



CREaTE

Canterbury Research and Theses Environment

Canterbury Christ Church University's repository of research outputs

<http://create.canterbury.ac.uk>

Please cite this publication as follows:

Merchant, P. (2016) Thomas Anstey Guthrie's Madhouse Shuffle: steps toward a nightmare scenario. *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* (Online First), 42 (2). pp. 146-163. ISSN 1748-3727.

Link to official URL (if available):

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1748372715626721>

This version is made available in accordance with publishers' policies. All material made available by CReaTE is protected by intellectual property law, including copyright law. Any use made of the contents should comply with the relevant law.

Contact: create.library@canterbury.ac.uk



Thomas Anstey Guthrie's Madhouse Shuffle: Steps Toward a Nightmare Scenario

The literary career of Thomas Anstey Guthrie (1856–1934), who wrote under the pen name of 'F. Anstey', began with the spectacular success of his comic novel *Vice Versâ*, which brought him—according to his autobiography—'freedom to follow the only pursuit I cared for'.¹ It freed him to give up his budding career as a barrister, begun in 1881. It brought difficulties as well. Anstey would struggle to follow up that early success, and to sustain his new career through the very variable operating conditions of the following fifty years. In addition to his well known fiction and translations, Anstey's efforts included writing for theatre and film. The evolution of one particular creative idea of his, from its inception as a prose narrative to its culmination as a film scenario, is traced here through three texts: a fictional memoir called 'The Statement of V.M. patient at Bethnal House Asylum, July: 19: 1886' (1888), a published novel named *The Statement of Stella Maberly* (1896) and a motion picture scenario entitled *An Evil Spirit* (1916). This evolution reveals how Anstey came to grips with the new medium of film.

Some shifting in the conditions under which Anstey would operate was already evident by the end of the 1880s, a decade that saw his fiction flow into a range of formats: shilling editions, three-deckers, one-volumes and magazine publication. Then, after the failure in 1889 of *The Pariah*,² a novel which Anstey had hoped would establish him as a 'serious' author and which he regarded as containing his 'best work', the 1890s turned into a time for refocussing. Anstey reverted to the 'more frivolous' or 'lighter' vein which he had learnt was his strong suit, chose to diversify into 'short stories and *Punch* work',³ and set his sights on the theatre. He began to put particular emphasis on having his stories adapted for the stage, either by other writers or by his own hand. Sometimes these adaptations were commissioned and sometimes he worked speculatively, in the hope of finding a favourably disposed theatre manager. Anstey's efforts were all in vain until *The Man from Blankley's*, his own adaptation of a piece he had written for *Punch* eight years before, enjoyed a lengthy run at the Prince of Wales's Theatre in 1901. He persevered, with more help and encouragement from the example of

Ibsen than he first realised, in his commitment to discovering 'how a play should be constructed and written'.⁴

If the impetus for Anstey's turn to the theatre was supplied by his immersion in Ibsen, the impetus for the next major redirection of Anstey's energies—and the one I document here—came from his engagement with cinema. As that engagement developed, giving Anstey another new medium to master, so a writer who had risen to prominence in the 1880s strove to reposition himself for the twentieth century. And whenever Anstey entered some fresh phase in his career, it would be the characters he chose to take into it with him, having clung to them for years, that most clearly carried and most valuably revealed the identifying imprint of his imagination. On the 'humorous' or 'frivolous' side of Anstey's output, the most memorable and most frequently revived characters were of course from *Vice Versâ*. The schoolboy son and the businessman father sent to school in his son's place began as Dick and Paul Pufflehead, became Dick and Paul Bultitude, and ended up exchanging identities five times in forty years. They did so not only in *Vice Versâ* itself but beforehand in a tale of 1877 and afterwards in a two-act dramatic adaptation by Edward Rose, a three-act version of Anstey's own, and a silent movie directed by Maurice Elvey in 1916 which—Anstey noted—'was not a success'.⁵ On what Anstey saw as the 'serious' side, his most durable and compelling creation is the subject of this essay: a deeply troubled young woman 'dancing on pretty feet to a madhouse' whom he named first Violet and then Stella, and whose successive incarnations reached as far into his lifetime as did Dick's and Paul's.

Of the three works Anstey built around this figure, much the rawest and most harrowing is an unpublished prose narrative in which the 'dancing' is first observed: 'The Statement of V.M. patient at Bethnal House Asylum, July: 19: 1886', dating in fact from December 1888.⁶ Anstey cast this, as its title suggests, into the form of a madness memoir. He left it at between eight and nine thousand words, not troubling to tailor it to a length which might have made publication more likely. Six years later, however, he revisited his unpublished manuscript. At this point he took notes on it to remind himself of what he had written, and revealed

in those notes that the V stood for Violet. Soon afterwards, changing Violet's name (and using the one-volume format), he promoted her to the position of narrator and central character in a full-length novel, *The Statement of Stella Maberly*, which appeared anonymously in the spring of 1896. Anstey's authorship, initially disguised by the addition to the title of *Written by Herself*,⁷ was disclosed only in the autumn, with the second edition impending.

Even after this revelation had ensured that the *Statement* would no longer purport to be the work of Stella herself, one last stratagem for its repackaging was still to suggest itself. Twenty years on, it would no longer be as any kind of written statement that the story presented itself but, Anstey hoped, as a motion picture entitled *An Evil Spirit*. To that end, he spent the second and third weeks of February 1916 distilling Stella's experience into a nerve-jangling 'Scenario for Film' which dealt with murder, mania and demonic possession. No production company ever offered to make the film, but Anstey's vision is preserved in the British Library;⁸ and, as the manuscript of 1888 was the precursor of the published novel, so the 1916 scenario is its offshoot. The final step in the drawn-out *danse macabre* on which this triptych of texts would lead anyone who pieced together the sequence, therefore, is from the madhouse to the picture house.

