The Yezidi angels are not agents in *Experimental Film*, however a similar entity, Ashreel Maskim 'Confusion-angel, That One Who Wears Us', one of the 'Terrible Seven', is active in *WWAGDT* (the 'Terrible Seven' are also featured prominently in Files' unrelated short story 'A Wish From A Bone' [2013]). Ashreel is the 'Black Man' or magickal patron of the sixteenth century Scottish witch Euwphaim Glouwer who escapes the same witchfinders who targeted Clan Druir using the angel's powers to, like the Druirs, travel in time to modern Ontario. Euwphaim arrives later than the Druirs, in 1968 when Gaheris and Ygerna summon Ashreel in an attempt to save Ygerna from her monstrous fate. Their plan is to transfer her consciousness into the body of Dolores Trench, a Scottish student who is in Canada researching the 'Scots Witch-Craze' of the sixteenth century which precipitated the Five-Family Coven's relocation to the country. Unaware of Ashreel's connection to Euwphaim, the twins' plans are foiled when Ashreel instead switches the witch's consciousness with that of Dolores, leaving her to occupy Euwphaim's body as it is burnt at the stake by the witchfinders. Euwphaim then returns to Scotland where she conceives a daughter who subsequently has her own child, Jodice Glouwer, a powerful medium who later relocates to twenty-first century Toronto. Euwphaim intends Jodice to become instrumental in her revenge against Lady Glauce who betrayed her in 1593, leaving Euwphaim to be captured by the witchfinders while she escaped through a 'time-tunnel'. Euwphaim considers this to have been a tactical error on Glauce's behalf and an indication of her inherent cowardice: Glauce saves her family but condemns them to a marginal existence in the 'Iron World' as a result, whereas Euwphaim's plan was for them to join forces and ''set fire to the world and watch it burn, to see what else might grow from its ashes' (73). Again, there is an element of poignancy to the Clan Druir's situation here, the predatory activities of certain members notwithstanding: their escape to Canada is also an exile, both spatial and temporal, to a time and place which does not, cannot, accept the truth of their existence. Like Lady Midday they are anachronistic but where the Druirs exist on the margins, Midday's objective is to reassert her authority in the world, changing it in the process in an apocalyptic manner similar to that envisioned by Euwphaim.

**'Under These Rocks and Stones'**

When Miliner Druir leaves the *brugh* to explore the 'bright, strange' world of humans which she has first glimpsed on the cinema screen another type of glamer is at work, that of Hollywood: as Theodor Adorno observed, 'mass culture is unadorned make-up' (78). In 'Under These Rocks and Stones', the essay which provides the afterword for *WWAGDT*, Files addresses the attempt by the Canadian state to form a unified, and unifying, sense of national identity which she describes as

The 'image of “Canadian-ness” we absorb through the media, so initially diffuse the government set up both a National Film Board and a Canadian Broadcasting Company (first radio, then television) to disseminate it (374)

The state's use of mass media here recalls Lady Midday's attraction to the 'wildly flourishing new international church of cinema' (278) as a tool to re-assert her authority. For Files the government-approved image of Canadian-ness is problematic because it

most often applies specifically to white Canadians of non-Indigenous and non-Francophone descent, with a vague sideline in well-assimilated “immigrants to make ourselves feel better about the whole thing. (374)

Furthermore, she argues that the monolithic identity envisioned by the state is only required by a specific demographic, white Ontario, which still suffers from a negative sense of itself – 'not-England', 'not-America', 'not-Quebec, not-the-Maritimes, not-the-Prairies, not-Vancouver and *certainly* not-Nunavut' (375, original emphasis) - while 'other sections all seem to have a pretty distinct sense of self, to the extent that few them ever really wanted to become part of one big country in the first place' (374). Files makes it clear that her intention with *WWAGDT* is to make a peculiarly Ontarian narrative in response to the 'lazily assembled crock of received wisdom long overdue for forcible revision' that is the official representation of the province. She recognises that

Toronto and Ontario can be exactly as scary as anywhere more exotic, if you know where to look … scarier, maybe. Because, on the surface, it all seems so *pleasant*. (375, original ellipsis and emphasis)

The connection between this sense of an illusory Ontario and the Fae's use of glamer is clear while the idea of an occult - in the sense of both 'hidden' and 'esoteric' -Toronto is evident in the activities and milieu of characters in *WWAGDT* such as the psychic Jonet Glouwer, who works as part of a team of 'ghostbusters' which discreetly 'detoxifies' haunted properties in the city, and Hark Chiu-Wai aka Jude Hark, a magician-for-hire, and also an immigrant, from Hong Kong, whose job involves 'calling on obsolete gods' (100) to fulfil the desires of his confidential clients. The title of the story which introduces Hark, 'The Narrow World (1999)', recalls Weber's concept of the 'Iron Cage': as with the Fae and Lady Midday the gods Hark deals with are denied in the modern world; as a result of this, the gods 'don't demand reverence, simply recognition' (100), a situation even more poignant and pathetic than that of Clan Druir who at least have a presence in the world, however marginalised. (Files has also used the horror genre to address the invisibility of Toronto's homeless population in the unrelated short story 'Homebody' [2013]).

