

Enchantment, the Sensory and the Eerie – Ethel Rudkin and the Black Dog

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‘No matter ‘ow dark a night it is, you can allus see the Dog because ‘e’sⁱ so much blacker.’

(Rudkin 1938: 124)

Introduction

The renowned folklorist Ethel Rudkin was born in 1893 in Willoughton, West Lindsey, a place she remained close to until her passing in 1985. Over her lifetime, Rudkin dedicated herself entirely to the study of her home county’s folklore. Her home became a makeshift museum of artefacts, and she set her focus on archaeology, folk-life, language and folklore with equal rigour and interest, becoming well respected in a wide range of fields. She authored and initially self-published the book *Lincolnshire Folklore* in 1936 (reprinted by EP Publishing in 1973) which is still referenced in scholarship today, and contributed many articles to the *Folklore* journal over the course of her career. One such article, titled ‘The Black Dog’ and published in 1938, collates her research on the Black Dog folklore of Lincolnshire, her home county, drawing from a pool of local accounts and firsthand witnesses. In this paper Rudkin establishes two beliefs from the outset: firstly, that the Black Dog ‘walks in Lincolnshire still’ (111), an active participant in the lore and belief of the time; and secondly that the Dog in Lincolnshire is ‘never feared’ (130).

To what extent the Black Dog captured in her writing is truly ‘a nicer, more comfortable sort of Dog than in any other county’ (131) is uncertain, with the accounts she charts exhibiting a

broad spectrum of behaviour from the Black Dog, and of emotional responses from the witnesses. What is evident, however, is Rudkin's core belief that the Black Dog in Lincolnshire possesses a quality that sets it apart from similar apparitions elsewhere. Rather than seeking to provide a definitive answer as to whether the Black Dog of Rudkin's home county is truly the 'kindly beast' (131) she claims him to be, this paper examines the complexity and multidimensionality of this character and depiction. Through close textual analysis and a period of practice-based investigation through printmaking, new understandings of Rudkin's paper and the character of the Dog she presents are revealed.

The accounts Rudkin depicts are explored through lenses of the eerie, the sensory and of enchantment. Here, the eerie is defined as a mode of experience coloured by the strange, mysterious and frightening – the uncertainty of that which lies beyond our standard cognition or experience. Enchantment is understood as an affectual state, brought about by, as defined by philosopher Jane Bennett, a 'momentarily immobilizing encounter' (2001: 5) that transfixes and spellbinds the witness, leading to a 'state of interactive fascination' (5) that shares qualities with experiences of fear and the eerie. The sensory is used to reference the corporeal and sensorial details of Black Dog encounters, unpicking the role and effect of these sensory engagements within them. In a folkloric context, these lenses take on further meanings: folkloric narratives often engage the eerie as defined by theorist Mark Fisher, presenting a presence of absence or an absence of presence (2016: 61) – something missing that ought to be there, something present where there should be nothing, or spectral and ghostly presences that engage both. Beyond an emotional state or encounter, within folkloristics enchantment is often identified as a world-state, characterised by belief in legends, magic and the mysterious. Disenchantment is seen to arise from the dissolution of belief in 'the world of spirits, casual forces, wood sprites and relics' (Taylor, 2007: 533), while the enchanted world is brought about by belief in legends, or through verbal charms

and ritual songs that ‘can be said to create that enchanted world on their own’ (Radulovic and Dordevic, 2021: 15). This understanding suggests that folklore, and the creative practices surrounding it, can usher in enchanted worlds. Folklore is also deeply tied to the sensory, in the sensory aspects of original encounters and legends, through the embodied practices of storytelling, rituals and performances, and through the transmittance of narratives through the senses of sight, sound and touch. Through the application of these lenses, and through a period of artistic practice in which three of Rudkin’s accounts were illuminated through printmaking, this paper proposes that the Black Dog of Lincolnshire – as translated through Rudkin’s authorial voice, her curation of accounts, and through experimental artmaking – can be understood to possess a unique sensory profile compared to Black Dogs elsewhere. It further posits that through the eerie and sensorial qualities of Rudkin’s paper, the collected encounters she presents, and creative reanimations of them, it is possible for a state of enchantment in the witness, reader or viewer to result.

