



**“Mr. Lewis’s book is safe to be popular”:
Domesticity and Familial Magic in
Conjurer Dick (1885) and the Victorian Popular Press**

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Abstract

This article examines the ways in which professional conjuring was presented as a disruptive influence upon the Victorian domestic sphere in the literary landscape of the time through the lens of *Conjurer Dick* (1885) by Angelo Lewis. I also consider the wider context of how magic was discussed in the popular press. Aside from his traditional occupation as a barrister, Lewis was better known as ‘Professor Hoffmann,’ the author of several conjuring manuals and translations of magician autobiographies. His novel, *Conjurer Dick*, one of the only examples of a fictional text about magic written by a practising magician, does not, as the *Saturday Review* noted following its publication, “make out that the life of a professional showman is by any means an easy or happy one.” This article explores the highly gendered and societally complex attitudes towards performance magic in the nineteenth century through the enigmatic Angelo Lewis and *Conjurer Dick*’s fixation on how magic affects domesticity and the family unit. By exploring the reception of *Conjurer Dick* in the popular Victorian press, this article hopes also to establish to what extent Hoffmann’s novel accentuated or refuted negative stereotypes of magicians, and in particular how attitudes in popular culture towards magical knowledge in men differed from that of women.

Key Words

magic; Angelo Lewis; Professor Hofmann; conjuring; domesticity; periodicals

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**“Mr. Lewis’s book is safe to be popular”:
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Conjurer Dick (1885) and the Victorian Popular Press**

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Introduction

Conjurer Dick, the 1885 novel by Angelo Lewis, topped several “books for Christmas presents” lists the year it was published. An advert in the *Academy* noted that its author was the winner of “the £100 Prize recently offered by the “Youth’s Companion,” Boston, for the Best Story for Boys”, and the *Western Daily Mercury* stated that the novel “will be read with the utmost delight by boys” (1885: 6). Angelo Lewis, an English solicitor born in 1839, was best known by the public under another name: Professor Hoffmann. As Hoffmann, Lewis was an internationally recognised magic enthusiast and writer, responsible for a variety of conjuring manuals.¹ In an 1896 interview with Lewis for *The Windsor Magazine*, George Knight presents him as an unwittingly successful author, noting that Lewis’s previous text, *Modern Magic* (1876), sold out its “first edition of two thousand copies [...] within seven weeks, much to the surprise of its modest author,” despite the fact that it “appealed to a comparatively limited public” (Knight 1896: 362).

This article argues that although, as in the preceding paragraph, magic in the nineteenth century was often presented as a masculine occupation and hobby, much of the popular press sought to combine it with more traditionally feminine-coded domestic activities such as cooking. It will also establish how Lewis’s understudied novel reflects attitudes towards magical knowledge in domestic settings and how these compared to the profession’s depiction in the Victorian popular press and other texts. Finally, this article contextualises conjuring in Lewis’s novel, its symbolic accumulative effect and what this can reveal about the cultural value of magic and how it contributes towards the presentation of gender divisions in literary forms.

Lewis’s novel follows the life and adventures of Richard “Dick” Hazard, a young boy who becomes apprenticed to the eccentric and vice-ridden magician Professor Vosper, with whom he travels around Britain assisting in the family’s magic and acrobatics act. By the conclusion of the novel, Hazard has been largely put off conjuring as a career due to its financial, social and emotional instability, and instead decides to pursue a career as a solicitor. The *Saturday Review*’s assessment of the novel considers this aspect and the challenges of making a living as a professional conjurer, stating that:

¹ Lewis began writing instructional conjuring manuals and dabbling in magic himself in the mid-nineteenth century. His best-known conjuring manual is *Modern Magic* (1876), followed by three sequels, predictably titled: *More Magic* (1890), *Later Magic* (1903), and *Latest Magic* (1918).

Conjurer Dick, by Angelo J. Lewis (Warne), is very amusing and sure to be popular with boys; perhaps not always with their parents. Mr. Lewis, who is well known as a “prestidigitator,” under the stage name of “Professor Hoffman,” does not make out that the life of a professional showman is by any means an easy or happy one; his pages will not induce many boys to imitate Richard Hazard, his hero, and prefer the conjurer’s life to a safe seat in a counting house.

(*Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 1885: 816-817)

As the *Review* notes, the parents of the novel’s young readers’ would most likely have appreciated that it did not paint the itinerant life of a professional magician as glamorous. Magic, despite its popularity as a hobby for children (indicated by the wide range of juvenile conjuring manuals produced during the nineteenth century), was not always thought of as a suitable hobby for adults. It was often discouraged as a career due to its associations with deception and financial poverty.² Lewis himself, in the aforementioned interview with Knight, implies that this is the reason for his use of a pseudonym, noting too that he asked for *Modern Magic* to be published anonymously as he “didn’t expect that it would do a practising barrister any good to pose as the author of a work on conjuring” (Knight 1896: 362-3); Edmund Routledge asked him to use a *nom de plume* instead.