At this time, 1916, the precedents available for consultation by any novelist aspiring to become a scenarist came from the twenty years of transmedial adaptation that Denis Gifford has traced.⁹ Already the partnership of literature and film had proved mutually enriching. Through the use of novels as source material, fiction fed into film; and film returned the compliment by suggesting new narrative techniques for the novel to adopt. Although it was the adherents of literary modernism who most readily absorbed what the cinema modelled and taught,¹⁰ and Anstey—declaring that 'it would be idle to deny [his] Victorianism even if [he] wanted to do so'¹¹—would never have classed himself as a modernist, he still found some very attractive and valuable opportunities afforded him by that cross-fertilisation. Particularly congenial to a man who at one time had 'devoured' the work of Collins, Le Fanu, Reade, Yates, Braddon and Ouida¹² was the reproduction by the silent film industry of many of the structures and motifs of

Victorian sensation fiction.¹³ This essay will therefore argue that Anstey's writing over what Gifford terms 'the first twenty years of motion pictures' evinces an important and increasing awareness of cinema.

This awareness, moreover, is especially epitomised in the emergence and development of *Stella*. The substitution of *Stella* for *Violet* so precisely coincides with the advent of cinema that the three texts in which those characters successively appear—'The Statement of V.M.', *The Statement of Stella Maberly* and *An Evil Spirit*—might even mark the Before, During and After of that historic moment. The first of the three, written in December 1888, sends *Violet* unawares to a kind of visionary cinema when she gazes by night at the pictures in her room and sees the figures in them 'moving as if alive' ('V.M.', fo. 113v); but in the 1880s, Anstey's notion of moving pictures is necessarily rudimentary, limited to the magic lantern entertainments which his autobiography testifies to his having enjoyed (both as spectator and as would-be showman) in his boyhood¹⁴ and to the flipbooks with pen-and-ink drawings of 'faces ... with moving tongues and rolling eyes' which are Jolland's speciality in *Vice Versâ*.¹⁵ 'The delirium of the animated pictures' was what Anstey picked out as the climax of 'Violet Millar's Statement', however, when (using that title for the first time) he returned to the 'V.M.' manuscript in the winter of 1894-95 and made his memory-jogging *résumé*.¹⁶ By now, as Andrew Shail observes, moving pictures were an altogether more familiar phenomenon:

Well before the Lumières' Cinématographe debuted to a paying public on 21 February 1896, the British public had been able to sample animated photographs for almost 17 months, since the arrival of the first 'parlour' of single-viewer Edison kinetoscopes on 18 October 1894.¹⁷

Building at first on what he had been able to salvage from 'The Statement of V.M.', Anstey devoted almost the whole of 1895 to *The Statement of Stella Maberly*. His diaries show that he began his outline on 14 January and finished writing on 14 December,¹⁸ with the two deaths which form the novel's climax separated and set off by a variant version of the earlier 'delirium of the animated pictures' and a sinister sort of magic lantern show:

I could not rest, I paced up and down in a kind of mystical exaltation; the old portraits in ruff and doublet looked down on me with grim approval from the walls, the armorial shields in the oriel window glowed like blood in the last gleams of the sunset. (*Stella*, pp. 246-7)

Anstey's six complimentary copies of the novel arrived on 27 March 1896,¹⁹ five weeks after the Regent Street debut of the Cinématographe. What he now had in *Stella* was not only, thanks to the frontispiece illustration by Maurice Greiffenhagen, a more fully pictorialized character than he had had in *Violet*, but a heroine who—born at the birth of cinema itself—cried out to be shown 'moving as if alive'. The completion of *An Evil Spirit* on 20 February 1916, twenty years (almost to the day) after the Regent Street show, would eventually accomplish that; Anstey's scenario caused the illustration to come to life, telling *Stella*'s story through the flow from scene to scene and in a series of juxtaposed images.

Even though the character is substantially reinvented through these three versions as the name changes and as the shifts of narrative form transpose her from madness memoir to 'Scenario for Film', her physical situation in the aftermath of her ordeal remains unaltered and is what always defines her. The screen *Stella* first appears at the age of 'about 30', 'after some years' confinement', and we meet her in '[a] bedroom in a Criminal Lunatic Asylum' (*Spirit*, fos 108, 110). *The Statement of Stella Maberly*, likewise, found the heroine in a place where she supposes she 'shall remain till death releases [her]' (*Stella*, p. 249). 'The

Statement of V.M.' had been more specific still, with a title describing V.M. at the time her statement is supposedly made (19 July 1886) as a 'patient at Bethnal House Asylum'. With the choice of this particular licensed house 'for the care and treatment of persons suffering from mental disorder' and the inclusion of its current and former Medical Superintendents, John Will and John Millar, among the designated readers of V.M.'s statement ('V.M.', fo. 127v), Anstey paid a discreet but deliberate tribute to the latter. Millar's son George had been Anstey's friend for fifteen years, and for the last three of these he had also been married to Anstey's sister Edith. Because John Millar had died in January 1888,²⁰ an act of commemoration appeared appropriate; and Anstey could contrive to write Millar in, simply by backdating the action to 1886, the year in which John Will had succeeded him as superintendent.

Had 'Millar' been made the patient's surname as well as her doctor's (which is how Anstey's *résumé* six years later would, perhaps absent-mindedly, enlarge upon the initial M), the tribute might have been partly undermined. Although V.M.'s statement never establishes whether she is mad or bad, she certainly seems dangerous to know, driven by 'a strong desire to take to smashing things' ('V.M.', fo. 115v). Her statement paints her as the very opposite of a shrinking Violet; at the seaside she throws another woman down a set of steps to her death, and she threatens her second husband with a meat chopper. Depending on how far what she says can be trusted, that second husband—a music teacher—might or might not be conspiring with a doctor who lives in the same apartment block to commit her to an institution. Anything which is delusional in this, like everything which is destructive, seems to spring from deep psychic disturbance. The murderous attack at the seaside comes after V.M. is discharged from another institution, to which she had been taken after the trauma of her first husband's death: 'Shock so great that for close on 2 years I dragged on a miserable existence in a Lunatic Asylum' ('V.M.', fo. 123v). Their daughter also apparently dies. V.M. reports hearing devilish voices, which torment her with whispers of 'Hidden Children', and being haunted by visions of hell.