The discussion begins with an outline of the practice research methodology employed, suggesting the sympathetic qualities of printmaking to the subject matter and presenting the accounts selected to be explored through practice. The Lincolnshire Black Dog is then contextualised through an overview of the Black Dog motif in British folklore more broadly. Having established the methods and background, the discussion then moves to explore Rudkin’s Black Dog as an eerie actant, a sensorial being, and as holding the potential to instil enchantment in a witness, exemplified through the three unique artworks produced. The paper is drawn to a close by an evaluation of Rudkin’s characterisation, and the artworks produced as a response to it, as read through the core lenses, proposing a reconceptualization of the Dog that Rudkin presents as ‘kindly’ and ‘never feared’ (1938: 131) as something far more complex.

Printmaking and Methodology

To explore Rudkin's paper beyond a purely textual analysis, printmaking was employed to illuminate three selected accounts. These accounts were selected according to their relevance to the three key lenses applied in this paper: those that possess aspects of the eerie, those that are highly sensorial in their descriptions, and those that are characterised by a state of enchantment. The resulting selection includes the Black Dog that leaps fences and gates ahead of the spectator, rustling leaves as it jumps through (113); the Dog that follows a woman on her walk home, at which she tries to strike it with an umbrella that instead passes through its body (125); and the Dog described as darker than the night sky, that brushes up against a farmer's legs with wiry fur, and habitually crackles through the local hedges (123–124). In these accounts the presence of the Dog on empty roads, the umbrella passing through its body, and the presence that can be seen even on a dark night evoke the eerie. The rustling and crackling of foliage, the boar-bristle fur and the sight of the pitch-black or leaping figure engage the sensory. Finally, enchantment is suggested by the spectacle of the leaping dog, and in the awe-struck account of the farmer. As these accounts embody the core themes of this paper, exploring them through printmaking allows for a further interrogation of these qualities within them, drawing them into the visual realm for the first time since the encounters occurred.

The value of exploring these accounts through practice lies in the externalising potential of artmaking. Folklorists David Neal and Michael Robidoux (1995) present the notion of co-creation in folkloric narratives, in which the 'skeletal narratives' of ballads and legends leave space for audiences to project their own ideas and understandings over them, becoming 'co-creators of the text' (281) as they do so. Compared to archetypal and 'skeletal' narratives, Rudkin's writing leaves no such room for personal interpretation and projection: in the vibrant encounters she charts, the idiosyncrasy of each account is brought to the fore. Where

illustrating from ‘skeletal narratives’ (281) might reveal aspects of the artists internal world and projections, illustrating the intensely specific accounts Rudkin presents instead serves to illuminate the effect and imagery produced in the mind of the reader when encountering them. The inflexible, vibrant images Rudkin collates are liberated from their purely textual forms, allowing for them to be analysed as visual artworks, raising the possibility for further interpretation. Writer Anaïs Nin speaks of typesetting her poetry in letterpress as a process of transforming thought into physical presence (1971[1942]: 196), raising the idea that in the transcription of a folkloric narrative onto metal in printmaking, the encounter is given weight and form, drawing it out from the textual, conceptual and mnemonic and into the visible world.

Beyond the value of granting physicality to historical folkloric encounters, printmaking is selected for its relevance to the core themes of this investigation. It is a sensorial medium: printed works possess unique visual qualities such as the velvety black of printing ink, and the lines of composition evidence the physical touch of the printmaker. It is tied to the eerie through the innate dialogue between absence and presence contained within the medium: the multiplicity of print lends the idea that unseen others might be simultaneously viewing the image one sees (Coutts 2018: 221); the image itself maps the physical presence of the printmaker even in their absence; and any ‘print’ speaks of the absent matrix that impressed it. Furthering the dialogue between absence and presence, in the absence of Rudkin, who passed in 1985, and her informants, these prints conduct a conjuration of the Black Dogs that were seen and described, reinstating their presence. As enchantment can be considered an ‘interactive state of fascination’ (Bennett 2001: 5), enchantment might equally be cultivated by the engaged viewing of artworks, marking a further connection between artistic practice and these themes.