Lewis’s novel has so far been largely critically neglected, despite the fact that it acts as an excellent prism through which to consider nineteenth-century gender roles, domesticity and performativity. Recent scholarship has begun to examine more closely the links between masculinity and magic, with Tracy Ying Zhang focusing on the intersections between nationalism and masculinity in early twentieth-century Chinese attitudes towards conjuring, noting that “although men dominated modern magic, women were always indispensable actors in the performances” (2018: 13). Zhang goes on to note that, despite the inarguable presence of women in magic, “they were often magicians’ wives, daughters or hired women assistants, playing supportive roles such as human cannon balls, floating beauties and talking heads” (2018: 13), a position which we will see replicated in *Conjurer Dick*. Kainoa K. Harbottle’s *Conjuring Culture* (2011) examines the links between masculinity and magic across the *fin de siècle* and in his consideration of *Conjurer Dick* and its depiction of “conjuring’s problematic role in Victorian masculinity” (2011: 117), Harbottle concentrates primarily on the central character of Dick and his often questionable male role models. Rather than focus on the explicit onstage magic performed by Vosper and Dick, I shall focus more upon Lewis’s presentation of the domestic magic facilitated by the novel’s female characters and the offstage impacts of conjuring upon the familial unit. Although my focus is primarily upon a single text, this article also hopes to begin to assess how magic influenced gender roles more widely in the nineteenth-century novel.

Amongst the wealth of nineteenth-century conjuring manuals aimed at boys, two of the hobby’s most notable appearances are in the anonymous *Parlour Magic* (1838) and William Clarke’s illustrated *Boy’s Own Book* (1861). Texts such as these establish the wider societal context for magic as a masculine-coded pastime for both adults and children. *Parlour Magic* opens with a large pink-red shield on its frontispiece, stating that: “To the lovers of the home,

² *The Boy’s Own Conjuring Book* (1859) is at great pains to emphasise that its young readers should not become too familiar with deception, prefacing itself by stating that the “following pages are not intended to make the young reader either a cheat or a trickster; there is nothing, perhaps, so utterly contemptible in every-day life, as trickery and deception, and we would caution our young master not to obtain by these amusements a love of deception” and that the anonymous author “would advise him strongly to cultivate in his own mind the virtues of sincerity, straightforwardness, candour, openness, and truth” (1859: 14). John Oxenford’s 1842 play *Legerdemain; or, The Conjurer’s Wife* (subtitled “a Domestic Drama”) also deals explicitly with the financial instability of conjuring and British society’s dismissal of it as a profession.

this little manual of amusing phenomena for family recreation is respectfully dedicated” (ii). This general invitation to enjoy conjuring is ungendered, but the preface to the text immediately clarifies that this content is for the enjoyment of boys only, stating that its intention is “to qualify the hero of his little circle to divert and astonish his friends, and, at the same time, to improve himself.” (v) It later depicts the ideal, explicitly young male reader several times. The idea of conjuring as a hobby for boys is equally clear in the visual culture of magic at this time. William Clarke’s illustrated *Boy’s Own Book* (1861) and the also anonymous *Games of Skill and Conjuring* (1865) align with many of the illustrations in other juvenile conjuring manuals which, even if not specifically aimed at boys in their rhetoric, overwhelmingly feature boys performing the tricks in their illustrations. This, then, is the landscape within which *Conjurer Dick* situates itself.

Cookery and Conjuring: Things, Food, and Magic Stoves

In *Conjurer Dick*, domesticity and the accoutrements of the home are, from the outset, inextricably linked with the performance of magic. Lewis’s novel opens with Dick Hazard being inspired to reminisce about his childhood by a simple domestic object: the family’s plate-warmer. Lewis’s narrative foregrounds the domestic, culinary and largely feminine aspects of the home through this appliance and its use as a continual reference point throughout the opening of the novel. Dick comments that “the plate-warmer lighted up the darkened chambers of [his] memory” (Lewis 1885: 3) in regards to his childhood, and at the same time identifies memory, by extension a part of Dick’s self, as a physical space actualizing itself in the domestic form of a chamber. Dick finds that he cannot push the plate-warmer out of his reminiscences, despite it “spoil[ing] the romance of” his memories. He further finds that he and his family can “no more keep it out of our joint reminiscences than Mr. Dick could keep Charles the First’s head out of his Memorial” (3). This comment situates memory and group concepts of selfhood as a shared space, and Lewis’s reference to *David Copperfield* (1850), the first of many allusions to Dickens’s work, helps to establish the novel in the literary tradition of the *bildungsroman*.