Lois in *Experimental Film* considers the titular medium to be 'as far away from exploitative Hollywood genre narrative film as humanly possible' (39); instead of entertainment, the experience of 'experimentalism' is 'to invite another person into your head, hoping you emerge haunted' (39). Lois sees Hollywood productions as, to borrow terms from Roland Barthes (1980), texts of *plaisir* (pleasure), that is, comforting narratives which affirm the spectator's place in the *status quo*,whereas experimental film produces texts of ecstasy or *jouissance* which disrupt the viewer's certainties about the world and their place in it, leaving them 'haunted'. Horror fiction at its best is similarly disruptive because of the genre's capacity for what the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky called *ostranenie*, which translates from Russian as 'defamiliarization or 'estrangement'. In the essay ‘Art as Device’ (1925), Shklovsky writes:

The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By “estranging” objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and “laborious”. The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. (6)

Such estrangement or defamiliarisation is also referred to as 'making strange', an apt term to apply to horror, which causes us to look at the world anew and expands our field of perception in a similar way to how the heightened Fae senses which Maccabee Roke retains after leaving the *brugh* allow him to observe 'an ogre out for a walk, ill-fitting human suit askew' and hear 'dying city trees [,..] spitting cross-species curses' at him on the streets of modern Toronto, phenomena which go unnoticed by most of the city's population (242). Like the exclusive image of 'Canadian-ness' Files identifies which selectively edits reality (and it should be noted that she was writing before the elcetion of the multi-culturalism and diversity-commited Justin Trudeau in 2015), so too the 'iron cage' of post-Enlightenment rationality and its 'disenchantment' of the world limits human understaning of the true nature of the cosmos. (Of course beliefs in the 'supernatural' persist amongst those who hold onto lost traditions and practices: as Weber observed, for such people 'the world remains a great enchanted garden' [1965: 270]).

**Conclusion**

The shared universe of *Experimental Film* and *WWAGDT* is expanded in the short stories featuring Captain Solomon Rusk, descendant of the Scottish witch and original member of The Five-Family Coven Alizoun Rusk. Solomon, an 18th century British Navy officer turned pirate, is the child of Alizoun's great grandson Carson Rusk who also fathered Solomon's older half-sister Tante Ankolee. Of mixed race – her mother was Haitian – Tante Akolee lives on the fictional Caribbean island of Porte Macoute where she applies the magical gifts she has inherited from Alizoun to traditional Vodou practice. Tante Akolee's magic, and the historical setting and international scope of the sea-faring Solomon Rusk stories ('Sown From Salt' [2008]; 'Two Captains' [2013]; 'The Salt Wedding' [2013] included in the 2018 collection *Drawn Up From Deep Places*), provides a colonial context for the universe they share with *Experimental Film* and *WWAGDT*. The island's name recalls the Haitian phrase 'Tonton Macoute' meaning 'bogeyman' and associated with the Vodou religion. Haitian Vodou, like Tante Akolee herself, is a product of Western colonialism, combining the beliefs of the Haiti's indigenous people, the Taino, with African religions, such as those practiced in the Kingdoms of Dahomey and Kongo, and Roman Catholicism. Like the Yezidi archangels, the supernatural entities who comprise the 'Loa' of Vodou are servants to a single supreme being, 'Bondye' a Creole word derived from and sharing pronucnciation with the French phrase 'bon dieu' meaning 'Good God'. The experimental film-maker Maya Deren (1917-1961). a Russian immigrant to the United States, not only documented, but also participated in Voudon ceremonies in Haiti between 1947 and 1954 as shown in her posthumously released documentary *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1985). One of Deren's 'trance films', *Divine Horsemen* can be seen, given the director's personal engagement with Vodou practice, as not only the documentation of invocatory ritual but an invocation in itself, like Lady Midday intended Iris to undertake, and as Wrob achieved, in *Experimental Film*. Certainly, the film and Deren's book of the same name (1975), was instrumental in bringing the reality of Vodou practice into Western awareness by providing a counter-narrative to its depiction in Hollywod 'zombie' movies. Like Lois, Deren was highly critical of Hollywood's focus on entertainment which she considered an obstacle to cinema's development as an art form. In opposition to the superficial glamour of Hollwood which seduced Miliner Druir, Deren called for a cinema which would 'experiment with the effects contemporary technical devices have on nerves, minds, or souls' (1946:15). Such a cinema would belong to a lineage which included so-called 'primitive' (a term Deren disliked) cultures in which the artist/shaman figure had to 'create real forms which would have supernatural authority' (15). Deren's engagement with Haitian Vodou can be understood as an attempt to (re)enchant her film-making by drawing on a practice created by the displacement of African peoples and subordination of Haiti's indigenous population under Western colonialism, which also caused the birth of Tante Akolee.