This tale of psychological terror does much to account for the Gothic leanings of the film scenario which indirectly descends from it, *An Evil Spirit*. Yet 'The Statement of V.M.' is itself hard to account for, at least until some further biographical evidence shedding light on the composition period is admitted. With all three of the texts in the Violet/Stella sequence, the dates of writing reveal a good deal. In the case of 'The Statement of V.M.', that date solves a puzzle of which none of Anstey's published works, not even his autobiography, can make sufficient sense: how it was that he could come to write a story both so bleak and so mysterious. In fact, he wrote it shortly after his father, with whom he still lived, had entered a final decline whose details Anstey certainly wished to keep out of the public arena. His diary entries for the previous month refer, for instance, to 'P.' (for 'Pater') 'getting up & dining at 7 a.m. ... [w]anting to know who that was in the chair—a vacant one ... complaining that he was continually fancying himself in a strange house'.²¹ It is not surprising that Anstey should have been interested at this time in hallucinations, and in what happens when all distinction disappears between reliable report, on the one hand, and fabrication or false memory, on the other. This was also the time when Anstey's younger brother Leonard embarked on what would prove a very distinguished career as a neurologist. Just two days after Anstey completed 'The Statement of V.M.', in fact, Leonard gave him cause to feel proud: 'Len appt^d Physician to the Regent's Park Hospital for Nervous and Epileptic Diseases.'²² Anstey could not have convincingly described the psychomedical symptoms that are necessarily woven into this self-styled record of 'Mental Struggles' ('V.M.', fo. 127v) without the specialist knowledge to which his brother's studies and professional standing gave him access.

That Anstey never ventured to prepare 'The Statement of V.M.' for publication suggests a certain recoiling. How deeply disconcerting a story his heroine's struggles had added up to soon dawned on him. Using the emptied-out shell of the story at a later date, however, with some of its constituent elements appropriately redisposed, would make *The Statement of Stella Maberly* a different and maybe more marketable proposition. With Anstey's first attempt at a full-length novel, and first reversion to his 'more serious vein' since *The Pariah* in 1889,

came the chance to flesh out and colour in an idea which his autobiography concedes 'had haunted [him] for some years'.²³ The canvas on which he accordingly set to work in early 1895 was far larger than it had been in late 1888—Stella's statement runs to four or five times the length of V.M.'s—and the consequent augmentation of the cast list opens some entirely new plotting possibilities. Not only is Stella given a more substantial and detailed back story, involving a Hampshire childhood clouded by family tensions and dominated by her 'black moods of depression and sullenness' (*Stella*, p. 29), but Anstey places alongside her two characters of whom there had been no hint in 1888. First there is Evelyn Heseltine, the wealthy friend from school to whom—at her home on the Kent/Surrey border—Stella becomes a live-in companion; and then there is Hugh Dallas, the local 'Prince Charming' (p. 42). The resentment with which Stella observes the developing relationship between Evelyn and Hugh, who are to marry, brings a crisis at the end of Chapter Four. Stella's intense jealousy either leads her to contrive Evelyn's death by poisoning or so drives her to distraction as to leave her imagining that this is what she has done. When she then finds Evelyn alive again in Chapter Five, she cannot interpret this apparent resurrection except as an infernal substitution. Evelyn is turned into 'quite a different creature' now (p. 114), and possessed by a 'vile and fiendish spirit' (p. 168) whose entire aim is Stella's destruction. So, whereas in *Vice Versâ* Anstey had used a generation-crossing bodyswap to effect the transformation around which the novel's plot was built, here he uses what Stella reads as a case of demonic possession: 'the real Evelyn Heseltine ... died in her sleep weeks ago, and the body she has put off for ever is now inhabited by a lost soul, some foul and evil spirit which has taken her form for its own vile purposes' (p. 204). Whether this is pathological ideation on Stella's part, or a means of diverting attention from her own murderous malice, and whether after all it is only Evelyn's name and not her nature that has any hint of 'evil' in it are questions which Anstey knows will occur to the reader but which the first-personal narrative cannot directly raise. Since the central character in the story is also the story's teller, the view that Stella takes of matters—or that she would like her hearers to take—enjoys a practical monopoly.

So unreliable a narrator as Stella, whose statements regarding both others and herself may at any time be either deluded or disingenuous, throws Anstey back upon the resources of his dialogue. It is often from the dialogue in the novel that the reader's insights must come. Several key scenes are done in playbook style. At one point in Chapter Five, for example, the speech marks open and close sixteen times with no description or commentary inserted and the tagging limited to 'I said' twice and 'I pleaded' once (pp. 137–40). The Anstey who writes *The Statement of Stella Maberly* is so much more skilled in telling a story through dialogue than the Anstey who wrote 'The Statement of V.M.' that it is almost as if, like Evelyn Heseltine, he had put off his old body. Certainly his career progression since 1888 had in that regard been impressive. For *Punch* he had written many more of the stories in dialogue which, most notably, would be collected as *Voces Populi* (First Series 1890, Second Series 1892) and *The Travelling Companions* (1892); he had become 'a constant playgoer';²⁴ and his observation of the methods of Ibsen had shown him that soliloquies and asides were not the only ways of making a character's motives intelligible.²⁵

His study of Ibsen, however, influenced Anstey in more ways than this. It specifically informed those features of the *Statement* which, as Violet Millar's story expanded into Stella Maberly's and extra characters were added, Anstey now had occasion to introduce. Those plays of Ibsen's (including *Hedda Gabler*) which Anstey had reworked for *Mr Punch's Pocket Ibsen* (1893) all tend—with variations—to offer up what Joan Templeton sees as a favourite Ibsen pairing, 'the dark demanding woman and the fair, passive woman who is her foil';²⁶ and there was strong warrant here for the contrasts that *The Statement of Stella Maberly* develops not just between Evelyn and Stella but between Evelyn as she originally is and Evelyn in the toils of demonic possession. That 'Ibsen's plays, though I only studied them with a view to parody, had taught me, unconsciously, something of construction'²⁷ is at least part of the reason for the symmetries and the splitting which make Anstey's representation of women so schematic. Another part of it was even closer to home: a novel, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), that for Wendy Doniger vividly exemplifies the myth-making of male-authored texts in which

women are 'intrinsically split from the start'.²⁸ With his own Evelyn Heseltine, fiendishly transformed, Anstey matches that 'imaginary male construction of a polarized woman', as Doniger puts it, to which Stoker's Lucy Westenra amounts.²⁹ How far he and Stoker compared notes cannot be ascertained; but in early 1895, when the figure of Evelyn was starting to take shape and the novel that became *Dracula* had been on Stoker's drawing-board for almost five years, the two men were friends who read and admired each other's work. Four weeks after he recorded having the '[f]irst idea of "Stella Maberly"', Anstey read *The Watter's Mou* in the space of an evening and wrote warmly about it to Stoker: 'I think it a most touching & beautiful story & envy you for having written it.' The following Sunday, 17 February, he and the Stokers had lunch together.³⁰