Dick goes on to recall his unhappiness at having to share a home with his Uncle Bumpus, who acts as an antagonistic figure throughout Dick’s childhood. Dick is particularly appalled by the way Bumpus eats. This culminates in an incident involving jam tarts, where “(here one third vanished) (another third went the same way) (the last fragment disappeared) [...] If an elderly Ghoul had suddenly dropped into the midst of our little party, we could hardly have been more disgusted” (7). The sequential narration of the disappearance of the jam tarts is reminiscent of a “building” magic trick, and anticipates later connections between magic and the domestic. Bumpus’s unappealing manner of eating also transforms him in the children’s eyes into a supernatural ghoul, further emphasising the narrative’s connection between the culinary objects and magic or ghostly apparitions. Patricia Pringle, drawing on the work of Sigfried Giedion (1948), notes that “the nineteenth century has been described as having exhibited a horror of emptiness which led to an excess of ornament, the filling of even the centre of the room with ‘stuff’ and the obsessive draping of every aperture” (Pringle 2006: 56). *Conjurer Dick* is, as we will later see, a novel often littered with items and ornaments, but here Uncle Bumpus personifies the “horror of emptiness” and disappearance in a scene which connects food and the domestic space of the kitchen with the swift vanishings of magic tricks. Karen Beckman’s *Vanishing Women* (2003) has explored the significance of disappearing tricks in relation to women in the nineteenth century, and this encounter acts as an early warning to Dick of the “fear of the [...] feminizing effects of magic on the British male body” (Beckman 2003: 42).

Lewis centralizes both domesticity and gender in *Conjurer Dick* by introducing characters such as the bluntly-named Major Manly and the despair and “ignominy” of Dick at being “sent to a girls’ school” (Lewis 1885: 12). One of the most unusual familial characters of the novel in regards to conjuring, however, turns out to be Professor Vosper’s wife, Linda, who performs alongside him in aerial feats as “The Fairy Violante”. Linda openly admits that she relies on “fakement” (103) to transform into her alter-ego every night, a persona which apparently looks so different to her normal appearance that Dick cannot at first recognise her. That her mother acts as her make-up artist and costumer establishes this as a matriarchal ritual. Linda attempts to balance a public persona with her domestic roles, further complicated by having her mother and daughter accompany the act on tour. Indeed, the Vospers’ daughter Lily is one of the key critics of magic’s impact upon family life; when Dick assumes that she must love magic due to her family’s links to the profession, also implying that conjuring is a genetic or hereditary ability, she replies that she “hate[s]” it, and that Dick must have such a passion for conjuring only because he has not “seen as much of it as [she has]” (108).

Dick’s alignment of domesticity and conjuring in his childhood recollections culminates in his visit to a pantomime as an adolescent. The performance utilizes common techniques of stage magic and phantasmagoria to achieve startling effects:

I remember, however, that on the police making a sudden descent on the Wolf’s Glen, the grinning skulls became instantaneously transformed into *quartern loaves*, and the magic bullets into *patent pills*; [...] I can recall even now the delicious horror that we felt gazing on these terrific shapes, and our sensation of relief, and yet disappointment, when, at the entrance of the police, they all turned into something of a harmless, not to say ridiculous, character; the great bats into *gingham umbrellas*, the owls into *family portraits*, the serpents into *garden-hose*, and so on.

(Lewis 1885: 31)

Lewis’s portrayal of the transformation of the Gothic elements of the pantomime into comedic household items prefigures the narrative of the *bildungsroman* as a whole, as Dick eventually gives up his fantastical life as a conjurer to become an ordinary lawyer with a stable home and social life. This extract, however, can also be read as indicating the reverse: that there is magic and “delicious horror” even in the everyday and the familial, and it is clear from his earlier motifs of the jam tarts and the plate-warmer that, for Lewis, his own literal and literary conjuring had a firm foundation in domesticity. Lewis’s transformation of the bullets into pills also brings to mind elements of commercialism and advertising which, as noted by critics such as Simon During in his consideration of “commercial conjuring” in the Victorian period, historically have strong links to performance magic (During 2002: 74).

This extract from *Conjurer Dick* echoes James Eli Adams’s identification of the displacement of “domestic life into a world of vision or daydream” (Adams 1995: 59) in relation to Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). The connection with Dickens is not casual for, as I explained previously, Dickensian allusions are rife. Particularly pertinent here an instance where Lewis describes events as occurring in a “Pickwickian sense” in regards to the trustworthiness of magicians. Dick at first struggles with the deception necessary. Vosper disregards these moral scruples, arguing that “off the platform” he himself is a “fairly truthful person” (Lewis 1885: 145, emphasis mine). Vosper argues that lying to an audience does not contradict the gentlemanly standards upheld by many Victorians, due to the fact that the audience pays to be deceived. He concludes by stating that “every fool knows that a conjurer’s assertions are only to be taken in a Pickwickian sense” (145). This blasé attitude towards the use of deception in conjuring arguably vindicates Dick’s ultimate decision at the end of the novel to exit the world of show business and magic to pursue a more socially respectable career.

