

**SPATIAL AND SONIC MONSTROSITIES  
IN WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON'S  
"THE WHISTLING ROOM"**

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**ABSTRACT**

The article focuses on the corpus of tales featuring “Carnacki, the Ghost-Finder” by the British author William Hope Hodgson, an influential figure in the history of horror, fantastic literature, and speculative fiction. Drawing both on classical works of criticism by Tzvetan Todorov and Dorothy Scarborough and on the rather scarce corpus of scholarship devoted to Hodgson himself, the essay analyses the employment of space and sound in “The Whistling Room”.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** William Hope Hodgson; Thomas Carnacki; space; sound; Tzvetan Todorov

Writing in 1963, Tzvetan Todorov remarked that “detective stories have in our time replaced ghost stories” (Todorov, 49). A number of authors in the early decades of the twentieth century, however, combined features of the ghost story, fantastic literature, and the detective tale with curious effects. The fictional sleuths who investigate both supernatural events and misdemeanours of earthly origins include Algernon Blackwood’s “psychic doctor” John Silence, Dyson and Phillips, a pair of gentlemen of leisure created by Arthur Machen, and not least Thomas Carnacki, the “ghost-finder” brought to life by William Hope Hodgson, an author whose own life would provide ample material for a string of adventure tales that challenge credibility.<sup>2</sup>

William Hope Hodgson (1877–1918), sailor, photographer, body builder, writer, and soldier, whose extraordinary career was cut short by his death at the Ypres salient, is chiefly known for his two novels that combine horror, fantasy, and speculative fiction, and which subsequently influenced several other writers of note.<sup>3</sup> He also published short

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<sup>2</sup> David Barnett notes that the first in the line of occult detectives is likely Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s Dr Martin Hesselius. Barnett, “Thomas Carnacki, King of the Supernatural Detectives”, *The Guardian* (30 June 2010), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2010/jun/30/thomas-carnacki-supernatural-detective> (accessed 31 January 2022). The phenomenon of occult detection is also explored in the recent anthology *The Ghost Slayers* (British Library, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of Hodgson’s life and career, see Emily Alder, *William Hope Hodgson’s Borderlands:*

stories, essays, and poetry. As with a number of authors of popular speculative and horror fiction, research into Hodgson so far is not extensive, but the corpus has been growing recently.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Carnacki is the protagonist of a series of five short stories published in *The Idler* magazine:<sup>5</sup> “The Gateway of the Monster” (January 1910), “The House among the Laurels” (February 1910), “The Whistling Room” (March 1910), “The Horse of the Invisible” (April 1910), and “The Searcher of the End House” (June 1910) (see Alder, 27). In 1913, these stories were printed together as *Carnacki, the Ghost-Finder*. Three more specimens were added to the 1948 edition: “The Haunted Jarvee”, released posthumously in *The Premier Magazine* in 1929; “The Hog”, which appeared in *Weird Tales* in 1947; and “The Find”, a previously unpublished story.<sup>6</sup>

Like Blackwood’s John Silence stories, the corpus is frustratingly small, and in the manner of Arthur Conan Doyle, Hodgson enjoys taunting his readers with such alluring suggestions as the “Silent Garden Business”, the “Yellow Finger Experiments”, and, perhaps most intriguingly, the “Case of Moving Fur”. Whether Hodgson was actually planning to pen some of them, or whether they were always supposed to remain unwritten mirages, like the giant rat of Sumatra, is tempting to consider, but it seems likely that the case of the “Grunting Man”, referred to in “The Whistling Room”, was later realised as “The Hog”, so one may speculate that Hodgson would have continued the series, were it not for the Great War, whose horrors first transcended his own terrifying literary visions, and ultimately ended his life.<sup>7</sup>

### The Carnacki Corpus

Hodgson’s Thomas Carnacki investigates cases of hauntings, which occasionally turn out to be the work of crafty humans, but often prove genuine. However, what he encounters are not ghosts in the traditional sense, as spirits of the deceased who seek vengeance,

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*Monstrosity, Other Worlds, and the Future at the Fin de Siècle*, doctoral diss. (Edinburgh: Napier University, 2009), 15–42.