During the interval between 'The Statement of V.M.' and *The Statement of Stella Maberly* and over the years which elapsed between the initial idea for *Dracula* and the finished novel, Anstey and Stoker were responding both to each other and to a wider reconfiguring of the macabre in fiction. Involved in this reconfiguration were mirroring effects, a deft deployment of doubles, and renewed recourse to a classic pattern which traces an evil force or presence from the point of entry to the moment of expulsion. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—a magazine serial in 1890 and a book in 1891—illustrates the pattern perfectly, and *The Statement of Stella Maberly* conforms closely enough to give Anstey's published *Statement* a supplementary something to lift the book above the unpublished predecessor upon whose foundations he was rearing it. 'The evil thing has left you for ever', says Stella in Anstey's concluding chapter (p. 245). '[T]he hideous thing that he had hidden away would no longer be a terror to him', thinks Dorian in Wilde's.³¹ A single line in Anstey's diary for 1895 suffices to show how mindful of Wilde he was bound to be as, with his outline complete, he started his first draft: '3: April. Began "Stella Maberly". Wilde v Queensberry on at C. C. Ct today.'³² Just as 'The Statement of V.M.' did before it, and just as *An Evil Spirit* would subsequently do, *The Statement of Stella Maberly* here demonstrates the importance of the dates of composition to the direction in which the Violet/Stella sequence of texts evolves.

With the sort of sensations delivered by fiction possibly paling beside the sort recently on offer at the Central Criminal Court, there were—according to Anstey's autobiography—'very few who read my unfortunate *Statement of Stella Maberly*'; but Conan Doyle 'wrote me a generously enthusiastic letter about it'.³³ The enthusiasm of the reviews which the *Statement* attracted in 1896 was tempered on both sides of the Atlantic by a general feeling that what Anstey had hoped to make marketable was still, as the *Pall Mall Gazette* suggested on Wednesday 13 May, 'meeter for doctors and lunacy experts than for publication as a novel. We hasten to add that there is nothing offensive in it.' With that the *Chicago Tribune* of Saturday 17 October completely concurred:

it is a book for a hospital clinic rather than for an entertainment-seeking public. Not that there is anything physically repulsive in it. The author is too much of an artist for that. But it is a book that will make no one happier. It leaves a dark cloud over the spirit—a thing that does not belong in the world of fiction.

In fact, as soon as *The Statement of Stella Maberly* succeeded to 'The Statement of V.M. patient at Bethnal House Asylum, July: 19: 1886', the story started to smell much less of the hospital clinic; and when the material was next repackaged, in *An Evil Spirit*, that text—simply by being designated a 'Scenario for Film'—would address itself quite overtly to an entertainment-seeking public. The date of composition, in this case a single week in February 1916,³⁴ again does much to illuminate the underlying authorial purpose. For, if Anstey were ever to suspend the belief he had always held in the novel as a peculiarly privileged genre, it could not have happened either any sooner or any later than in the early weeks and months of the year 1916. His last full-length work of fiction had occupied him through the summer of 1914, when he spent the months of June and July 'in a fine old seventeenth-century house at Ludlow'.³⁵ Once the book was finished, the outbreak of war and his decision to join a Veterans' Corps left him with far less time for writing than before. *In Brief Authority* (as the novel written at Ludlow

became known) recorded disappointing sales figures in 1915; and by 1916, when the publisher's accounts came through, there was no denying 'that the book had not been a success'.³⁶ Anstey never wrote another full-length novel. It was time for him to transfer his attentions irrevocably elsewhere.

Anstey might at this juncture have devoted himself to playwriting, but for the war having brought what he perceived as a lockdown. 'Many of the theatres closed, and ... no one had any heart for pleasure'.³⁷ In reality there was no wartime standstill, but rather a change coming over the theatrical world with which Anstey would struggle to keep pace. 'The upper-middle-class drawing-room play ... was to become a thing of the past';³⁸ and *The Man from Blankley's*, which continued to define Anstey as a dramatist, completely exemplified this species of play. The consequence was that for an intermission of fully ten years, as Anstey's autobiography reckons it, 'any dramatic ambition I had ever had was effectually quenched'.³⁹ The obvious alternative for Anstey was the fledgling form of the film scenario. The manuscript evidence (British Library, Additional MS 54308, *passim*) indicates that he first turned his hand to this in March 1915, with *The Tinted Venus: Scenario for Film*. He then wrote in the space of a year, and without any clear idea of their prospects of ever proceeding to production, a further four scenarios; *An Evil Spirit* belongs to this creative spate.

The Anstey who sat down to write *An Evil Spirit* was within six months of his sixtieth birthday, but already many years behind the times. At least, it suited him in later life to speak of himself—and maybe think of himself—as so stuck in the mud of his self-confessed 'Victorianism' that 'it would be idle', he pleaded, to suppose himself capable of embracing the possibilities of a new-fangled medium.⁴⁰ Yet in the event, without being any kind of pioneer, Anstey proved very willing to follow where other writers more in tune with the times had led. He understood the compromises for which any intergeneric translation from fiction to film would inevitably call, and gave a considered consent to these. They were different only in degree, not in essence, from the compromises involved in dramatic adaptation. They were less daunting to contemplate if a text were already fluid, or previously subject to reworking and retitling, as had been the case for twenty years with

Anstey's *Statement*. Anstey might also already have concluded that an amenable author effecting his or her own alterations would do less damage to the original than the intervention of another might do. Certainly, what he came most to dread and deplore was the tendency of cinema directors 'to do a story all over again and do it different', taking it 'usually in a direction as far away from the original as human ingenuity can devise'.⁴¹ Anstey liked to set the limits himself, and on that understanding he was no longer a stickler for the text. In a drafted sketch reviving the Bultitudes again, for example, his inclusion of a scooter ride through the streets of London indicates endorsement of at least some of the extratextual high jinks in Maurice Elvey's 1916 film of *Vice Versâ*.⁴² It was when something was sprung on him by others that he jibbed. (For instance, conditions which he 'could not accept' were set for another proposed adaptation of *Vice Versâ*; and he raised an eyebrow over an account he received of the now lost Paramount Pictures version of *The Man from Blankley's* which suggested that 'the story must have suffered a sea-change into something exceptionally rich and strange'.)⁴³ Even as early as 1916, therefore, there was much that inclined Anstey not only to acknowledge a personal commitment to the breathing of filmic life into some of the stories and characters he had created long ago but also to make a virtue of that necessity.