The universe shared by characters in *Experimental Film* and stories featuring members of The Five-Family Coven is expanded further in the stories featuring twenty-first century, American 'holler witch' Allfaie “A-Cat” Chatwin and the demon-hunter Cornish sisters Dionne and Samaire, 'Crossing the River' (2009), 'Black Bush' (2011) and 'His Face, All Red' (2013), included in the collection *Spectral Evidence* (2018a), confirmed by a reference in the latter story to Juleyan Laird Roke, great-great grandson of Lady Glauce. A Scottish wizard, Juleyan used his powers to become a vampire at the moment of his execution for treason during the English Civil War. As Iain Sinclair has observed, in reference to Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula* series (1992 -), 'yesterday's undead are today's asylum seekers' (2003: 486) and Juleyan is no exception, escaping death at the hands of the State, like his ancestor Glauce, for the New World. Via one of Juleyan's victims, Allfair learns she too is descended from a European witch, peresecuted by Witchfinder Corn**î**che, 'genetic author' of her enemies/occasional allies Dionne and Samaire(2018a: 174). Where Tante Akolee is mixed-race (if one believes there is such a thing) Allfair and Samaire are mixed*-species,* both fathered by the same demon making them, like the 'quarter fae' Juleyan (184) and other progeny of cross-species fertilisation, *hybrids*. While Samair is ashamed of her origins, going so far as to cover herself in 'binding' tattoos to inhibit her demonic powers for the safety of others, Allfair revels in 'monster-pride' (174) using her abilities for her own advancement. Nevertheless, and despite their usually adverseial status, Allfair considers herself to be Samair's 'true family', closer to her than Samair's other step-sister, and constant companion, the fully human Dionne. For Allfair, she and Samair are also displaced people, who have grown up in 'separate Social Services petri dishes' (109) within the foster care system. In Samaire's case, this was due to her mother's murder by her human husband, a 'self-taught backwoods' exorcist', after she had been raped by a demon (55) while Allfair entered care because of her mother's neglect. This neglect seems to be typical of witches in the modern, 'iron-touched' world who tend to live a 'half-life at best' (110**).** The moral worldview created by Samaire's and her attitude towards her own hybrid nature separates her further from Allfair, who repeatedly, and unsuccessfully, encourages her to accept her true nature and the power that comes with it.

Further insight into the world of the Fae, and further expansion of the Five-Family Coven universe, occurs in the 2014 story 'Guising', included in *Spectral Evidence*, the narrator of which, Nuala, comes to realise that she too is a human-Fae hybrid, a quarterling resulting from her paternal grandmother's union with Saracen Druir, grandson of Lady Glauce. After a childhood encounter in Overdeere with Saracen's cousin Leaf Redcappie exposes her to the Dourvale *brugh*, Nuala researches her lineage as an adult. She comes to 'want to take off my false face and see the one beneath' and return to the *brugh* becuase 'this Iron World hurts me' (103). Nuala's emerging 'monster pride' contrasts with Maccabee Roke's, and his parents', rejection of their heritage. Theirs is a self-displacement, whereas Nuala has been kept ignorant of her origins by her father and grandmother. As with Lois's moral ambiguity and Safie's awareness of her own purposelessness in *Experimental Film,* by presenting contrasting views on Fae lineage in her hybrid characters, Files provides nuanced commentary on the modern, 'Iron-touched' world, acknowledging both its pleasures and its limitations. Although she has seen both Leaf and the *brugh* without their glamour, Nuala is nevertheless drawn to them perhaps because she shares an understanding of belonging to a low and/or marginalised class: it was social differences between her rural, blue collar father and 'from town' (88), petit bourgeois mother which caused them to separate, leaving Nuala with her father. Where Macabee and his parents reject the crude conditions of the *brugh* for the comfort and convenience of the human world, Nuala experiences an 'ache' – which she first felt after returning from her initial visit to the *brugh –* whenever she sees' something I should probably pay attention to' (102) ie manifestations of the Fae.