<sup>4</sup> Hodgson’s work has been analysed in chapters in collective monographs and journal essays, often in combination with other authors, for instance H. G. Wells, A. Blackwood, and H. P. Lovecraft, with scholars focusing on his two novels, *The House on the Borderland* and *The Night Land*. For an overview of critical responses up to 2009, see Alder, 5–7, 30–42. Hodgson’s fiction is now republished more frequently, including *The Collected Fiction of William Hope Hodgson*, 5 vols (Night Shade Books, 2017–19) and his so far uncollected poems have been republished as *The Lost Poetry of William Hope Hodgson*, ed. Jane Frank (Tartarus Press, 2005). As is often the case in the realm of ghost, horror, and detective stories of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, useful information can be found on websites and in magazines run by enthusiasts, such as *Sargasso: The Journal of William Hope Hodgson Studies*, which has so far produced three volumes (2013, 2014, 2016), and the websites *William Hope Hodgson* ([williamhopehodgson.wordpress.com](http://williamhopehodgson.wordpress.com)), *Mystery and Imagination* ([gothictexts.wordpress.com](http://gothictexts.wordpress.com)), and *Forgotten Futures* ([forgottenfutures.com](http://forgottenfutures.com)).

<sup>5</sup> The full text, with the original illustrations by Florence Briscoe, can be accessed at: <http://www.forgottenfutures.com/game/ff4/whistle.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> So far, only the “Whistling Room” (“Hvizdající pokoj”) has been translated into Czech in the anthology *Přízraky, zázraky a spol.* (Prague: Albatros, 2007), and a partial Czech translation of “The Horse of the Invisible” has been included in a special ghost-story issue of the magazine *PLAV* (2/2022).

<sup>7</sup> Hodgson’s comment on how the horrors of WWI exceeded his own tales of terror is quoted in Gonzales, 1212.

reconciliation, or merely do not want to leave this world, but other forces seeking to interfere malignantly with human life, sometimes for reasons that are explained, yet in other cases, there seems to be no causal link between the manifestation and the afflicted person. This decision bereaves the tale of a powerful narrative moment when the mystery is explained but makes up for it in disquieting implications of coincidental supernatural terror that can attach itself to anyone, a horror of modern randomness and anonymity. In this way, Hodgson comes close to both Blackwood and Machen, creating tentacles of terror that reach far and wide.

Todorov defines the fantastic in literature as a phenomenon that occupies the duration of the uncertainty between a natural and a supernatural explanation of an event, and when one option is chosen, the narrative leaves the fantastic for “a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous” (25). In a sense, all the Carnacki stories dwell in the duration, for there are always various loopholes in the other explanations, as M. R. James famously put it, some smaller than others.

The tales set off as fantastic literature, with both Carnacki and the reader hesitating between natural and supernatural explanations, and either veering towards the first, branding it a detective tale, but still with a pronounced uncanny aftertaste, or towards the second, transforming it into full-on modern horror. “The Gateway of the Monster”, featuring a room haunted by an enormous spectral hand, would thus, according to Todorov’s typology, be a case of the “supernatural accepted” (Todorov, 42), and the “The House Among the Laurels”, where the events are revealed to be tricks deliberately performed by a criminal gang to scare off unwanted visitors from their place of operation, an example of the “supernatural explained” (Todorov 44). Carnacki himself does the choosing between the two explanations, both for his friends, the original audience, and for the reader, but they are left to ponder about the details, which are never explicated, and also about the objective of the events that have been described in the tale.

In his treatise, Todorov notes that the detective story focuses on the solution of the mystery, while texts linked to the uncanny, including fantastic literature, dwell more on the reactions which this mystery provokes (50). The Carnacki tales accommodate both. As will become evident in the following analysis, they emphasise the reactions, especially of Carnacki himself – both narrator and one of the characters – and the solutions, which however covers only a certain amount of ground, always leaving enough space for disquieting speculation.

According to Todorov, stories of the fantastic tend to feature a first-person narrator (82), and Carnacki is one of them, although his speeches are always framed by an introduction. The framing narrator, conspicuously named Dodgson, is one of four friends who are regularly summoned to Carnacki’s house to dine and to listen to a story about his exploits, but the tale itself is reproduced as related directly by Carnacki, in the first person. Thanks to the choice of focalisation, the readers gain insight into Carnacki’s feelings during the cases, as he recounts his thoughts and physical sensations in detail, and frequently addresses his audience, encouraging them to imagine what it must have been like, showing at the same time a desire to share and connect, and the inability to convey his experiences and impressions fully. Carnacki’s reliability is never questioned, and it is not once implied that he could be deceived, although he frequently doubts himself and stresses his humanity and fallibility. As a person, Carnacki is a mysterious blank –

nothing is mentioned about his private life and there is no explanation as to his surname which suggests family roots outside the British Isles.

