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# Sleeve notes: PJ Harvey's Gothic world

## ABSTRACT

*Leg-of-mutton sleeves, Victorian mourning feathers, stiff, white governess dresses; Harvey's costumes for her performances on stage and in music video for the three albums *White Chalk* (2007), *Let England Shake* (2011) and *The Hope Six Demolition Project* (2016) position her as English Gothic. Referencing literary and cinematic readings of the term, this article argues that Harvey performs an English, Victorian Gothic. We argue that she recuperates the female Gothic for contemporary times allowing it resonance beyond its literary and cinematic beginnings. Drawing on some of those literary and cinematic debates on the Gothic and the eerie, we consider how her costumes across these albums showcase 'remnants' both of the past and, of the forgotten. Harvey stitches those stories into her performances, allowing her to present spectres of both the past and present in the form of the forgotten, excluded and misunderstood.*

## KEYWORDS

PJ Harvey  
Gothic  
Victorian  
spectre  
eerie  
femininity  
English

## INTRODUCTION

There is a photograph of PJ Harvey from 1995, shot by Cummins (1995) that often appears on Google image searches of her. In it she has her hair scraped back off her forehead and her arms raised above her head. She is wearing a

1. As Goodwin (1992) and Railton and Watson (2011) have noted, music videos share titles with song tracks and referencing conventions are still emergent with respect to distinguishing between them. This book will follow their lead and so a music video will be written in small capitals (LET ENGLAND SHAKE), the album titles will be in italics, *Let England Shake* and a song track from an album will be within quotation marks, 'Let England Shake'.

black sleeveless vest and her armpits are on full display. They are unshaven. This image established PJ Harvey early on as an artist whose play with visual imagery, which was centred on the body and costume, was equally as disruptive of genre and gender as her musical output. Under her arms lurked something that should not be there within a specific set of aesthetic ideological imperatives. This article is about something close to those early, hairy armpits. It is about her sleeves, in particular, about how the sleeves that she has worn over three albums from 2007 to 2016 mark her out as an English Gothic performer. It focuses on these sleeves as part of her stage and promotional costumes for *White Chalk* (2007), *Let England Shake* (2011) and *The Hope Six Demolition Project* (2016)<sup>1</sup> pulling out their references to an English Victorian Gothic unpacked with reference to the Gothic literary tradition and the role of the spectral past as it is stitched onto the body.

This article arises from a particular position with a specific set of questions. As film and music video theorists our understanding of costume is to consider it as one aspect of performance, both live and mediatized, that builds into the work's overall audio-visual aesthetic (Vernallis 2004). The images discussed here therefore are from album covers, reviews and recorded performances. In this respect, Harvey's costumes, her sleeves and Gothic flourishes are part of her metatextual persona (Dyer 1979) that segues from and into the narratives and sonic textures of her music, and can itself, as texture and material, be significant (Vernallis 2004: 101, 2013). The article builds on work on her music video performances, which argued that her performances 'played around with stock images of femininity that haunt the cultural landscape' (Gardner 2015: 1). Harvey has, up until now, played with a largely cinematic and musical Gothic that by *White Chalk* (2007) is more obviously literary. This album marked a shift to a historical Gothic placed clearly in Englishness and the nineteenth century. She therefore uses a Victorian Gothic aesthetic in her stage and video outfits across these three albums from 2007 to 2016 as a development of her critical toolkit. In *White Chalk*, she performs madness and femininity, Englishness in *Let England Shake*, and in *The Hope Six Demolition Project*, her stage costumes make her appear as critic and soothsayer. The middle of these three albums acts as a bridge between the concerns of the first one to the subject matter of the third, but they are all tied by her costume, which references the Gothic.

Why this matters now is that if the role of the Gothic is a response to contemporary fears and crises (Botting 2008), then Harvey's turn to it in her visual presentation of her performing self over these three albums indicates her role not only as critic of gender, which has been established (Burns and Lafrance 2002; Gardner 2015), but of nation and its relationship to war. As Harvey's work becomes more politically engaged, so her costumes dredge the past for Gothic inspiration to house those critiques. An article such as this cannot assume to accommodate all the literature written on The Gothic (Hantke and Monnet 2015), but there are writers whose work is mobilized to argue for Harvey's use of it. These interventions focus on the Gothic as an aesthetic (Spooner 2004), and as an attitude (Wasson 2010), which are linked to various reflections on the past (Baker 2013) and the present (Botting 2008).