These Dickensian echoes continue in the recurrence of Lewis's repetitive listing of domestic objects as Dick and Vosper perform tricks onstage, further connecting conjuring to mundane everyday items. The "articles" given up by their audiences for tricks comprise a sequential list of personal items: "watches, rings, postage-stamps, coins, scarf-pins, purses, cigar-cases, keys, tooth-picks, railway-tickets, pen-knives and knick-knacks innumerable" (138). It is as if magic were an invasion of the public's privacy, albeit a voluntary one. John Reed has argued that such lists are successful in Dickens's work as part of a wider symbolic system, "allowing description to operate diegetically and also extradiegetically by imbedding this almost matter-of-fact description in a compelling moral fable – what today we might call a kind of hyperreality" (Reed 2010: 12). Lewis's novel undoubtedly plays into this type of hyperreal presentation. Whilst *Conjurer Dick* can be read as a morality fable, as noted by contemporary reviews of the novel, it is, though, less concerned with the overall morals of society than the professional validity and instability of magic as a career. In Lewis's portrayal, magic often leads to fatalities, poverty and the overall inability to support one's family. *Au fond* indeed, the domestic – with all its anxieties for the Victorian man about feminisation - determines the parameters within which magic can work. Perhaps one of the most surprising connections made by Lewis is between conjuring and cookery.

Yet magic and the culinary arts are frequently aligned in both the Victorian popular press and the wider literary culture of the nineteenth century, more usually with men rather than women. Joseph Jacobs, a popular performer who also made use of the popular "Wizard" moniker, offers an example.³ Whilst travelling back from a tour in Australia to England by ship, he wrote and printed his own newspaper to keep his fellow passengers entertained. When *The Era* reported this event, it chose to focus on intimate and largely domestic and culinary details and how these related to his magic performances: without a doubt, it goes, the public must have "longed to follow those mysterious gentry [magicians] into the privacy of their domestic life" (1859: 10) and

felt a great desire to have seen how the wizard conducted himself at the breakfast table the next morning, when the paraphernalia displayed was of a more comprehensible description. Whether the tea, or coffee, was obtained by cabalistic agency from some inexhaustible reservoir, whether the professor produced the eggs from the "magic egg-bag" ready cooked, or, turning up his wristbands, and calling upon you to observe that there was no deception; whether any required quantity of muffins came at his command out of the crumpled table-cloth, varied only, according to the usual process, by the occasional production of tempting rounds of beef and savoury chines of ham.

("Wizard Jacobs' publishing a Newspaper at Sea" 1859: 10)

This quotation references several individual magic tricks, such the "Inexhaustible Bottle," alluded to by the "inexhaustible reservoir" of tea and coffee, and the "magic egg-bag," a variation on the popular trick of producing ready-cooked foodstuffs from bags or hats onstage. Foodstuffs are the focus of tricks in many of the conjuring manuals available to Victorian readers, presumably due to the availability of items, and the uncanny element of domestic and culinary items being rendered strange in some way by the magician.

This interest in the "domestic life" or domestic spaces of magicians is carried through into *Conjurer Dick* beyond the conflation of conjuring and cookery. When he first enters the Vospers' home, Dick is shocked to find a typical Victorian abode. At first expecting excitement and spectacle, Dick identifies "a pack of cards on the mantelpiece" and a "suggestive-looking black box under the sofa", but then finds that "beyond these items there was nothing to indicate

³ The most famous adopter of this style was John Henry Anderson (1814–1874), "The Wizard of the North," who popularised the title.

that the room was the dwelling of a magician” (Lewis 1885: 97). By virtue of his household’s disappointingly ordinariness, Vosper’s living space offers its own form of deceptive domesticity by hiding the nature of those who reside there, a theme also seen in Victorian magic tricks.⁴ Part of Dick’s interest is the same mystery identified by *The Era* writer in terms of the excitement of viewing the private life of a public performer. He writes that he “felt a little disappointed,” although he does not really “know what [he] had expected, but it seemed to [him] that the abode of a really conscientious conjurer ought surely to be more characteristic than this” (97). Dick’s fixation on these domestic details indicates that this interest recurred throughout the nineteenth century, prioritising the domestic setting as a reflection of personal character and identity yet also highlighting it as a site of suspicion.