Accordingly, although in 1896 Stella already had more of a visual presence in the text of her *Statement* than Violet had ever enjoyed, as Anstey transferred Stella from page to screen his conception of the character became more visual still. The readiest reference point now was a famous and much photographed face: '{n.b. I do not imagine that Miss Lillah McCarthy could be engaged for this part, but I mention her as the ideal type for it.}' (*Spirit*, fo. 108.) Not least because as long ago as 1895—just before *The Statement of Stella Maberly* went to press—Lillah McCarthy had appeared as Ophelia for the Ben Greet Players,⁴⁴ she was a natural choice for the role of the young woman dancing on pretty feet to a madhouse. In linking her name to Stella's, Anstey overcomes or overlooks some serious misgivings about the demand for star casting which he could see was generated by the entertainment-seeking public. ('[T]he bulk of the British Public has no real love of Drama in any form', he would tell Edmund Gosse; 'it goes

mainly to see actors—not plays’.)⁴⁵ He recognises that, in the new conditions created by the coming of cinema, nothing which he as an author might seek to say about any one of his characters could give the public nearly so firm a handle on her or him as the identity and image of the actor by whom the character happened to be embodied.

To an author who outwardly was the epitome of Victorianism, the adjustments for which these new conditions called were bound to seem daunting. As he set about adapting the *Statement*, Anstey was himself adapting—to a form of storytelling in which words printed on the page or lines delivered on the stage no longer had primacy. He could not deploy the skills he had developed in telling stories and delineating character through the spoken word. Where *The Statement of Stella Maberly* used dialogue to characterise the heroine, the film scenario uses gestural language and non-verbal signs—as when ‘Stella’s expression indicates jealousy & prejudice against Dallas’ (*Spirit*, fo. 115). The words have retreated to the necessarily brief expository captions (‘intertitles’ or ‘leaders’) that appear before each scene, or have been reduced to the baldest of instructions in the scripted ‘Action’. Pages of dialogue vanish from the playbook-style passage, as the novel had presented it, in which Stella confronted Evelyn in the drawing-room; the extended cut and thrust of 1896 now boils down only to ‘Stella ... faces Evelyn, & seems to be demanding an explanation. Evelyn replies mockingly’ (*Spirit*, fo. 129). The author has to think no longer of readers but, quite explicitly, of ‘spectators’ (*Spirit*, fo. 124). Although a ‘scenario’ is not a full-fledged production script, and it would be 1920 before Anstey received the technical instruction which the latter required, writing *An Evil Spirit* therefore meant making a real attempt to understand the vocabulary of cinema. The text indeed shows Anstey constantly concerned to establish exactly what this new language will allow him to express, and what—‘if [it] can be done ...’, ‘if it can be carried out ...’, ‘[i]f it can be contrived ...’ (*Spirit*, fos 113, 131, 133)—will prove visually effective. He wonders how much of the garden it might be possible for the spectators to glimpse through the window of Stella’s room in Evelyn’s house; he wants a Pekinese dog to recoil from Evelyn because it must seem to sense an evil presence inside her; and

for the same reason he wants to add a rearing horse, a detail which was absent from the novel.

In general, turning the novel into a scenario for film commits Anstey to heavier and more overt anticipatory hints in the narrative. For instance, the first appearance of a collie devoted to Evelyn before her transformation is brought forward efficiently by the equivalent of four chapters:

Evelyn & Stella are walking together, with a handsome collie in attendance. Evelyn caresses the dog, which is violently devoted to her. {n.b. This should be clearly shown, as it is of importance to the sequel.} (*Spirit*, fos 113–14).

So affectionate an interaction at the outset makes for an even more emphatic contrast when the collie's behaviour later changes, signalling—like the behaviour of the spooked Pekinese—a sinister change in Evelyn, and of course creating as it does so a need for both dogs to be silenced permanently. That Evelyn orders the poisoning of her collie is something which readers of the novel were left to infer, but the scenario shows it unambiguously: 'she gives the coachman instructions. He receives them sorrowfully' (*Spirit*, fo. 131).

The part of Stella's story which invites most added matter and added emphasis, however, is the frame: her account of herself confined in what the novel had implied was a secure hospital. From that position, now very explicitly indicated, the Stella of 1916 dreams, just as the Stella of 1896 had done, of happier—and freer—days. The scenario fleshes out these dreams in such a way as would set every spectator measuring the ending which Stella has been given against the ending which wishful thinking says that she (and the dogs) might have enjoyed:

Scene The Garden.

Action Hugh & Stella are seated under the cedar tree. Her head is on his shoulder, his arm is round her waist. Evelyn (as she was) comes on, with the collie leaping round her. Hugh & Stella greet her without changing their attitude. She puts one hand on his shoulder in a sisterly fashion as she stoops and kisses Stella.

Fade out

The End (*Spirit*, fo. 143)

There is also more detail in 1916 about Stella's present position in the criminal lunatic asylum, very remote from the position underneath the spreading cedar tree with Hugh Dallas which she craves. While the inner story of Stella and Evelyn tends to retain but reduce the material of 1896, Anstey in 1916 writes more extensively around that core narrative. Particularly he does this in restoring the narrative envelope, with the patient unburdening herself to her physician, which he had devised for Violet's 'Statement' but with which he had then dispensed. Its restoration becomes possible because seventh on the scenario's 'List & Description of Principal Characters' is a '[m]iddle-aged, grave & kindly' Medical Superintendent (*Spirit*, fo. 109), who appears at the start of Parts I and II and at the end of Part IV. This character played no part in *The Statement of Stella Maberly* and is a throwback to 'The Statement of V.M. patient at Bethnal House Asylum, July: 19: 1886', in which the then outgoing and incoming Medical Superintendents of Bethnal House were among V.M.'s intended readers. For his final text in the Violet/Stella sequence, Anstey has thus settled for streamlining the inner story—with alterations which for the most part are slight—but has significantly bolstered the frame.