Key to our claiming PJ Harvey as an English Gothic is an understanding that this aesthetic affords her a critical space from which to formulate poetic responses to both femininity (*White Chalk*), and to war and loss (*Let England Shake*, *Hope Six Demolition Project*) that are grounded in Englishness, especially landscape. 'Gothic' is not the only mode for responding to contemporary fears, but Harvey is conversant with its conventions, especially its

preoccupation with madness and murder (Gardner 2015). This, she now maps onto Englishness so producing her Victorian English Gothic, in terms of lyrical preoccupation with murder and insanity specifically (Gardner 2015), and which has now explicitly surfaced in her work as Victorian English Gothic. 'Untangling "English" from "British" is a fraught business' (Gardner 2015: 142), but Harvey's lyrics in *White Chalk* refer explicitly to the cliffs of Dorset, a county in the south of England, and she refers repeatedly to 'England' in *Let England Shake*. *The Hope Six Demolition Project* is less 'placed' in Englishness lyrically, yet Harvey's costume extends the English Gothic aesthetic, as our analysis illustrates.

### PJ HARVEY'S (VICTORIAN) GOTHIC

PJ Harvey is a critically acclaimed and commercially successful English musician, but she is not an exclusively 'Gothic' artist. Appearing on the independent music scene in the early 1990s, she has produced ten studio albums and won the Mercury Prize twice (in 2001 and 2011). She is often mentioned 'alongside' Nick Cave and Patti Smith and generates the same kind of critical acclaim in the mainstream and niche press as these two: intellectual, maverick, eccentric (Whiteley 2000; Burns and Lafrance 2002; Davies 2001; Railton and Watson 2011). Indeed, it is, in part, her short-lived, romantic and professional relationship with Nick Cave in the mid-1990s, which did much to generate a sense of her as 'gothic', given his status as 'gothic' (Van Elferen 2013). Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, her work mined a seam of garage punk and Gothic Blues, where the Gothic element referenced an American Antebellum aesthetic also explored by Nick Cave (Baker 2013). She has drawn on various musical traditions and genres to offer a singular vision of desire, sexuality, and more recently, nation (Gardner 2015). The most recent three albums in particular, have seen her engagements with land, nation and belonging accompanied by costumes that have referenced the past, in particular that of the Victorian Gothic. Harvey has long used costume to critique. Be it her version of the femme fatale (in *DOWN BY THE WATER*), the hysteric (*MANSIZE*) or the whore (*50FT QUEENIE*), her video performances have seen her illustrate her alienation from archetypal feminine figures and re-inhabit them anew through music, gesture, lyrics and costume.

Maria Mochnacz has worked with Harvey from the beginning of her career and directed the bulk of her music videos from 1993 through to 2007. The videos over this period shared both a clear aesthetic and were matched to the audio demands of each album. Each video/film is congruent with the album's audio-visual aesthetic; videos for tracks on *Dry* (1993) by Mochnacz are shot in black and white and in keeping with the audio aesthetic. Changing directors, Harvey worked with war photographer Seamus Murphy for *Let England Shake* and *Hope Six Demolition Project*. These films, like the album, offer up a reading of Englishness as defined by place and memory. In the introduction to the DVD, Seamus Murphy explains that Harvey had approached him after she had seen his work. He writes of how:

I never wanted to interpret the album, but to capture something of its mood and force. I wanted to look at the enigma of England, its island mentality and complicated relationship with its past. Contemporary England springs from a history of colonial adventures, military ambitions, industrial prowess and a rigid hierarchy. Now it is also defined

by is waning power and role in modern geopolitics. And it can be a gratifyingly odd place.

(Murphy 2011)

This declaration of intent is absent on the music videos prior to this album and it explicitly introduces another author alongside Harvey, one whose artistic aims are apparent, which Harvey has previously been reluctant to do and which has never been explained on her album covers. In line with this increase in assertion of what drove her to make the album, she was more explicit in clarifying the motivation behind it in the promotional interviews she conducted for it, which attracted a good deal of publicity; what she had to say about England seemed to matter (*The Andrew Marr Show* (18 April 2010), an interview to *The Guardian* the day after winning the Mercury Prize). Her alliance with Murphy has continued with a collaborative illustrated book of poetry (*The Hollow of the Hand*, 2015) and their appearance at the Royal Festival Hall (October 2015). Their appearance together showcased their collaborative output. Harvey recited selected poems from her anthology and played tracks from *The Hope Six Demolition Project*, while Murphy screened scenes from the film he made and contextualized some of his photographs by recounting his and Harvey's experiences during their time in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Washington DC. Harvey's recent work has sought to develop her creative capacity, encompassing poetry readings, guest editing Radio 4's *Today* programme and scoring soundscapes for theatre productions (*The Nest*, *The Young Vic*: 2016).