Given the clear contemporary interest in how magicians address the specific domestic concern of food preparation, it is perhaps more surprising that Dick does not focus upon the Vosper’s kitchen arrangements. Earlier texts such as A. B. Engstrom’s *The Humorous Magician Unmasked* (1836) list tricks such as how to “change Coffee into Tea, and Tea into Coffee” (Engstrom 1836: 40) alongside how to “make an Egg Dance” (Engstrom 1836: 33). Engstrom, as Betsy Krieg Salm notes, was a member of the prestigious Order of St. Olav in his native Norway, and moved to America to teach painting in the 1820s (Krieg Salm 2010: 122). Since Engstrom was an author who would have been privy to an international array of upper-class clientele and acquaintances, this perhaps gives an indication that food-themed tricks found favour in those circles. Magic, indeed, was an intrinsic part of Victorian delight in the transformations effected by cooking, from Soyer’s “Portable Magic Stove” (advertised extensively from 1849, and dwelt on at length in Soyer’s 1851 *The Modern Housewife or Ménagère*) to the many enthusiastic descriptions of gastronomic “miracles” often associated with French cuisine.⁵ Jean-Eugène Robert-Houdin’s *The Secrets of Conjuring and Magic, or How to Become a Wizard*, translated into English by Lewis writing as Professor Hoffmann in 1878,⁶ also gives some insight into the popularity of food-based tricks, containing a section entitled “A Digestive Desert” giving the reader instructions on how “to eat corks” (Robert-Houdin 1878: 281). Robert-Houdin notes that this “amusing little practical joke will serve as an introduction to other ‘dinner-table’ tricks” (Robert-Houdin 1878: 283), implying that an entire repertoire of conjuring can be formed around the items provided in a dinner setting. The majority of conjuring manuals imply a male reader by default, so here performing magic tricks in a domestic setting is coded as a masculine activity or a source of entertainment provided by the host.

This culinary interest follows through into the visual culture of conjuring. Images such as Figure 1 demonstrate a clear alignment of magic and domesticity. Indeed, it would be difficult for a viewer to determine whether Madame Gilliland Card is in the midst of performing a trick or a commonplace domestic duty, such as serving tea for guests. Madame Card’s real name was Georgiana Elizabeth Eagle, the daughter (as was often the case) of a well-known male magician, George Barnardo Eagle (Dawes 2007: 128). Gilliland Card performed several

⁴ A notable example of this is “The Haunted Swing” described in Albert A. Hopkins and Henry Ridgely Evans’s 1897 tome *Magic: Stage Illusions and Scientific Diversions*, in which it is termed the “most successful operation” (1897: 91) in Atlantic City and San Francisco. The trick involves a fake room revolving via a cylindrical bar around the stationary seats of the audience members, literally turning the domestic space upside down and producing uncanny results. The trick was also shown in Britain and Australia.

⁵ For the humorous description of delight in gastronomic “magic” and “miracles”, see, amongst many other examples, Ricket, 1873: 83.

⁶ Robert-Houdin is often referred to as the “father of modern magic” Lewis, as Hoffmann, also translated and edited Robert-Houdin’s posthumous *Secrets of Stage Conjuring* (1881).

times in Cheltenham over the course of 1873, with an advert placed in *The Cheltenham Looker-On* for 22 November 1873 describing Card as a “Popular and Celebrated ENCHANTRESS, HUMORIST, ELOCUTIONIST, and CLAIR-VOYANTE MESMERIST” primarily performing “MIRTHFUL, SCIENTIFIC, & CHARMING ENTERTAINMENT” (*The Cheltenham Looker-On*: 754). Although the advert gives no exact details of her performance, from the layout of the objects of the poster we could assume her to be performing a more domesticated version of the aforementioned “Inexhaustible Bottle” trick, where a range of different liquids are conjured from one container depending on the wishes of the audience.



Figure 1. Madame G. Card / Wizard Queen and Mesmerist. 1872

Source: Harry Ransom Centre, University of Texas at Austin

<https://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15878coll5/id/118/>

Culinary associations with magic were clear even to those who did not explicitly identify as conjurers. The American Davenport Brothers were the best-known performers of conjuring repackaged as spiritualism onstage, and were commonly denounced by the press, by magicians and by literary figures for their deception of susceptible audiences (Christopher 1991: 99). Many conjurers were keen to unmask what they viewed as a misuse of illusion and sleight-of-hand prowess, becoming increasingly dedicated to distinguishing themselves from the traditionally spiritualist command of the domestic sphere. One of the most unusual satires of the Davenports' performances concerned their most famous act, “The Spirit Cabinet,” the trick which the famous magic duo John Nevil Maskelyne and George Cooke recreated to start

their own careers around the same time (Christopher 1991: 148). The Spirit Cabinet involved the brothers entering a seemingly typical wooden cabinet with their hands and feet bound by rope, then the doors of the cabinet were shut. Unusual noises and musical sounds would emanate from inside, ostensibly impossible for the brothers to be making themselves. The French periodical *Le Journal amusant* (1856-1933) lampooned the Davenports' performance of this trick in 1865 in Paris by drawing direct parallels between conjuring, domesticity, and cooking. The title of many of the article's illustrations, "Frères Davenfours," is a play on the meaning of *four* ("oven" in French).