In terms of investigation techniques, Carnacki relies on his courage and experience from previous cases, and his usual method is to first explore the whole haunted place meticulously and then spend a night there, with appropriate protection, to determine the nature of the phenomenon. The tales feature a curious mixture of modern technology and more traditional “techniques”. Carnacki arrives armed with a camera with flashlight, and photographs often play an important role in several of his cases, as do microphones and recording equipment, but he also uses formulas and chants from occult rituals, information from ancient manuscripts, the sign of the pentacle, garlic, and holy water. This intriguing blend of the old and the new reflects the thematic elements of the stories too and is most tellingly manifested in Carnacki’s signature protective device, the “electric pentacle”.

The stories centre markedly on manliness and masculinity. Carnacki has male clients and male companions and collaborators – women are largely absent and if they appear in the stories at all, they remain passive. There is a notable focus on (manly) pluck, which is suggested by the mere frequency with which the word appears, and it is a quality that Carnacki appreciates in others and in himself. However, there is also a great deal of manly fear and the attempts to overcome it, “pluck” going hand in hand with sheer “funk” and cold sweat. In each story, there is a point where Carnacki becomes genuinely terrified, and the reader is invited to join the sensation. The detective openly and in detail describes his dread and the physical manifestations of anxiety, in some cases even runs away from the haunted space in terror when his instinct encourages him to do so, but ultimately recovers his courage to conclude the business, so the narratives at the same time emphasise and undermine his masculine authority.

Among features related to genre and gender, the Carnacki corpus is remarkable for the inventive employment of space and sound, which contributes to the effectiveness and attraction of the stories. This article focuses on “The Whistling Room”, giving it minute attention that has so far been rarely afforded to individual short stories by Hodgson. “The Whistling Room” is one of the most effective and popular contributions to the series, which presents radical ideas about the possible impacts of evil and violence and is marked by nauseatingly inventive brutality.<sup>8</sup>

### **“The Whistling Room”**

In this story, Carnacki relates a case he was invited to investigate in Ireland. Tassoc, an American businessman, has recently become the owner of an old manor house. He is soon to marry a local beauty, Miss Donnehue, thus provoking the jealousy of the local

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<sup>8</sup> According to the William Hope Hodgson Website, it has been “reprinted at least 23 times in English and several times in foreign languages and was also adapted for television in 1954 as an episode of *The Pepsi-Cola Playhouse* featuring Alan Napier as Carnacki. [Sam Gafford]”. “Carnacki #3: ‘The Whistling Room’”, published 28 November 2012, <https://williamhopehodgson.wordpress.com/2012/11/28/carnacki-3-the-whistling-room/>, (accessed 31 January 2022). The teleplay by Howard Green, directed by Axel Gruenberg, significantly alters both the plot and the outcome, which is not surprising given the outrageous nature of the tale – a convincing and faithful adaptation could be imagined from the Hodgson fan Guillermo del Toro.

men, who would not be sorry to see him leave. His happiness is marred by a strange whistling in one of the rooms in his new home. Unsure whether it is the work of disappointed former suitors of his bride-to-be, or something more sinister, he engages Carnacki's services. What initially gives the impression of being one of the lighter Carnacki stories that works with stereotypes about Ireland and the Irish and plays with the possibility of a hoax and the setting of a haunted Irish mansion, turns out to be one of the most gruesome and disquieting tales in the collection.<sup>9</sup>

### Sonic Monstrosities

Dorothy Scarborough comments on the employment of sound in literature of the supernatural, from the early ghosts with their eloquent silence and apparitions that retain the ability of verbal communication, to ghostly music and even song. She also mentions the introduction of "new sounds in modern ghostly tale", including specific sounds indicating movement and activity, or completely odd ones, such as the peculiar hissing in Blackwood's "A Nemesis of Fire" (Scarborough, 97–99). The disconcerting dissociation of sensual experience can also be used to much effect, such as hearing without having the corresponding visual impression, and vice versa.