Nevertheless, between the novel of 1896 and the scenario of 1916 Anstey makes one other addition to his list of Principal Characters. This addition affects not the outer edges of the story but its very core, and has an impact which is far from slight. Necessarily included as a distinct character now, and moreover promoted to the position of title character, is 'The Evil Spirit. / A shadowy form in

black gauzy drapery, with a handsome but voluptuous & slightly cruel face' (*Spirit*, fo. 108). Because the spectator must be shown on the screen what Stella saw at the moment of Evelyn's death—or fancied that she saw along with what she mistook for the death of her friend—Anstey's script has to make visible to the audience Evelyn's annexation by this sinister feminine Other:

a dark shadowy form appears ... , the form of a very beautiful woman with an evil sensuous face, whose features do not resemble Evelyn's in any way. Unseen by Stella, the form approaches the bed & looks at Evelyn critically. Then it appears to be satisfied, sinks down on the bed & gradually disappears, seeming to merge into the body of the dead girl. (*Spirit*, fo. 124)

Where the novel merely had a metaphor of reanimation, with a ray of sun shooting into Evelyn's room and seeming to revive her (*Stella*, p. 102), the scenario has a stealthy but systematic takeover, so that Scene 39 becomes unmistakably a transformation scene. Two scenes later comes an authorial note with further explanation: 'The idea is that the spirit of a woman who, in her former life, was clever, unscrupulous & depraved has succeeded in animating Evelyn's dead body' (*Spirit*, fo. 126).

The spirit's entrance is balanced by its exit, the culmination of the thirty intervening scenes:

Close up Evelyn lies dead on the sofa, her face contorted & her expression evil. Stella stands gazing down on her with sombre satisfaction. A shadowy female form with the same beautiful wicked face as in (39) detaches itself from Evelyn's body, makes a wild gesture of despair & baffled malice, & disappears.

As it does so, Evelyn's face becomes innocent & calm, the lips relaxing into a gentle smile. Stella bends over her & kisses her forehead, then she crosses Evelyn's hands over her breast, takes flowers from a bowl, & lays them on the body. (*Spirit*, fo. 142)

The kiss on the forehead was in the novel (*Stella*, p. 245), but the crossing of Evelyn's hands and the placing of the flowers were not. These added acts of reconsecration are an acknowledgement that something malign has indeed left Evelyn. Furthermore, in the novel Hugh Dallas kills himself after the death of his wife.⁴⁶ In the scenario, however, there is no suicide; it appears that Hugh feels liberated by Evelyn's death, rather than distraught at it.

The trope of demonic possession is by now quite palpably driving a story which in its previous versions had centred, contrariwise, upon the 'Mental Struggles' of the narrating 'I' ('V.M.', fo. 127v). Violet in 'The Statement of V.M.' concedes that if she is not haunted she must be 'hopelessly helplessly mad', and also that her mind 'giv[ing] way' is something she has already experienced before ('V.M.', fo. 126v). Although in *The Statement of Stella Maberly* the story as recounted by Stella begins to divert attention from the narrator's psychological difficulties to the demonic possession of the narrator's friend—the real Evelyn Heseltine' passing away and 'some foul and evil spirit' stepping into the breach (*Stella*, p. 204)—the narrator herself with her freely acknowledged 'perversity of misconstruction' (p. 95) can be seen as even more deluded for having ever fancied that Evelyn could possibly be possessed. The novel's Canon Broadbent voices this view, putting Stella's account of Evelyn's supposed death down to 'ill-health, a disordered imagination, overwrought nerves' (p. 205). Most of the novel's reviewers took the same view. For them, Stella was very obviously disturbed or deceitful, and her tall tale of the 'foul and evil spirit' was a smokescreen for the truth about herself as an indefensible (and maybe homicidal) lunatic which she either sets out to conceal or simply fails to see. The skill of the novel was to reveal that truth not so much through Stella's narrative as in spite of it: 'the incidents

that go on around her appear just enough through the veil of misconception to allow us a glimpse of how they really are'.⁴⁷

All of this changes with the very first words that Anstey, when coming to quarry a film scenario from his novel, sets down upon the page. By entitling the scenario *An Evil Spirit*, he gives the presumed 'misconception' his unequivocal authorial endorsement. With that title, the nightmare Stella lives through ceases to be a figment of her fevered imagination and becomes a phenomenon of the sort she is now shown researching:

Scene The Library.

Stella is in a chair, absorbed in a volume.

Vignette to show title of volume. 'Letters on Demonology & Witchcraft. Scott.' (*Spirit*, fo. 132)

Neither that book nor its author was mentioned in *The Statement of Stella Maberly*; but that Anstey should have had Walter Scott in mind when he prepared the scenario is both appropriate and illuminating. Even twenty years before *An Evil Spirit*, his choice of name, Evelyn, for the young woman fought over by the forces of good and evil—with the latter internalised in the very sound of her name—already resembled a choice which Scott had made seventy years before that. *The Betrothed* has a heroine called Eveline for whom experience is profoundly polarised: 'It seemed to her as if she were the prize, for the disposal of which the benign saint and vindictive fiend were now to play their last and keenest game.'⁴⁸ The example of Scott, added to the influence of Ibsen, provided a basis for the binary oppositions which govern Anstey's thinking about women in *An Evil Spirit*. The 'List & Description of Principal Characters' emphasises a contrast between Dark Lady and Fair Maiden which promises to make Stella and Evelyn the Rebecca and Rowena of the Kent/Surrey border. While Stella is '[a] tall slender brunette, rather stormy & passionate-looking', Evelyn is '[f]airhaired with an expression of

sweetness & innocence' (*Spirit*, fo. 108). The scene which sees the passing of the original Evelyn and the approach of the evil spirit then splits the Fair Maiden into a Good Blonde and a Bad Blonde, juxtaposing them behind the foregrounded figure of Stella.