Whilst Harvey has sought to challenge herself artistically, the use of fashion and costume is one tool Harvey employs to visually animate her work. She has inspired the high-fashion magazine *Vogue* to describe her as an influential fashion 'muse'

her early adoption of Victoriana, fashion's current preoccupation. Mochnacz's twin, Annie, is responsible for the leg-of-mutton looks, made of materials sourced from vintage shops and made along the lines of 18th-century dress patterns. In 2011, Harvey accepted her Mercury Prize in a corseted white dress and feathered headdress designed by Ann Demeulemeester, famous for her "poet warrior" silhouette and her longtime muse, Patti Smith, to whom Harvey has often been compared (Borelli-Persson 2016)

Harvey's ironic performances in music video particularly are conversations with the past, specifically with visualized memories of archetypes of femininity. She plays with and performs stereotypes of 'womanliness' that she finds embedded within the 'communal reservoirs' (Van Dijck 2007: 8) of personal and collective cultural memory, specifically those of the lover and the mother. She has used costume not only to perform such feminine tropes, but songs such as 'Dress' and video performances for MAN-SIZE indicate how she articulates the relationship with dresses in particular that she finds uncomfortable. The dress is the ultimate signifier of femininity and romance; it is simultaneously close but elusive and inevitably doomed to failure, because she does not 'fit' and this ill-fitting is described lyrically and performatively. She continues this tradition of critique through costume and material in these three albums, but does so through a distinctly Gothic lens. Our reading of Gothic and Gothic clothing comes from Spooner's (2004) work, *Fashioning Gothic Bodies*.

Differing from Gothic fashion, Spooner (2004: 1) correlates the progression of Gothic narrative conventions with historically and gender-specific fashion discourses. In applying this to Harvey's costume and performance, it will allow us to map the development of Harvey's employment of costume with the concerns of each album, and how this engages with Harvey's critique of female representation.

It is important to clarify which version of 'Gothic' is being mobilized here, since there is a tension between psychoanalytical and historical approaches to it. Our argument rests on an understanding of Gothic as played out across nineteenth-century literature, focusing on the Gothic costume's potential as indicator of both female repression and emancipation. This foregrounds a literary tradition that has seeped into contemporary subcultural dress and brings with it connotations of melancholy, romanticism, exclusion and an obsession with death. Not all of these concepts can be dealt with here, but our suggestion is that her costumes work on three layers in their allusions to the authors and literary concerns of a nineteenth-century English Gothic. First, she presents herself both as the author figure (the Brontës and Shelley in particular), second, to characters within their novels and from there, lastly, to their concerns; their fear of the future and of a complex revisioning of the past (Frankenstein) and of their own desire and femininity (Brontë). In particular, the role of the Gothic in contemporary art forms acts as a mode of rebellion, since it foregrounds transgression and a refusal to conform to conventional aesthetic norms.

Harvey's work has always expressed the desire to confront and transgress boundaries, but until now, accounts of this disruption have focused on her music and performance. By extending that examination to her costume, our argument is that she is operating an English Gothic over these three albums, which is a departure from her previous work. This emerges in her lyrics (that use words such as 'milestone') and in her use of the English landscape. This is not a journey into an unrelated area. Harvey's costume choices emerge from a Gothic tradition that has its roots in the English landscape, which her stage and video outfits sit in a place; they are rooted. They make sense in this geographical context because they come from a 'place'. In *White Chalk* and *Let England Shake*, the natural (English) world is used as a setting for disappointment, death and war. It rots bones ('White Chalk'), its tree branches are home to body parts ('These Are the Words that Maketh Murder'), and its milestones are the stage for doomed love affairs ('The Devil'). This is not a picturesque pastoral in any way. The farm workers in Murphy's films for *Let England Shake* (for the short film THE WORDS THAT MAKETH MURDER) may stride across a field swathed in the mists of dawn but as they do, Harvey sings about how (she) has seen and done things that she regrets. Bell ringers ring out their bells while Harvey sings about soldiers burying their dead ('In the Dark Places'). Writing from a rural perspective, she is reinvesting the pastoral with the reality of the repercussions of war upon those who live there and reconfiguring the English pastoral as English Gothic. She is part of what the landscape writer MacFarlane (2015) has termed a 'contemporary address' of cultural actors across many disciplines who are interested in the 'eeriness of the English countryside', where the landscape houses 'part-buried sufferings and contested ownerships'. MacFarlane notes the importance of landscape throughout all forms of English gothic, an importance that is integral to these albums. The current turn to the 'eeriness' of the national countryside is, he argues, driven by 'contemporary anxieties and dissents...being reassembled

and re-presented as spectres' (2015). It is the notion of 'eeriness' that links Harvey's work to a Gothic sensibility, specifically how 'eerie' evokes the abnormal or spectral.