The Carnacki stories rely heavily on the aural, such as spectral neighing and galloping in "The Horse of the Invisible", rapping on the banister in "The Searcher of the End House", the blood drip in "The House Among the Laurels", grunting in "The Hog", and door-banging in "The Gateway of the Monster". Even in "The Thing Invisible", which is less aurally focused than the others, sound plays an important role during the moments of greatest tension. Especially "The Whistling Room", "The Hog", and "The Horse of the Invisible" employ unusual sounds to momentous effect.

"The Whistling Room" advertises sound in its very title. The combination of the adjective and the noun arouses the reader's attention as the connection is deliberately odd, immediately provoking speculations. It suggests the chamber itself produces the sound, which seems impossible, and like the characters in the story, the reader starts to consider human intervention, a clever device, or some trick of ancient architecture that might produce the effect, and the idea of whistling indicates a rather innocent phenomenon. The mention of whistling cannot but bring to mind the spook-story enthusiast M.R. James and his story "Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad", where the focus is more on the instrument and that which it summons rather than on the sound. F. Marion Crawford's story "Man Overboard," as Scarborough notes in her above-mentioned commentary, features a ghost that incessantly whistles his former tune, but Hodgson comes up with a more startling concept yet.

Carnacki arrives in Ireland and hears the whistling with his own ears:

Tom and I were in the library, when we heard an awfully queer whistling, coming along the East Corridor – The room is in the East Wing, you know.

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<sup>9</sup> In childhood, Hodgson spent some time in Ardrahan, co. Galway, with his family, and he used it as a location for his novel *The House on the Borderland* (1908) and also for the Carnacki story "The House Among the Laurels".

“That’s that blessed ghost!” I said to Tom, and we collared the lamps off the table, and went up to have a look. I tell you, even as we dug along the corridor, it took me a bit in the throat, it was so beastly queer. It was a sort of tune, in a way; but more as if a devil or some rotten thing were laughing at you, and going to get ’round at your back. That’s how it makes you feel. When we got to the door, we didn’t wait; but rushed it open; and then I tell you the sound of the thing fairly hit me in the face. (74)

Even here, it is implied that there might be a melody, but for some time, the descriptions focus on other aspects of the phenomenon. As Carnacki stays at the castle, he encounters the whistling several times, and attempts to give his listeners a more accurate idea: “an extraordinary hooning whistle, monstrous and inhuman” (75), “grotesque parody of human whistling, too gigantic to be human” (78), “as if some monstrous giant had been holding mad carnival with itself” (79), “for all the meditative lowness of the note, the horrible, gargantuan quality was distinct – a mighty parody of the human, as if I stood there and listened to the whistling from the lips of a monster with a man’s soul” (83).

The curious adjective “hooning” is employed several times. In contemporary usage, it is associated with irresponsible and reckless driving,<sup>10</sup> but the older entries for “hoon” as a noun include “a lout, a rough; a crazy person, a ‘clot’; a ponce”.<sup>11</sup> The designation may thus suggest a combination of lunacy, obscenity, and criminal intentions. These strange and disjointed, and ultimately inadequate, descriptions of the weird phenomena upset the reader by providing them with a glimpse and making them eager to know more but leaving them unable to get a distinct idea.

The depictions stress several aspects: the vastness and immensity of the sound, its monstrosity, suggesting a human origin transformed into something obscene, the sense of perverse, mocking amusement on part of the originating force, and, importantly, the ability of the room to move. The sound is deeply expressive and suggests both intelligence and agency:

As the door flew open, the sound beat out at us, with an effect impossible to explain to one who has not heard it – with a certain, horrible personal note in it, as if there in the darkness you could picture the room rocking and creaking in a mad, vile glee to its own filthy piping and whistling and honing. To stand there and listen was to be stunned by Realisation. It was as if someone showed you the mouth of a vast pit suddenly, and said: That’s Hell. And you knew that they had spoken the truth. (75)

Scarborough notes the efficiency of “the awful effect of a sudden silence after supernatural sounds” (98), and Hodgson makes full use of this device. In the descriptions, sound and silence and contrasted several times: “the hooning whistling of the Room, coming down strangely through the stillness of the night [...] low and constant, queerly meditative”. When Carnacki enters the room, he finds it “full of an abominable silence [...] sort of purposeful silence, just as sickening as any of the filthy noises the Things have power to make [...] this room had just that same *malevolent* silence – the beastly quietness of a thing that is looking at you and not seeable itself, and thinks that it has got you” (77).

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<sup>10</sup> “Hoon, v.” *OED Online*, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/269054](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/269054) (accessed 24 January 2022).