The oppositional female archetypes deployed by Anstey here indicate an ability, beyond what might be expected from a screenwriting beginner, to appreciate and then to deploy some of the defining staples of early cinema. This bifurcation of femininity, woman as transgressive and deadly versus woman as redemptive and domestic, was among the motifs which according to Gabriele had descended to silent film through Victorian sensation fiction. Anstey, who when young had avidly absorbed Braddon and Le Fanu and others, was therefore in a position to bring to the table—though a newcomer—exactly the right kind of fare. Contrasts even starker than those Anstey might venture to construct in a novel suited the medium of film. Indeed, the bolder the contrasts the better. Until more sophisticated materials and equipment could be developed to meet and match the already sophisticated thinking of the leading writers and directors in the industry, the state of the cinematic art was not conducive to that subtle shading, those areas of uncertainty and those variant possibilities of interpretation with which Anstey knew that prose fiction could tantalise and intrigue. When we read in the printed text of Stella's *Statement* that Evelyn strangled the Blenheim spaniel given to her by Hugh Dallas (and the 1896 equivalent of the Pekinese preferred in 1916), we may look for evidence of some 'veil of misconception' between these events and their narrator which might militate against our being shown 'how they really are'. However, it is hard to plant the same seed of doubt when Evelyn, having seized the dog before our eyes and killed it just out of shot, 'flings the body ... into Stella's lap' (*Spirit*, fo. 134). Although Anstey's framing of the story has sought to make it plain that what we are to see on the screen is only Stella's version of the facts, that framing is easily forgotten. Most of Anstey's readers would have no trouble in recognising the potential unreliability of fictional first-person narrators; but if they then went to a cinema as 'spectators' those same readers might well assume, as automatically and unthinkingly as they assumed their seats, that the camera—conversely—can never lie.

The conventions of cinema oblige Anstey to present his story, therefore, in a way which fundamentally alters its nature. When the presence of the evil spirit is asserted on the page by a witness whose imagination may be 'disordered' and whose nerves appear 'overwrought', delusion or deliberate deceit is the first hypothesis which occurs. When, on the other hand, its manifestations are enacted on the screen, that hypothesis is effectively closed down. The resulting vindication of Stella and her fantastic claims of demonic possession, which the novels' reviewers had perceived as unreliable, ensures that the scenario becomes a very different work. It escapes that undecidability which may appeal to modern readers but which Anstey's unreconstructed 'Victorianism' sometimes caused him to find problematic, as for instance in a diary entry for Sunday 8 August 1920:

R^{d.} Rh. Broughton's 'The Devil & the Deep Sea', not a very convincing story & the heroine's decision left for the reader ... R^{d.} Rhoda B.'s 'Between Two Stools', another enigmatic ending.⁴⁹

This wariness—or weariness—of the enigmatic might be what persuaded Anstey to consent so readily to compromises that he expected would lead to a simplified effect. In the end he cooperates willingly with the conventions of cinema, such as he understood them to be.

The completion of *An Evil Spirit* left Anstey increasingly eager to deepen that understanding and to teach himself the art of scenario-writing. After the war, with his Veterans' Corps duties at an end and with London no longer in lockdown, he became a frequent visitor to the Electra Cinematograph, Notting Hill Gate, where the films that he saw during the spring and summer of 1920 included James Kirkwood's *Faith*, Charles Brabin's *His Bonded Wife*, Fred Niblo's *The Haunted Bedroom*, and three Chaplin films: *The Tramp*, *The Fireman*, *A Day's Holiday*.⁵⁰ Over these same months, Anstey's diaries show that he was devoting longer periods of time—and more hours each day—to his own scenarios, as he sought to bring them to a higher level of technical correctness. On Wednesday 9 June he asked Adrian

Brunel of Minerva Films for a model scenario, and when he received this he sent Brunel two sheets of follow-up questions, which demonstrate how untutored his intuitive feel for what screenwriting entailed still was: 'When should the terms: (a) Close-up; (b) Medium close-up; (c) Vignette be used? ... When should the terms "Iris in", "Iris out" be used?'⁵¹ Anstey's questions travelled down the left-hand side of each page, and Brunel supplied his answers and explanations on the right. If these had been available to Anstey in 1916, when *An Evil Spirit* was written, he would have realised that the 'Vignette' in which he planned to show Stella holding and reading Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* was really a medium close-up, and he might have seen in the vignette as Brunel authoritatively defined it an ideal means of marking the flashbacks, with accompanying 'veil of misconception', into which the scenes with the Medical Superintendent dissolve away:

V. is a contrivance which makes a misty outline round the picture & is used when one wants to emphasise the fact that the picture is a vision, a dream, part of a story told by a character & not part of the continuous story.⁵²

Anstey's attempted association with Minerva Films in fact came to nothing. Within two weeks of receiving Brunel's answers to his technical queries he sent the company his latest scenario, *The Black Poodle*; but as the summer wore on his exasperation at the time that first Brunel himself and then A. A. Milne took to read the piece continued to grow. After several weeks spent lamenting 'my usual luck', Anstey withdrew his scenario on Tuesday 21 September and decided that he would have to look further afield, 'though I shall not have it done by any but British producers'.⁵³ For five years his efforts faltered, with scenarios which he 'never succeeded in placing ... with any cinema firm';⁵⁴ but Anstey was determined that they would finally prove fruitful. Sure enough, his next attempt—dusting off *The Tinted Venus* for consideration by Cecil Hepworth—succeeded in part, for in 1921

Hepworth duly made the film (though not quite as Anstey had written it) with Alma Taylor and George Dewhurst in the lead roles.⁵⁵

Anstey's impatience and his badgering of studios and producers measure his anxiety to do all he could within the new cinematic medium to extend a record of achievement to which he felt that otherwise he would no longer be able to add: 'long before the War I had come to realize that I should have to be content with such success as I had already gained'.⁵⁶ Above all, it was important to Anstey that his 'serious' as well as his 'humorous' work should be represented on the screen. In early 1916, with cinema audiences about to see what Maurice Elvey had made of Dick and Paul, it was in his 'madhouse' material, at the opposite end of the spectrum from the uproarious comedy of *Vice Versâ*, that those hopes of demonstrating versatility were invested. In the end Anstey demonstrated versatility not by managing to make Stella and Evelyn as popular and well-known as Dick and Paul, but by bringing to his scenarios skills similar to those seen in the novels which had preceded them. In that sense, even though for a while he had to pursue his goal without the ready cooperation—or cash—of 'any cinema firm', the steps that had taken Anstey from 'The Statement of V.M.' via *The Statement of Stella Maberly* to *An Evil Spirit* also served to set him on a fresh career path.