This process can be understood to produce new knowledge through two processes identified by practice research theorist Graeme Sullivan: dialectical practice, in which the artist-

researcher ‘explores the uniquely human process of making meaning through experiences that are felt, lived, reconstructed and reinterpreted’ (2009: 50), and conceptual practice, in which artist-researchers ‘give form to thoughts’ (50) through the creation of artefacts, ‘thinking’ through their medium. Through these processes, these etchings can be considered not only re-visualisations of the accounts Rudkin presents, but also reconstructions of experiences lived and felt by witnesses. They are read as artefacts produced through the process of thinking through making, where the narratives of the Lincolnshire Black Dog were cogitated and ruminated upon in the durational process of composition, leading to new understandings that both emerge and are made visible through printmaking. These new understandings are not concrete nor definitive interpretations of Rudkin’s work, rather they serve to generate aesthetic experiences, described by Sullivan as interactive, encouraging of dialogue and generating of debates. These prints serve to (re)introduce Rudkin’s characterisation of the Black Dog into the visual realm, current dialogue and debate. There is an understanding within practice research, as presented by theorists Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, ‘knowledge is itself often unstable, ambiguous and multidimensional, can be emotionally or affectively charged, and cannot necessarily be conveyed with the precision of a mathematical proof’ (Smith and Dean 2009: 3). These artworks are therefore considered to reveal emotional and affective knowledges of the Lincolnshire Black Dog, fostering a multi-dimensional engagement with Rudkin’s accounts.

The Black Dog

This section serves to contextualise the Lincolnshire Black Dog through presenting a summary of the broader motif in British folklore. Contrasting the common archetypes of Black Dog folklore with the idiosyncrasies of Rudkin’s accounts, it provides the background

and rationale for the further exploration of these legends, and the specific value of creative practice in doing so.

Where canids are a common figure in worldwide folklore – often appearing as shapeshifters in animal form, the devil in disguise, or as the guardians of lands of the dead and other-worlds – within Britain, the Black Dog is a motif so widespread that nearly every county has a unique name for the apparition. Among these Dogs are the Padfoot in Cornwall, the The Moddey Dhoo in the Isle of Man, the Black Shag in Suffolk, the Hooter in Warwickshire, Black Shuck in Norfolk, and the Gytrash in West Yorkshire, to note only a few (Brown 1958: 176). Descriptions of these ‘ubiquitous’ ghosts (Brown 1958: 175) vary widely but can be broadly defined as an apparition taking the form of a black canine that in some way proves itself to be something other than a natural, living dog. This can be through physical attributes: the Dog appearing with one glaring red eye or two as large as saucers; emitting a glow, smoke or flames; or appearing unusually large in stature (often described as the size of a calf). This also manifests through behaviour: rearing up on its hind legs to walk, leaping impossibly high fences, appearing from thin air and disappearing through solid matter. The most common association with the Black Dog in folklore is death, with the Dog seen as a chthonicⁱⁱ being or omen. In Norfolk, to meet the Black Dog marks death for the witness ‘within the course of the year’ (Rye 1872: 2); in Kidsgrove, Staffordshire, appearances of the Dog correlate with mining disasters; and in Gelderston, Norfolk, sightings of the Black Dog foretell an ‘act of horror on the site’ (Brown 1958: 185). Despite the prevalence of ominous Black Dogs, there remain instances of the Dog acting against this characterisation, described as a protector, guarding areas of land or accompanying lone travellers on unsafe roads (Brown 1958).