<sup>11</sup> “Hoon, n.” *OED Online*, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/88314](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/88314) (accessed 24 January 2022).

Upon another examination, “a constant, meditative, hooning whistling” is heard from the room, which abruptly ceases and “the silence seemed worse; for there is such a sense of hidden mischief in a silence” (78). The silence in the room becomes imbued with the same qualities as the whistling. The unpredictability and the sudden changes between sound and silence stress the agency of the phenomenon and its twisted playfulness, ruling out the possibility of a passive sonic imprint that is repeated always in the same manner.

According to his usual method, Carnacki proceeds to examine the room and later the entire house inch by inch, employing as usual a curious mixture of modern technology and traditional protection. He places a loop of garlic around his neck, plugs his ears with garlic and tries to amplify the whistling to record it:

I tried to get a phonographic record of the whistling; but it simply produced no impression on the wax at all. That is one of the things that has made me feel queer, I can tell you. Another extraordinary thing is that the microphone will not magnify the sound – will not even transmit it; seems to take no account of it, and acts as if it were non-existent. (82)

Together with Carnacki’s ingenious methods of sealing the room with human hair to prove that no one enters it, his technical examination finally rules out earthly meddling as the cause, and it becomes evident there are more sinister forces at play, that this is “a genuine case of what is popularly termed ‘haunting’” (80). Satisfactorily for the reader who prefers supernatural thrill to prosaic explanations, the room is indeed established as the agent of the whistling, and Carnacki finds out that the curious aural phenomena are caused by just as remarkable spatial manifestations.

### **Spatial Abominations**

The idea of the haunted room or house, of a supernatural phenomenon connected to a particular place, goes back to Walter Scott’s “The Tapestry Chamber” and much further (see Scarborough 105–106). Traumatic events or crimes are imagined leaving their mark on the place – from full-fledged active ghosts to passive repetitions. Hodgson takes this notion further. When Carnacki looks into the room from a window, using a ladder, he sees that

The floor in the middle of the huge, empty room, was puckered upward in the centre into a strange soft-looking mound, parted at the top into an ever changing hole, that pulsed to that great, gentle hooning. At times, as I watched, I saw the heaving of the indented mound, gap across with a queer, inward suction, as with the drawing of an enormous breath; then the thing would dilate and pout once more to the incredible melody. And suddenly, as I stared, dumb, it came to me that the thing was living. I was looking at two enormous, blackened lips, blistered and brutal, there in the pale moonlight.... [...] Abruptly, they bulged out to a vast, pouting mound of force and sound, stiffened and swollen, and hugely massive and clean-cut in the moon-beams. And a great sweat lay heavy on the vast upper-lip. In the same moment of time, the whistling had burst into a mad screaming note, that seemed to stun me, even where I stood, outside of the window. And then, the following moment, I was staring blankly at the solid, undisturbed floor of the room – smooth, polished stone flooring, from wall to wall; and there was an absolute silence. (83)

The haunted room becomes the actual physical manifestation of the trauma, where the person who haunts it merges with the physical space, creating a monstrous sentient chamber. The room lures Carnacki in by pretending to call for help in the voice of Tassoc, confirming the malevolent agency and intelligence of the phenomenon and also its awareness of the inhabitants of the house, their character and mutual relations. When Carnacki enters, he finds that “the end wall had bellied in” toward him, with “a pair of gargantuan lips, black and utterly monstrous”, within a yard of his face (84). He is miraculously saved by someone or something else in the room whispering the “Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa ritual” (84) and he ends up jumping out of the window.

In the 1900s and 1910s, various writers of the fantastic were interested in space and materiality, in the ideas of moving, fluid space, and in concepts like the Outer Space and the Fourth Dimension (Scarborough, 259). This interest is clearly manifest in Hodgson’s work in general. Todorov mentions the persistence of the theme of metamorphosis in gothic and fantastic fiction (Todorov, 109; Scarborough, 30–31). Often, these transformations would involve people turning into animals or one person becoming another, but almost always a reshaping of one into another individual being. What is innovative about Hodgson’s idea is the notion of a man merging physically with a room, exemplifying Todorov’s observation that in some fantastic texts “the transition from mind to matter has become possible” (Todorov, 114), in a very literal manner. Kelly Hurley, writing about Hodgson’s novel *The Night Land*, mentions the “representations of an admixed, fluctuable, even chaotic human body”, which is a pertinent point also for “The Whistling Room” (Hurley, 129).