¹ F. Anstey, *A Long Retrospect* (London and New York, 1936), p. 122.

² Anstey, *Long Retrospect*, pp. 206, 207.

³ Anstey, *Long Retrospect*, pp. 210, 211.

⁴ Anstey, *Long Retrospect*, p. 222.

⁵ F. Anstey, *Vice Versâ; or, A Lesson to Fathers*, ed. Peter Merchant (Brighton, 2011), pp. 253–6, 281; Anstey, *A Long Retrospect*, p. 367.

⁶ 'The Statement of V.M.' occupies eighteen leaves (not quite consecutive) of a notebook held in the British Library: Additional MS 54278. The phrase quoted, 'dancing on pretty feet to a madhouse', appears on fo. 108v. Subsequent references to this text will use the abbreviated title 'V.M.' and will be indicated parenthetically.

⁷ *The Statement of Stella Maberly, Written by Herself* (London, 1896). This is the edition to which reference will be made throughout—and henceforward parenthetically, with the title abbreviated to *Stella*. A new edition with introduction and notes, and incorporating both the earlier ‘Statement of V.M.’ (see note 6) and the subsequent scenario *An Evil Spirit* (see note 8) is forthcoming, however, from Valancourt Books.

⁸ *An Evil Spirit* occupies thirty-seven pages in the first of two volumes filled with ‘film scenarios by T. A. Guthrie, chiefly based on his published works’: British Library, Additional MS 54308. Subsequent references to this text will use the abbreviated title *Spirit* and will be indicated parenthetically.

⁹ See Denis Gifford, *Books and Plays in Films 1896–1915: Literary, Theatrical and Artistic Sources of the First Twenty Years of Motion Pictures* (London, 1991).

¹⁰ See Andrew Shail, *The Cinema and the Origins of Literary Modernism* (Abingdon and New York, 2012); Keith Williams, *H. G. Wells, Modernity and the Movies* (Liverpool, 2007).

¹¹ Anstey, *Long Retrospect*, p. 380.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 87–8.

¹³ I am indebted here to Alberto Gabriele, *Reading Popular Culture in Victorian Print: ‘Belgravia’ and Sensationalism* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 118–19, 130, and to a suggestion made by the anonymous reviewer of the present piece.

¹⁴ Anstey, *Long Retrospect*, pp. 41–2, 75–6.

¹⁵ Anstey, *Vice Versâ*, p. 99.

¹⁶ This *résumé* is contained in a separate notebook: British Library, Additional MS 54283, fos 50r–49v.

¹⁷ Shail, *The Cinema and the Origins of Literary Modernism*, p. 10.

¹⁸ See British Library, Additional MS 63553, fos 37r and 70r.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 77r.

²⁰ Anstey’s diary records not just the day but the time: ‘Thurs: 19: Jan. D^r Millar died at 2 o’clock in the afternoon’ (British Library, Additional MS 63551, fo. 60v).

²¹ British Library, Additional MS 63551, fos 69v, 70r.

²² *Ibid.*, fo. 70v.

²³ Anstey, *Long Retrospect*, p. 231.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

²⁶ Joan Templeton, *Ibsen's Women* (Cambridge, 1997; repr. 2001), p. 25.

²⁷ Anstey, *Long Retrospect*, p. 222.

²⁸ Wendy Doniger, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India* (Chicago and London, 1999), p. 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ British Library, Additional MS 63553, fo. 37r; Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, BC MS 19c Stoker; British Library, Additional MS 63553, fo. 40r.

³¹ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Isobel Murray (Oxford, 1998), p. 182.

³² British Library, Additional MS 63553, fo. 42r.

³³ Anstey, *Long Retrospect*, pp. 234–5.

³⁴ Anstey's diary (British Library, Additional MS 63571, fos 57r and 59v.) shows that he began to write the scenario on Monday 14 February 1916. He worked on it every day that week and did the final rewrites after lunch on Sunday 20 February.

³⁵ Anstey, *Long Retrospect*, p. 341.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

³⁸ See L. J. Collins, *Theatre at War, 1914-18* (Basingstoke and London, 1998), p. 2.

³⁹ Anstey, *Long Retrospect*, p. 375.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 366, 390.

⁴² British Library, Additional MS 54309, fo. 268.

⁴³ Anstey, *Long Retrospect*, pp. 367, 368.

⁴⁴ See Eric Salmon, *Granville Barker: A Secret Life* (London, 1983), p. 8.

⁴⁵ Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, BC Gosse correspondence, letter from Anstey dated 2 January 1919.

⁴⁶ Anstey thus transferred to *The Statement of Stella Maberly* the climactic offstage pistol shot which his version of *Hedda Gabler* had mischievously removed from that play. See F. Anstey, *The Pocket Ibsen*, with illustrations by Bernard Partridge, new and enlarged edition (London, 1895), p. 124.

⁴⁷ *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 5 September 1896, 272.

⁴⁸ Walter Scott, *Tales of the Crusaders*, 4 vols (Edinburgh, 1825), 2, p. 128.

⁴⁹ British Library, Additional MS 63574, fo. 18r.

⁵⁰ British Library, Additional MS 63573, fos 267r, 273v; Additional MS 63547, fos 11v, 19v.

⁵¹ British Library, Additional MS 54309, fo. 274.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ British Library, Additional MS 63574, fos 10v, 39v; Additional MS 54259, fo. 50v.

⁵⁴ Anstey, *Long Retrospect*, p. 366.

⁵⁵ See Jenny Stratford, 'F. Anstey', *British Museum Quarterly* 33:1/2 (Autumn 1968), 85n17.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 331.