### PERFORMING THE GOTHIC

The front cover of *White Chalk* is the first instance of Harvey performing the Gothic, notably a Victorian Gothic. Much referred to as dressed as a Victorian governess, Harvey is clothed in a long white dress that covers her figure; the dress is recognizable, from the exaggerated puff sleeves at the shoulder, as modelled on a Victorian design. Captured against a darkening background, Harvey sits, hands clasped in her lap, hair untamed, staring joylessly towards the camera as her shadow creates a doubling presence. Cloaking her figure in darkness imbues the image with a sepia quality that furthers the association with Victoriana and assembles Harvey as an historical and spectral presence. Harvey has plundered a variety of archives of feminine imagery throughout her career and her performances are conversations with the past, specifically with visualized memories of archetypes of femininity. They are ironic reviews of past stereotypes of femininity that have worked to shore up dominant ideologies of gender that Harvey reworks... (Gardner 2015: 70). Many of these performances, of the diva, the femme fatale and the hysteric mobilized 'camp' to do so, and reworked figures from a female pantheon of possibilities that populated mid-century Hollywood and pop culture, but this is not the case with *WHITE CHALK*. The image's invocation of a Gothic sensibility, given that she stares out with a 'perverse emotional deadness' that Wasson (2010: 2) argues is indicative of the world as seen through a Gothic lens, reaches back further into history, which serves to set her apart from the present, enabling her to comment on it, just as camp did for her earlier work. Baldick argues that the Gothic includes a 'fearful sense of [historical] inheritance' (cited in Wasson 2010: 2) and this serves to frame Harvey's mobilization of the Gothic as another method for claiming a critical position. Within this newly realized Gothic past, Harvey performs the Gothic as a further dramatic narrative to her performance and music. It contextualizes her as a Gothic body that has transgressive potential; her costume and performance problematize the boundaries between author and performer, and between Gothic heroine and spectre. They also disturb temporal boundaries; Harvey's work dwells, as Baker (2013: 7) claims Nick Cave's does, on 'the relationship between the past and the present – simultaneously nostalgic, transgressive and haunted'. The past does not merely return; it has never gone away and remains traced upon the present, in musical and material remnants. These historical narratives of femininity have a hold on the present that Harvey is enacting by dressing in them and by doing so, calls into question their authenticity at the very same time as she produces herself as 'authentic' in so far as the dress is an obvious construction.

Harvey's costume as authenticating process constructs her *White Chalk* persona in line with Spooner's (2004) model for Gothic bodies in that the dress casts her as a historically specific subject. Forming part of this process and thus enriching the performance of the Gothic, Mochnacz (2007) explained the dresses were adapted from late eighteenth-century patterns and constructed from second-hand materials, and the images for *WHITE CHALK*, *THE DEVIL* and *WHEN UNDER ETHER* were photographed using long exposures, resulting in Harvey having to sit still as would have been the case in early portrait photography. The dresses were created by Annie Mochnacz

(Maria Mochnacz's twin sister), who had begun working with Harvey on the 'Uh-huh-her' tour, making jewellery and clothing for Harvey to wear on stage (Mochnacz 2007). Other than this, little is known on the creative process for the *White Chalk* costumes, leaving it difficult to comment definitively on the creative process between Harvey and Mochnacz.

The music for *White Chalk* has been described as a 'chilling interpretation of Victorian chamber music' (Keefe 2007), and with its out-of-tune piano and broken harp underscoring the songs, the music fulfils Harvey's vision as plausibly hailing 'from 100 years ago' (Harris 2007). The music is as sepia tinged as her image here. Indeed, the language Harvey employs lyrically is decidedly timeworn: 'all of my being is now in pining' (The Devil), 'how to catch someone's fancy' ('Grow, Grow, Grow'), 'ether' ('When Under Ether'), where 'ether' for example, was introduced as an anaesthetic in the 1840s. With a broader brush, Harvey sings of love and desire ('The Devil'), loss ('Silence'), trauma ('The Piano') and insanity ('Before Departure'), concerns that have occupied female gothic narratives of both literary and cinematic mediums. Whilst the photographic images entrench Harvey's persona to a past gone, presenting her as a returning presence, this alignment also opens a narrative of Harvey performing a stereotypical female gothic. Harvey as spectral female is a return, somewhat uncannily, to the concerns of female representation that Beard (1946: 77) has described as 'the haunting idea' in that the image of women is 'a ghostly creature too shadowy to be even that real'. By this, Beard argues on two points. Firstly, that writing on women repeats, and returns to unchanged discourses, and secondly, that women throughout history have been constructed as 'ghostly' in that they are disembodied presences within a patriarchy, which become more pronounced as they age. Whilst the images of Harvey as spectral governess may corroborate construction of the female as ethereal presence, the very existence of *White Chalk* is evidence of Harvey's ability to reject governance by a patriarchy, give voice to her own singular vision, and maintain sovereignty over her own career and path. In terms here of the performance of the album, it is the dress for her live performances that reject woman as disempowered.