Figure 2: V. Morland, 'Cuisine des esprits.'

'Ces satanés Parisiens sont trop difficiles — on ne sait plus que leur donner de nouveau'
(‘These infernal Parisians are too difficult — we don’t know what to give them again’)

Source: *Le Journal amusant*, 23 September 1865: 4

Gallica: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5501251h/f4.item>

Figure 2 is the last in a series of illustrations over three pages that, beginning on the issue cover with the reaction of the crowd to their magical cabinet, form a narrative of the brothers' visit to three witches to ask for "d'autres truc, les nôtres sont vieux" ("other tricks, ours are old"). The series is counterpointed by a conversation between two male friends of whom one is a Davenport devotee and the other a sceptic. When the devotee says his wife is going to get into the cabinet with the brothers, the sceptic recommends a rapid visit to the doctor and a return as quickly as possible to 'l'esprit naturel' ("natural spirit" i.e. his "character"). Figure 2, by contrast plays with another meaning of *esprit*: it shows the Davenports attempting to kindle a fire to carry out their *cuisine des esprits* - "spirit cooking" - in a cauldron with the help of the three witches in order to create their new trick. Despite the supernatural paraphernalia of toads, bats, snakes and witches, there is something undeniably domestic about the scene: one brother is on his knees and blowing hard as if trying to make a domestic fireplace flame up, while the other is at his ease on a chest plying bellows. Meanwhile, one witch seems to be pouring

champagne into the mix. The image suggests that conjuring and spiritualism were not only linked by their techniques, but also by an alignment with magical domesticity: not for nothing was Soyer's "Portable Magic Stove" heated by (alcoholic) spirits, which is clearly the allusion being made here.

This backdrop of the merging of cooking and conjuring during the mid-nineteenth century provides further context for Lewis's novel, and although many of his domestic scenes are arguably common features of the *bildungsroman*, many of them also echo the parallels between the domestic, gendered space of the kitchen and the traditionally masculine stagecraft of magic. It is not surprising then that Lewis conflates of cookery and conjuring throughout his other writings. In his introduction to Will Goldston's *Exclusive Magical Secrets* (1912), a collection of short biographies of a range of nineteenth-century magicians, Lewis, again writing as Professor Hoffmann, describes the subjects of the text as an "assemblage of *chefs*" (Goldston 1977: 8, emphasis in original) instead of magicians or performers. Lewis goes on to write that the readership will undoubtedly "expect a feast of dainty dishes, and the expectation will not be disappointed," which he can confirm as "some of the 'tit-bits' the writer has been already privileged to taste" (8).

"You'd soon wish for your old face back again": Conjuring, Aesthetics and Family Dynamics

This then is the background against which *Conjuror Dick* operates. Whilst the conflation of magic and domestic activity is clear throughout Dick's childhood, during his time with the Vospers it is made clear that the often entertaining presence of magic has not resulted in familial bliss. On the contrary: the marital life of the Vospers is riddled with arguments. A key example of how professional conjuring impacts upon Linda's identity and marriage comes in a conversation following a visit from Vosper's card-sharper friend, Ledoyen:

"His manner is a good half of the trick," said Mrs. Carrick. "I really believe he tries to look like the 'old gentleman.'"

"I believe he does, Duchess, and very good business, too. I'd give a hundred pounds to have Ledoyen's face and manner."

"If you had, you wouldn't have me," said Mrs. Vosper, "for I should be frightened to live with you. So you'd soon wish for your old face back again."

"Don't make too sure about that, old lady," said the Professor. "I've stood a lot from you in my time, but even worms will turn, if trodden on long enough and hard enough. You're getting rather heavy, mind you, and if you did run away, I don't know that this worm would come after you!"

"What, not after the Fairy Violante!" I said.

"Ah, there you have me! No, I don't think I could make up my mind to lose the Fairy Violante. The husband might be adamant, but the artist would have to surrender at discretion. I could not part with my Violante, even for the sake of Ledoyen's deliciously diabolical physiognomy."