According to Todorov, the whole fantastic narrative usually leads to one incident or a culminating point, going back to Edgar Allan Poe’s observation that the “tale is characterized by the existence of a single effect, located at the end, and by the obligation all the elements within the tale are under to contribute to this effect” (qtd in Todorov, 87). In this case, it is the revelation that it is the room itself that whistles and that it is a living organism with a malicious will and an intelligence of its own, suggesting the possibility of merging a person with a chamber made of stone and wood. All the other descriptions and incidents in the story have been preparing the ground for the moment when Carnacki looks in through the window and enters the room.

Immediately after his lucky escape, Carnacki concludes that the chamber needs to be destroyed, not only purged or exorcised: “the room would have to come down, and every fragment of it burned in a blast-furnace, erected within a pentacle” (84). When it is being torn down, the cause of the haunting is revealed: “there was let into the masonry a scroll-work of stone, with on it an old inscription, in ancient Celtic, that here in this room was burned Dian Tiansay, Jester of King Alzof, who made the Song of Foolishness upon King Ernore of the Seventh Castle” (85). An old manuscript which recounts the legend in detail is readily procured by Tassoc.

The widespread appeal of the jester’s satirical song leads to war between the two ancient kings. Alzof is burned together with his castle, and the jester is captured by Ernore, who takes his wife for himself.<sup>12</sup> Ernore also has Tiansay’s tongue torn out, to

<sup>12</sup> As in other Carnacki stories, women in “The Whistling Room” are causes or victims of the events, passive and mostly silent. In this case, nothing is indicated about the wife – what was her relationship with the jester, whether she died willingly by his hand to prevent further exploitation by the king, or



prevent him from repeating the song. The jester is imprisoned in the room around which the whole story evolves but manages to escape and is found cradling his dead wife in his arms, and whistling the Song of Foolishness, since he is physically unable to sing it. In revenge, Tiansay is roasted alive in a great fireplace in the same room, yet he defiantly continues whistling the song. It is revealed that the Iastrae Castle, Tassoc's new residence, incorporates the old remains of the ancient Seventh Castle, and the whistling room is identified as the place of the ancient jester's imprisonment and violent death. According to the parchment found in the walls, the whistling started immediately after the event, with a strange power emanating from the room.

Hodgson manages to make the idea of a haunted room original on several levels. Were "The Whistling Room" a more traditional ghost story, the spirit of the tortured jester would be haunting the room where he died, whistling the fateful song, and trying to enact his revenge. Here, the situation is different. Carnacki defines the incident as "one of those cases of continuity of thought producing a positive action upon the immediate surrounding material [...] a living spiritual fungus, which involves the very structure of the aether-fiber itself, and, of course, in so doing, acquires an essential control over the 'material substance' involved in it" (86). The reader witnesses the result of a transformation of matter by which the jester's traumatised soul came to possess the material surroundings of his execution, becoming them, and turning them alive to the extent that the room transforms, moves, and produces the whistling sound in order to exact Tiansay's revenge.

Vengeance is indeed the aim of the monstrous room, as it is revealed that Miss Donnehue is supposed to be descended from King Ernore and her presence and upcoming marriage have supposedly awoken the room to life. As Scarborough notes, the revenge ghost in modern fiction frequently manifests itself as "mutilated or dismembered, each disfigurement of the mortal body showing itself in a relentless immortality and adding to the horror of the haunting" (91). The mutilation of the jester's body is emphasised and only the monstrous, burned and blistered lips appear, recalling the most singular moments of the tragedy.

The brutality and nature of the punishment provide the second culminating point of Hodgson's story, after the revelation of the sentient room. Todorov discusses the frequent employment of cruelty in fantastic literature and its functions, noting that in many cases the violence is merely documented and does not actually occur within the universe of the tale (132–35). Here, the event of the mutilation and the burning is not described as happening within the tale, but neither is it purely "verbal violence": it is implied as having actually occurred in real history, with the tangible proof of the manuscript and the suggestive presence of the enormous fireplace.