If Harvey's costume and the marketing images are gothic texts, then both can be framed as 'the emptying out of meaning into surface... countered by a pull towards interiority' (Spooner 2004). As Spooner states, gothic garments articulate gothic concerns such as insanity, haunting and spectrality, styling the body as Gothic subject. Harvey's costume of Victorian governess therefore enunciates a female experience particular to the gothic: madness, entrapment, oppression and victim. Authentication of the costume is suggestive of Harvey's acceptance of this vision of the female; to wear is to be the embodiment of that experience. However, her live performances contest this view, suggesting that her engagement with this stereotype is problematic, and one she critiques through her costume.

Harvey's live shows for *White Chalk* were appropriately solo ventures, a variation on a piano recital, but with occasional turns on the guitar. Harvey is not an accomplished piano player (she confesses to using a metronome to regulate her right hand (Stubbs 2007)) and learnt the instrument for the album in order to refresh her approach and find a new landscape and timbre for her work. She is not a 'natural' on it, and so again performs her alienation from femininity since the 'piano is strongly coded as feminine' (Gardner 2015: 92), and the 'Victorian lady was expected to be accomplished on it' (Gardner 2015). She sings above her natural register, sounding innocent, childlike and



ghostly, articulating her distance from such codes of expected gender performance. There is a rejection of accomplishment in both her piano playing and singing on this album that is emblematic of the gap between her artistry and her presentation of herself as feminine, suggestive of how 'strange' the latter is to her. By performing this literary nineteenth-century female, she positions herself as a Victorian Englishwoman, which is both part of her heritage and from which she is also removed, which can also be seen in her alienation from 'feminine' dress in her early work (Gardner 2015).

Harvey's dresses for her live performances were designed in the same style as those used for marketing, but enriched with further design. The puffed sleeves at the shoulders are excessive and an intricate stem of buttons train down the back. While such adornments accentuate the feminine, they also confine Harvey's body to her gender and within the historical representation of the gothic feminine, visibly restricting her to all those gendered discourses symbolize. However, Harvey's dress is inscribed with lyrics from her songs that Mochnacz (2007) described as making her costume 'more armour like'. As with her piano playing, such adornment presents Harvey's body as a contested site where author, performer, the Gothic feminine and spectre wrestle for distinction. This 'site' is a place where both the 'star' image and a song personality are played out, what Frith (1998) describes as the 'double enactment'. Harvey 'plays out' female drama of love, desire and trauma, but central to all the performances is Harvey's 'star' persona, a desired site in itself, and also author of the songs. Harvey's own history of a singular vision of female sexuality haunts this very embodiment of Victorian gothic. However, Harvey registers her presence by stitching her dress with her lyrics, which symbolizes her own intervention into the history of the representation of women, a history she can draw upon, literally, but a heritage she refuses to be confined by.

When viewed as a trilogy, it becomes apparent how *Let England Shake* acts as a bridge between the gendered concerns and aesthetics of *White Chalk* and the more global and contemporary themes of *The Hope Six Demolition Project*. *Let England Shake* develops the notion of a Gothic pastoral, an eerie, haunting and festering landscape that haunts all three albums. It is an album that sees Harvey transition from the interior to a more public vista and discourse, but one still with a view on history and the lessons it affords us. Underpinning Harvey's musical evolution, her writing and performance, is her costume. Enquiries into her writing process have invariably led Harvey to explain how she conceives of her songs cinematically, even to the detail of envisioning lights, perspective and camera angles (Stubbs 2007). Given her early and well-documented study of the visual arts, Harvey's concern for articulating her work in visual forms is of little surprise. Whilst *White Chalk* extended her experimentation with feminine archetypes, her costume for *Let England Shake* furthers her ambivalent relationship towards her gender, in that it neutralizes her femininity in order for Harvey to embody the role of commentator, a role she expressed as critical for the resulting album (Lynskey 2011). Questioning whether a female vantage point can be accepted as a universal experience necessitates a move from a female Gothic to a more universal Gothic sensibility: hauntings, ghosts and phantasms.

Zizek's (2000: 3) view of modernity offers an informative approach to *Let England Shake*: 'perhaps the best way of encapsulating the gist of an epoch is to focus...on the disavowed ghosts that haunt it'. If the Gothic concerns itself with past events returning, then Harvey provides the gap through which these suppressed figures can arise. Designed in the same full-length gothic style as

those used for *White Chalk*, the dress again renders Harvey 'of the past', while her feathered headdress positions Harvey as a rural and Shamanic figure, as if an ancient 'before time', returning the past to the present. Her costume is inscribed with the 'disavowed ghosts' of war and England's heritage.