(Lewis 1885: 153)

The humorous conversation primarily highlights the split between illusion and reality and the commercial value of the former. Vosper contrasts the Fairy Violante on stage with Linda as wife in the same way as Ledoyen's manner and physiognomy with his own: in both cases the illusion creates more value than reality, but in the end his thought experiment comes to an end with a return to an ineluctable reality – that Linda can transform herself into the Fairy but he cannot transform himself into Ledoyen. Illusion has its limits and is, in the end, not opposed to reality but part of it. While Vosper does not always accept this, the triumph of reality is observable in the way Linda manages his alcoholism in the most socially approved manner

(Linda does “not reproach him” for although it causes her “heart-break” (172)). It is, however, most poignantly visible in the death of Lily, the Vospers’ daughter. The cause of Lily’s death is not clearly identified by Dick: he notes only that she “grew paler and paler” until a doctor declares that there is “no hope” for her recovery (233). However, the doctor does comment to Linda alone that he blames the late hours of Lily’s performances, and that “the strain of acquiring and using the complicated Clairvoyance Code” as part of her act has “done irreparable mischief” (234). Conjuring and, by extension, her magician father are, therefore, depicted as the chief causes of Lily’s death: his dedication to illusion has resulted in the final reality of death.

Given Lewis’s own successful career and insights into professional conjuring, these reflections could well have a basis in the life of his real-life contemporaries on the nineteenth-century magic circuit. Milbourne Christopher, for instance, states that ‘Professor Anderson’ whose wife and daughters also performed with him as part of his magic act, was notable for a capacity to “occasionally dr[i]nk too freely” (Christopher 1991: 115) after performances. Anderson’s daughters, Helen and Alice, vanish from magic scholarship: Charles Waller noted that “they just faded away”: in a typical ploy of the masculinism that characterises the traditional historiography of magic acts, he hoped that “these young ladies simply had their babies and settled down to a happy domesticity” (Waller 1980: 29): any female engagement with conjuring is aligned with eventual diminishment – indeed vanishing – and purely domestic value.

More recent scholarship has sought to reframe female narratives in conjuring. Scholars such as Karen Beckman, Lucy Fischer and Francesca Coppa have written significantly on women’s engagement with conjuring, particularly through their labour on the Victorian stage and their frequent magical “vanishings”. Coppa notes that “female assistants are doubly framed as not-magicians in that they are clearly framed as hired help and not as part of the rarefied social circle of magicians” (Coppa, Hass, Peck 2008: 86). Fischer considers “the rhetoric of magic” as a “cultural artifact in which the male envy of female procreative powers is ‘disguised,’ yet manifest” (Fischer 1996: 49). As in the conversation above, signs of this envy can be seen in *Conjurer Dick* in regards to the treatment of Linda and her power to create through transformation. In *Conjurer Dick*, however, we predominantly see a focus upon how magic complicated gender roles away from the stage, primarily in its domestic scenes outside of Vosper and Dick’s conjuring act. Helen Groth has argued that illusion is “fundamental to the conception of the Victorian domestic, as well as a carefully orchestrated distraction from its more nullifying constraints” (Groth 2009: 148), particularly in terms of Victorian literary and visual culture, and it is this iteration of the domestic and its inherent ties to magic that is most useful for the purposes of this article in considering how conjuring disturbs domesticity in the Victorian literary landscape.

The poignancy of Linda helping her husband up the stairs when drunk acts as a visual motif of her role as a supporter both on and off stage, and this emotional labour is clearest in Lewis’s depiction of Lily’s sudden death and funeral. The death scene is highly sentimentalised: Lily wore “a smile like a summer sunset.” And, as she died, she “breathed rather than spoke the words, ‘Peace, perfect peace.’ [...] and the freed soul took its upward flight into the perfect peace of Heaven” (Lewis 1885: 239). At the funeral, “on the whole, Mrs. Vosper show[ed] the most self-control” (Lewis 1885: 239) while Vosper is unable to contain himself. This death scene, especially in a novel riddled with Dickensian references, recalls that of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) – a novel which also features travelling performers and an itinerant magician – where Dickens writes as if a palimpsest of Lily’s: “peace and perfect happiness were born; imaged in [Nell’s] tranquil beauty and profound repose” (Dickens [1841] 2001: 524).

In contrast to Linda, after Lily's death Vosper is gradually consumed by the reality of his alcoholism. Initially, he had presented to Dick what turns out to be an illusion: the gentleman-magician and the nobility of show business. Vosper claims that "the stage business and selling the programmes" is the "gentlemanly part of the work" though he does casually admit, without elaborating, that there is also "a lot of rough work" (Lewis 1885: 92). Dick's idealisation of Vosper as one of two male role models in his life – the other being Major Manly – is slowly eroded as he is afforded backstage insights into the world of magic. One of the first is when he notes how different Vosper looks the first time he sees him out of the "evening dress" in which he performs magic. The outfit is designed to give him "a very gentlemanly appearance" (109) while Vosper's reality is not at all. By the late Victorian period, the evening suit described by Lewis had been adopted as the standard for stage magicians. One year after the publication of *Conjurer Dick*, Henri Garenne discussed the evolution from magic's previously more mystical outfits to its contemporary gentlemanly attire in *The Art of Modern Conjuring, Magic and Illusions* (1886): although "it was formerly the custom of conjurers to wear a long flowing robe, embroidered with strange figures," that style has been "long discarded," and that the modern day uniform of a conjurer should be "an ordinary evening dress suit" (Garenne 1886: 7). Vosper, then, is shrewd enough to keep up with the modernity of magician's apparel and its movement from obviously make-believe costume to the illusion of upper-class assimilation.