The fantastic narrative and even more the detective story, Todorov notes, emphasise the "process of uttering" and also the time of reading, as "surprise is only a particular case of irreversible temporality" (89–90). "The Whistling Room" is distinguished by clever foreshadowing, with seeds of future terror deftly sown from the beginning, such as when Carnacki first notices the above-mentioned fireplace in the otherwise empty room: "huge affair, and has a queer gallows-iron, I think they are called" (78). The narrative also

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whether she did not actually prefer her new lover. Miss Donnehue is only referred to and there is no mention of her actions.

employs subtle pacing. It is told over two meetings at Carnacki's, and the first session ends with the prospect that the whole business will be revealed as the handiwork of spurned Irish would-be suitors of Miss Donnehue. Carnacki leaves for Ireland again, creating an intermission which highlights the tension and gives the readers the opportunity to consider the obvious natural explanation. When he returns, he relates the rest of the case to his audience. Another manifestation is the triple, escalating punishment of the jester: first his tongue is torn out, then his wife is taken, presumably to be kept as a sex slave by the king, and finally he is roasted alive. The terrible surprises of a first reading cannot be repeated, but there remains plenty to disquiet and occupy the reader upon returning to the story, such as the minute descriptions of the sensations and the physical and philosophical implications.

### **“Out You Go!”: Final Remarks**

The dinner gatherings at Carnacki's residence in Chelsea are always concluded with the host sending his friends home with the above-mentioned phrase, leaving them – and the readers – to ponder the inferences of what they have just listened to, “in the dark” and without Carnacki's reassuring presence. “The Whistling Room” is arguably one of the tales which create the most disturbing aftertaste, thanks to the remarkable engagement with space and sound, clever pacing and foreshadowing, thoroughly described sensory experiences, inventive employment of various genre tropes, and unsettling suggestions about the lasting impact of violence and trauma. Here, the remnant of individual consciousness merges with the physical environment of the room, the connection forged by the force of suffering. The most disquieting fact is perhaps not the ancient atrocity but rather the hinted-at theory about spiritual fungus.

In a striking move, Hodgson uses whistling, a spectre of the fatal song which neither the reader nor the characters hear sung with full voice and lyrics, only whistled, marking the absence of the tongue necessary for pronunciation. The melody is never described, leaving everything to imagination. Were “The Whistling Room” a more traditional tale, resolution could be achieved by the discovery of the manuscript and the destruction of the fireplace, or perhaps by a reiteration of the ill-fated satirical song. One of the horrible ironies of the story is the fact that the evil manifestation in this case is the soul of the jester, a person whose role was to provide amusement and diversion, that grows rotten with hatred, seeking revenge on an innocent female descendant of his killer.

What makes these tales of male courage and companionship remarkable in terms of depicting gender roles and also more relatable to a contemporary audience is the curious openness and detail in which Carnacki's own fears and doubts are depicted, and the noticeably high concentration of “pluck” is balanced by the similarly conspicuous ubiquity of “funk”.

Like other representatives of weird fiction, Hodgson takes on board established conventions of the ghost-story genre and radically transforms them. The tale also presents a very different spiritual landscape. Like the whole Carnacki corpus, “The Whistling Room” involves references to a specific occult system, complete with arcane terminology, suggesting the existence of various malevolent powers and manifestations that seek

to interfere with human life for their own purposes, which are however never explained. In the Carnacki stories, physical suffering and death are not indicated as the ultimate threat. At the culminating moment in “The Whistling Room”, before the unknown power whispers the saving line of the Saaamaaa ritual, Carnacki is prepared to shoot himself rather than wait to see what the room “does” to him. The exact nature of the threat is not specified and neither is the origin of the last-minute miraculous deliverance, suggesting that both evil and good forces are random, capricious, and ultimately obscure. This modern bleakness, together with the relatable character of a ghost buster who regularly gets as spooked as his readers, is likely one of the reasons that account for the continuing and growing popularity of the Carnacki tales.

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#### RÉSUMÉ:

#### ZVUKOVÁ A PROSTOROVÁ MONSTROSITA V POVÍDCE WILLIAMA HOPEA HODGSONA „THE WHISTLING ROOM“

Článek se zaměřuje na sérii povídek z pera britského spisovatele Williama Hopea Hodgsona, jejichž hlavní postavou je „okultní detektiv“ Thomas Carnacki. Hodgson sehrál významnou roli ve vývoji hororové, fantastické a spekulativní literatury. Práce vychází z klasických kritických děl (Tzvetan Todorov, Dorothy Scarborough) i z nevelkého korpusu odborných statí věnovaných přímo Hodgsonovi a zkoumá využití prostoru a zvuku v povídce „The Whistling Room“.

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