The costumes were designed by Ann Demeulemeester as part of an unconventional collaboration between herself and Harvey that draws upon a mutual artistic kinship, while locating the animation of the album at the heart of the creative process. Considering 'the music was perfect for marriage with her work' (Rabkin 2012: 21), Harvey sent lyrics and demos of the album to Demeulemeester, providing the concepts and ideas for Demeulemeester to work from. Refusing to impose her tastes on others, Demeulemeester prefers to let the wearers choose their own outfits, resulting in her and Harvey 'playing dress-up' at the initial fitting and allowing Harvey to choose the outfits she wishes to wear (Rabkin 2012: 25).

For *Let England Shake*, Harvey is the 'poet warrior', a presence that drifts over the haunted landscape of the album, narrating tales of the horrors of war. While *White Chalk* concerned itself with returning discourses of feminine experiences, *Let England Shake* speaks of a habitual discourse of patriarchy: war. While Harvey wore dresses created in both white and black for her live performances, the focus here is on her black outfit and how it communicates the themes and concerns of *Let England Shake* and its role in informing the live appearances.

*Let England Shake* weaves its way through landscapes and times traumatized by war, grief and loss whilst meditating on nationhood, heritage and patriotism. It is an album of aftermath and returnings, where images of the effects of violence are strewn throughout, questioning notions of belonging and narratives of the past. Influenced by Stephen Wyatt's radio play *Memorial to the Missing* (Radio 4 2008), Harvey wanted to give voice to those who had experienced war first hand, so assumed the role of storyteller, assembling the album out of a collage of voices (Lynskey 2011). Bodies are reduced to wreckages, bones ('All and Everyone'), limbs, ('Hanging in the Wire') and flesh ('Words that Maketh Murder'), remnants calling out, disturbing temporality, so not to be forgotten ('Hanging in the Wire' and 'The Colour of the Earth'). The musical style again rejects a full engagement with the contemporary, rather drawing upon English musical traditions, for example folk music and incorporating familiar melodies from the more recent heritage of popular music, such as 'Summertime Blues'. The resulting album presents the England we have inherited as a land deformed and fetid with death: a rotting pastoral. It is a heritage that is problematic and unresolved for Harvey, leaving her to question her relationship with what it is to be English ('England', 'This Glorious Land'). Developing the high register she sang in on *White Chalk*, Harvey's tonal choices allow her presence to be detached from, as if hovering above, the songs, fulfilling her desire of enacting narrator by not allowing her voice to 'colour that too much with my own opinion' (Appleyard 2012: 17). Withdrawing her presence as star and author from the cover images and videos returns Harvey to a spectral presence in the public consumption of her work, allowing for a more direct communication between the album and listener.

Extending Harvey's position as a mediator of history to her live performances, her costume marries the gothic sensibility that pervades the album, with her role of chronicler while embedding Harvey within a landscape tradition of the English pastoral. On stage, she rejects the centre stage to stand at

the side. Playing guitar and autoharp not only roots her spatially, but restrains her in performing gestures. In line with Harvey as chronicler, she contains her performance, not allowing herself a flicker of emotion in her face or movement across the stage. Harvey's restrained performance extends to her engagement with the audience. Her performance as chronicler inhibits her interaction with the audience, for Harvey stands before us to tell. The focus for much of the *Let England Shake* tour was the current album. Rather than seeing this as a rejection of her back catalogue, it is more intuitive to interpret this as the trajectory of a creative artist developing new areas of expression and as validation of Harvey's decision to transition into a more political sphere musically.

As Spooner (2004: 3) advocates, clothing can affect 'posture and pose' and the swathes of material that cover Harvey's body function in line with Spooner's notion of Hollander's 'aesthetic of containment' in gothic clothes (Spooner 2004: 3) in that Harvey's dress points to meaning elsewhere and functions to insert her into a narrative beyond her own figure. It is telling that what she wears around her torso, Harvey refers to as a belt. Rather than a corset to strap in her femininity, Harvey referred to the leather belt as wearing a 'shield of armour', endowing her with the protection required 'to meet the world' (Rabkin 2012: 21). In her work on the cultural history of the corset, Steele (2001: 138) observes a shared function between military uniform and the corset, in that both seek to harden the flesh, to make the body erect and create a demarcation between the body and the world. Drawing upon Steele's work here, the addition of 'the belt' furthers the idea of Harvey's body as a contested site of identity, while reinforcing her role as Poet Warrior. The belt, functioning as armour and enabling Harvey 'to meet the world', suggests Harvey is going into battle with *Let England Shake*. Her costume functions to hush Harvey's gendered persona in favour of Harvey's role as chronicler. Continuing initially with Spooner's (2004: 12) line of argument, that gothic clothing speaks 'not of the body...but instead of the body', and that a dressed body is a social construction that inserts itself into a discourse (Entwistle 2000), Harvey's costume then is a site where history and subjectivity address communal trauma. Harvey's dress is inscribed with an uneasy national heritage. Her deep black feathered headdress, a variation of those worn in native American culture and associated with a belief in animism, convey a figure resurrected and arising from nature and an ancient order. Harvey's costume then constructs her as a returning remnant of the past: arising to tell truths, to converse with the present. Here, her dress is a performative tool in visually animating the seething hedgerows of Macfarlane's 'eerie English countryside' that are at the heart of the concept of *Let England Shake*.