Aside from Vosper's mostly performative brand of gentlemanliness, successful illusion largely falls to the female members of the family. Dick, under duress, at one point agrees to undergo the kind of transformative "fakement" exacted upon Linda nightly for her performances as The Fairy Violante. Dick's surprise at the results is stressed by Lewis:

I found on the contrary, to my great surprise, that I had never been so good-looking in my life, and was compelled to admit that Art had very considerably improved on Nature. [...] What I saw in the glass was the presentment of a rather good-looking – I am aware that self-praise is no recommendation, but I am speaking of the illusion, and not the reality – a rather good-looking man young man of about thirty, with an aquiline nose (my natural organ is straight), and a blasé, man-about-town sort of expression. It required a positive effort to believe that I was looking at myself. The two ladies were much amused at my astonishment, but I had little leisure to indulge in it, for there wanted but five minutes to the rise of the curtain, and it was time for Madame Linda to take her place at the piano.

(Lewis 1885: 191)

The beautifying, and in some ways feminising, effects of transformation – a by-product of the family's natural theatricality but specifically their magic act – portrays magic as having the potential to feminise male performers. This feminisation is manifest both in terms of the application of make-up and cosmetic restructuring (the change of shape in Dick's nose is unexplained), but also by virtue of the process being connected exclusively to Linda and the women of the Vosper troupe. As James Eli Adams notes, during the Victorian period especially "the masculine [...] [wa]s as much a spectacle as the feminine" (Adams 1995: 11), but Dick's reaction here differs from his previous experiences regarding his own masculinity, such as through the gentlemanly appearance of stage magic and the unknown "rough work" that comes with it. Here, the feminine "Art" turns him into a living illusion which he – luckily for him – had no time to believe in but which the women's amusement at his astonishment suggests that they remain fully aware of: they are quite used to cosmetics making them up. Yet again, this episode demonstrates to Dick and to the reader the power of women over illusion and their anchorage in reality. Men may think they are in charge of illusion, but the reality is that illusion threatens to take charge of them.

Conclusion

Conjurer Dick was not Lewis's only foray into fiction aimed at children and younger readers. In 1904, Lewis published *King Koko*, described by the author as "the first attempt to present a drawing-room conjuring entertainment in the guise of a connected story," aimed at "juvenile audiences" but also the "larger public" (Lewis 1904: 7). Exploring *King Koko* is particularly interesting in terms of tracing Lewis's development in depicting female characters and the transition from magic as a purely masculine occupation to one that could also be undertaken by women. *King Koko* follows the exploits of a "pretty princess" named Belinda (whose name perhaps recalls Linda) and her struggles against the villainous Baron von Schwindelheim and others. As with Major Manly of *Conjurer Dick*, Lewis, presumably due to his readers' assumed youth, often chose obviously descriptive names, but only for his male characters – Dick's surname of Hazard could equally be read as reflecting the dangers he avoids by choosing a stable career over one in conjuring. It is also men who are at the heart of the exploitation of magic in *King Koko*, as the King of the title and von Schwindelheim seek to use magic to make alchemical gold at a high cost. Belinda's fairy godmother, by contrast, although falling into the stereotypical crone category of fairy tales, is presented as a powerful female figure who can perform both actual magic and sleight-of-hand card tricks. *King Koko*, then, is an example of male misuse of magic, and the positive influence that magic can have on the growth of young women, in contrast to the hardships faced by Lily in *Conjurer Dick*.

Angelo Lewis's novel both played into but also complicated the traditional Victorian narrative seen in the popular press in regards to the undesirability of performance magic as a career, and its effects upon masculinity and gender roles more widely. Although the text ultimately criticises performance magic as a viable career for young boys, it highlights that the strongest characters in in both illusion and real life were the women. Where Victor Vosper's swift deterioration as a result of his career acts as a warning to Dick and the young male readers, Linda Vosper and the matriarchal world of the domestic space behind the curtain prompt Dick to adopt a more traditionally professional career path and seek out a more stable environment, in the hopes of avoiding the outcome that she herself suffers: the eventual destruction of her family by the conjuring business that Dick and the reader witness.

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