This ache can be interpreted as a painful longing, a *homesickness*. Which is not to say that Files condones the predatory activities of Fae such as Saracen and his mother Enzemblance Druir, or the hierarchical structures of their society, which marginalise those are not sufficiently pure. However, Files does seem to acknowledgeme the strength of their filial bonds which contrast with the dysfuntion found in many of her human characters' families. For Emile Durkheim, family breakdown was a symptom of the condition of *anomie*, a kind of derangementresulting from the sharp break from tradition caused by modernity. Durkehiem located this derangement in the insatiable desire (247) brought about by the abundance created by industrialisation: 'the more one has, the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs' (248) . This abundance beckons to some of the Fae, destroying their filial traditions as a result. From a Fae perspective then, modern society appears monstrous and predatory, vampiric in its stimulation of insatiability.

At the end of *WWAGDT*, Lady Glauce recongnises the helplessness of her situation: that the traditions, and conditions, of life in the *brugh* can not compete with the perceived freedom offered by the 'iron-touched' touched world for some of her Clan. In order to contain the vengeful Euwphaim she assists Macabee in collapsing the *brugh*, an action which closes him off from his family forever and puts an end to the predations of Saracen and Enzemblance. Although those ties are now distant, *WWAGDT end*s with Macabee amongst a new family of sorts, consisting of descendants of the Five-Family Coven who prefer life in the 'Iron-touched World' despite its many failings. That this world is largely disenchanted – although we are reminded on the last page that 'Dourvale remains' around the transmogrified Ygerna even though 'the tale of the Druirs is over' (373) - means Macabee's new family will remain marginalised within it. However, if they heed the advice of the final sentence to 'find your own homes, and go there' (373) – as Carra Devize does by finally starting a romantic relationship - then they will be able to achieve more than the kind of 'half-life' typical of those of supernatural origins and/or abilities.

Carra also supplies the ending to *Experimental Film*, in the form of a message for Lois received during the 'free imaging' course for mediums she teaches at the Freihoven Institute Parapsychology unit, where she was previously an inmate (the implication being that she is no longer hospitalised there following the events of *WWAGDT)*. The message, from Iris Whitcomb, suggests that, for all Lois has seemingly banished Lady Midday from the material plane, her desire, and that of the modern world in general, to 'look' is insatiable. This desire to look, the drive to, as Jean Baudrillard put it, 'make the world signify, to render it visible' (2007: 63) is itself as form of disenchantment. As a result, and again in Baudrillard's words, 'we live in a world in which there is more and more information, and less and less meaning' (1994: 79). Lois's investigation in to Iris, and her encounter with, and rejection of, Lady Midday, seems to have given her life meaning and purpose, and at end of the novel she appers to have both retained her family and achieved success in her career; however, Iris's message remains as a warning to Lois that her compulsion to look has the potential to distance her from these close ties.

**Works Cited**

Adorno, Theodor. 'Schema of Mass Culture' in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. J.M Bernstein (ed.). London: Routledge, 1991, pp.61-97.

Barthes, Roland, *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1980 [1971].

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1994 [1981].

 - *The Ecstasy of Communication*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007 [1987].

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Intimations of Postmodernity*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Deren, Maya, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*. New York: The Alicat Book Shop Press, 1946.

* *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. [Film]. US: 1985.

Didem, Kaya. 'Melting into chaos: Liquid modernity and other ideas of the late thinker Zygmunt Bauman', *The Daily Sabah* [online], 24th February 2017.

https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2017/02/24/melting-into-chaos-liquid-modernity-and-other-ideas-of-the-late-thinker-zygmunt-bauman, Accessed 30th August 2018.

Durkheim, Emile. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. New York: The Free Press.

Files, Gemma, *We Will All Go Down Together: Stories of the Five-Family Coven*. Toronto: Chizine Publications, 2014.

 - *Experimental Film*. Toronto: Chizine Publications, 2015.

 - *Spectral Evidence*. Trepidation Publishing, 2018a.

 - *Drawn Up From Deep Places*. Trepidatio Publishing, 2018b.

Lovecraft, H.P., 'The Shadow over Innsmouth', 1931 in *H.P. Lovecraft Omnibus 3*, London: Voyager, 2000.

Sinclair, Iain, *London Orbital*. London: Penguin, 2003.

Weber, Max, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013 [1905].

 - *The Sociology of Religion*. London: Methuen, 1965 [1920].

1. NB: Each story in *We Will All Go Down Together* have the year in which it is set as part of its title. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)