*The Hope Six Demolition Project* can be approached as Harvey's full realization musically, in terms of content, and performance (which includes costume) of the previous two albums. In very much the same way as Wasson (2010: 11) notes the difference in how the Gothic locates horror between World War 1 and World War II, so there is a marked variance between the Gothic of *Let England Shake* and that of *The Hope Six*. Whereas the horror of *Let England Shake* is with the dead in the trenches, the horror of *The Hope Six* is located within damaged communities and townscapes. The Gothic pastoral is expanded to embody a more contemporary focus and landscapes further afield, confronting war in Afghanistan ('The Wheel'), Kosovo ('Chain of Keys') and poverty in Washington ('The Ministry of Social Affairs'). Sax-assisted riffs, distorted guitars and hook-laden choruses provide the tonal substantiation of the album's more contemporary outlook. However, as a successor to *Let*

*England Shake*, *The Hope Six* continues Harvey's practice of drawing upon a musical heritage; the American blues refrain from Jerry McCain's 'That's What They Want', providing the hook to 'The Ministry of Social Affairs', to the sea-shanty riff that propels 'A Line in the Sand'. Such employment of a musical lineage aids in establishing the album's implied exploration of the complex relationship between history and the present. Harvey's performance of narrator is developed to a musical reportage epitomized by the line, 'I took a plane to a foreign land, And said, "I'll write down what I find"' ('The Orange Monkey'). What haunts this work is not spectres of a bygone age, but rather what del Pilar Blanco appropriately encapsulates as, 'marginal populations... living on the edge of visibility and inspiring a curious mix of fear and indifference' (Del Pilar Blanco and Peeren 2010: xiii). Haunting here is a metaphor for what is, and who is, forgotten and unacknowledged, and *The Hope Six* wrestles with the political issues of these remnants and the vestiges of colonialism and globalization.

Other than a brief appearance on the Andrew Marr show, Harvey did not partake in promotional events. The Recording in Progress sessions at Somerset House and the premiere of *The Hollow of the Hand* at the London Literature Festival centralized the concerns and themes of the album and the creative process from sourcing material to recording, as the predominant focus of bringing *The Hope Six* into the public domain. It is suggestive of an intention to unfasten Harvey's star persona from the album at this stage. Allowing the music to speak instead of her, Harvey's already spectral presence of her previous two works assumes a fully formed phantasmal distance on the release of the album. Ian Rickson, director of her tour for *Hope Six*, explained the drive to capture the essence of the album in the live performances, embedding Harvey as a 'tribal queen' amongst her band and in the performance (Bonner 2016: 40). Indeed, Harvey's live shows advance the notion of 'performing' the music, in that the shows are choreographed pieces with Harvey slipping not only between author and performer, but also between solo artist and band member. Here, Harvey acts as a Gothic minstrel leading her band of men, developing the reportage of the album into a theatrical performance of songs.

For the tour, Harvey draws upon three costumes, which to borrow the words of Spooner, assume a 'historical confusion' (2004: 164) due to the merging of contemporary styles and bygone fashions, a fusion that envisions the globalized, contemporary, yet Gothicized vista of *Hope Six*. Her black plumaged sleeveless jacket (as worn previously by Harvey for the inside cover shot for *Let England Shake*), and her varying feathered headdresses draw upon Victorian expressions of grief, while evoking the ancient soothsayer figure Harvey embodied for her previous release. Here, the undead fashion reanimates Harvey's performance in a contemporary space and presents her as a Gothic creature, wandering the landscape as vengeful imp, mourning those forgotten, but imploring the audience not to. The continuation from *Let England Shake* in the use of feathers is revealing. In Harvey performing the Gothic, a sensibility concerned with doubling and repeating, it is highly appropriate for her to return and to reuse garments. In doing so, Harvey creates a visual connection that supports the thematic lineage of *The Hope Six* and *Let England Shakes*, and one that projects reoccurrences and reappearances. McLennon's chapter on how twentieth-century literary vampire texts, and more contemporary small screen and cinematic animations, engage with the historical American South to explore how the past shapes the present is of relevance here. McLennon (2015: 3–22) explores how the employment of the imagined American South

allows the texts to navigate anxieties about the post-colonial United States. Harvey's costume, in creating a visual connection between her two politically focused albums, is suggestive of a correlation between a gothic past and a haunted present. If Harvey's costume for *Let England Shake* spoke of the repetition of war in the narrative of humanity, then this reprise echoes in Harvey's costume here. War, national trauma and 'the missing' are performed as returning concerns in the chronicle of civilization.

Freed from the constraints of the piano and guitar, Harvey is able to move around the stage, beseeching the band with her gestures 'what if we take our problems to the United Nations'; she writes out in the air to the audience, 'This is how the world will end'. Her more contemporary garments reassemble Harvey's sexuality and identity, returning both to her performance but still signifying Harvey's problematic relationship to her gender. No longer a medium for long-dead voices, Harvey came to bear witness to what *she* saw. Her short black dress floats around her body, her legs on display and the slits in her sleeves allowing her arms free movement outside of the garment. More aligned to the covering and containment of the dresses for her previous two albums, her ensemble of blue wrap around jacket, long sleeved leather gloves, leggings and knee high boots adorns her upper body in swathes of cloth and leather, while accentuating her female figure. While her black dress affords a degree of display for her body, the costume of the blue wrap conceals: a simple dichotomy that has haunted female experience and representation (Madonna and whore as example) over many narratives. However, as both support Harvey's movement around the stage, from author to player, from leading her band of nine men, to retreating into the band when playing saxophone, whilst bearing the political discourse of the album in costume as performance, it follows that Harvey's portrayal contemporizes gothic female representation and liberates it from the legacy of archetypes and interior concerns. As Mighall (1999: 286) has asserted, 'Gothic cannot be an essence, for what is Gothicized constantly changes'. If we apply Mighall's approach to the Gothic as a mutable sensibility to Harvey here, we can argue how she reconfigures the Gothic female and makes it her own. By returning her identity to her performance and costume (through the displays of her body), and in wearing the Gothic inflected apparel, Harvey reconstructs the female Gothic in her own image: decoupling it from the concerns of the interior and the domestic to create a gothic feminine for contemporary times and entrenching it in more universal debates. Harvey then inserts herself into the legacy of the Gothic female, evolving it from its literary and cinematic roots and reanimating it for a wider resonance within the popular cultural arena.

Harvey wears remnants of the past in her costumes in performance and on video: the feathers of the Victorian funeral cortege, the black of the grieving widow, the white of the Victorian literary ghost. She wears the past on her body, a multiplicity of historical versions of femininity that collide with her present. These remnants, and her movement within them, also signify the return of the repressed (Clemens 1999; Creed 1993; Gills and Hollows 2009; Muller 2017). This is accentuated by the strange materiality of her costumes whereby her body is rendered stiff and her movement confined through the use of textures strange to contemporary dress, visibly restricting her. Clemens (1999: 4) writes about how the 'repressed' is related to something uncanny, something that should not be seen (or remains hidden). For MacFarlane (2015), the repressed returns as 'vengeful nature' and Botting's (2008: 194) Gothic facilitates the vengeful return of 'dark desires and emotions'. Harvey

performs the Gothic in a warped English pastoral and by so doing precipitates a rethinking of this past.

## CONCLUSION

As Harvey ages, so her costumes on stage and in video return to the past. This is not the past of Hollywood or of the 1950s, it is not a 'pop' past, as her former performances have referenced through costume. Instead it reaches further back in time, both closer to home but also to the present; it is MacFarlane's 'eerie' English countryside as seen through a Gothic lens. Within this landscape she performs the spectral feminine and inhabits the ghosts of a Gothic literary tradition. These spectres, stitched onto her body, worn in performance, literally 'costume' her as English Gothic. They reconfigure the spectre as a contemporary as well as a past presence. This re-inhabitation and re-wearing of tropes of English Gothic recuperate the Female Gothic for contemporary times, allowing it resonance beyond both its literary and cinematic beginnings and giving it poetic and political import. The costumes that she wears across these three albums indicate her wearing of the 'foreign': past femininities and present 'home' lands.

On a cold November night in Wolverhampton (at the Starworks Warehouse, 4 November 16), Harvey takes centre stage, a diminutive figure dressed in her black feathered waistcoat and feathered headdress. Under the waistcoat she wears a black, sleeveless vest, her white arms bare, her armpits now shaven. Her male troupe surround her, tower over her. And yet, Harvey commands, and, clothed in an English Victorian Gothic, stitched into the spectral, she narrates and performs alienation and trauma, a haunted poet warrior.

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