It is this latter image of the Black Dog as a friendly and helpful apparition – a ‘kindly beast’ (Rudkin 1938: 131) – that Ethel Rudkin paints in her paper. Where this characterisation

shares similarities with the few Black Dogs elsewhere known to act protectively or positively, the Black Dog Rudkin presents appears unique, both in the level of perceived ‘friendliness’ or ‘kindness’ she ascribes to him, and in the heightened sensory aspects of the witness accounts she documents. Where typical Black Dog legends are categorised by specific actions, behaviours or outcomes – as with the violent barguest, the death portent, or the psychopomp (spirit guide) – Rudkin’s accounts place emphasis on the sensorial experience of the witness at the moment of encounter. In accounts from other counties, descriptions of the Dog itself are minimal, with greater focus placed on their actions. In the 1577 pamphlet ‘A Straunge and Terrible Wunder’, through which the Reverend Abraham Fleming popularised the narrative of the Black Shuck of Bungay, only 24 of the 1800+ words are spent describing the Dog in sensory terms, and even then these descriptions are vague – a ‘straunge shape’ (5) or ‘an horrible shaped thing’ (1). Rudkin’s accounts, contrastingly, revel in the sensory, as exemplified by what may be the only description of the feeling of the Black Dog’s fur: ‘it was like a *pig’s* skin rubbin’ agen me, bristly, an’ not like a dog’s coat at all!’ (124). This unique attention to the sensory experience of the witness begins to mark Rudkin’s, and Lincolnshire’s, Black Dog apart from the broader legend.

The idiosyncrasy of the Lincolnshire Dog resists analysis through the cultural evolution model, in which modern legends are seen to emerge from a lineage of pagan gods and ancient beliefs (Witcutt 1942: 167), existing as a remnant of the past or ‘lively fossil which refuses to die’ (Francis Potter 1949: 401). As folklorist Gillian Bennett critiques: ‘To use [the fossil] analogy meaningfully, of course, folklore had to be a dead artefact rather than a living organism’ (1994: 33). While recognising that Rudkin’s presentation of the Dog is influenced by the culture of the time, her biases, selection of respondents, and editorial voice, her narratives can still be seen to portray a legend that is shifting and evolving, developing unique attributes and details as it does so, enacting the notion of the legend as a ‘living

organism' (1944: 33). In the years since the publication of her paper, this lively spectre can be seen to have fallen dormant – the respondents have since moved on, no new accounts emerge from the county, and Black Dog folklore is increasingly folded into a singular motif of a red-eyed omen that stalks the North. Considering the re-animative potential of artistic interventions in archival material (REF), the approach of practice-based research allows for a novel and expansive investigation of this material. Rather than seeking to map or contain it, practice allows for the vibrancy of each account to emerge, creating new artefacts that allow the evolution of a lively legend to continue.



Figure 1: etching with aquatint of the Black Dog leaping a fence, highlighting the joy of the leap, 2025.

Enchantment and The Leaping Dog

Having presented the background to this investigation, this section now moves to explore Rudkin's notion of the Dog as never feared, the accounts that corroborate her assertion, and the insights that arose from engaging with one such narrative through printmaking.

From the outset of her paper, Rudkin strongly asserts the position that the ‘most striking fact about the Dog in Lincolnshire is that he is *never feared* [...] fear of the Dog never enters into it, once he is recognised for what he is’ (1938: 130). Accounts that support this claim include several instances of the Dog acting protectively: one witness presents the belief that the Dog ‘protected her’ (122) as she walked alone at night, and another, despite being overcome by ‘a most unusual and uncanny feeling’ (122) in his presence, maintains ‘that the dog was providentially sent that night to protect him’ from harm (122). In two instances, the Dog is welcome company: one informant finding it ‘nice of the old Dog to wait for her’ when encountering him twice in one day (126), while another expressed gratitude for his accompaniment on her travels: ‘she liked to know that he was trotting along beside her’ (116). These accounts reflect a Black Dog entirely separated from the ominous reputation of other counties, while the softened characterisation of the Dog is amplified by the regular use of male pronouns – not uncommon in studies and accounts of the Black Dog, but rarely occurring with such frequency or apparent familiarity – endearing both the witness and the reader to the Dog. Outside of the encounters that paint the Dog protectively, he appears deeply embedded in the local landscape, vanishing up trees, leaping fences and hedges, darting in and out of roads, and taking residence in the banks of streams. To examine this unique portrayal of the Dog as a non-portentous, interactive part of the landscape, the first account explored through print is that of Mrs. B in Algakirk:

‘It leaps into the road and runs before the spectator, leaping back over another gate farther on. It always comes and goes on one’s left. “I once heard the leaves rustle as it jumped through,” said Mrs. B.’ (113)

While short, the encounter is among the first Rudkin presents, setting the tone for her paper. In Mrs. B’s account, the Dog appears unconcerned by the presence of the witness, neither seeking to protect nor attack them. Rather than engaging with the witness, the Dog presents a

spectacle – jumping, weaving and leaping ‘before the spectator’ (113). In rendering this account through printmaking (fig 1), the spectacle is given a concrete, visual form. The surrounding environment forms a key component of both the etching and the account. The leaves of the hedges, etched individually over the course of hours, allowed for a prolonged consideration of the importance of the foliage – awaiting the Dog’s landing to burst into sound. As with the rustling leaves Mrs. B hears, another respondent tells of the hedges crackling as the Dog pushes his way through them (122), asserting his striking physical presence and sensory effects as a core aspect of these narratives.

The notion of the encounter as enchanting arose in tandem with the creation of this print, where the shock of the sound, the spectacle of the leap and the moment of encounter are visualised and frozen still. Returning to Bennett’s definitions of enchantment as a ‘momentarily immobilizing encounter’ (2001: 5) that leads to a ‘state of interactive fascination’ (5), she states that this state of wonder involves the ‘the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement’ (2011: 5). Freezing time at the apex of the leap, the print places the viewer in the position of the original witness, where time and movement are suspended. Though this suspension is an incidental condition of a still-image medium, it presents to opportunity to inhabit the moment, watching the airborne Dog poised to burst through the foliage below. Expanding an instant through the visual, the image fizzles with anticipation of the sensory – the sound and movement that will erupt when the Dog returns to earth – it suggests a holding of breath, in which the witness is awestruck by the spectacle. Cultural geographer Sage Brice proposes that drawing forms a ‘mode of attunement’ (2018: 135) to landscapes and narratives, opening up ‘spaces of encounter, at bodily, sensory, cultural and political registers’ (135). Expanding upon this proposal to incorporate printmaking – a practice to which drawing is often integral (Abell 2015: 23) – printmaking can be seen to present a vehicle through which to attune to the narratives Rudkin depicts,

creating spaces of encounter with the emotions, sensations and atmospheres of witness accounts. The resulting image suggests the enchanting nature of the Lincolnshire Dog, particularly when the sensory experience of the witness is anticipated or engaged.



Figure 2: etching with aquatint of the Black Dog as the umbrella passes through him, highlighting the permeable boundaries of the Black Dog, 2025.

The Eerie and the Umbrella

Following the investigation of the Lincolnshire Black Dog as protective, friendly and enchanting, this section now presents the encounters that situate him within the realm of the eerie, exploring this dimension through print, and suggesting the implications of the eerie Black Dog on Rudkin's characterisation. While Rudkin presents some episodes of the Dog acting as protective or playful, as in the case of the leaping Dog, many others run contrary to her assertion that the Dog in Lincolnshire is '*never* feared' once recognised (130).

Exemplifying these fearful episodes is one description of the boggart of Belle Hole farm, where a farmer's wife watches him enter and circle her kitchen. The witness doesn't dare to move 'for fear of disturbing him, because she knew what it was' (116). Despite her recognition of the Dog, the witness freezes for fear of disturbing him. While the suspension of time and bodily movement can be a condition of enchantment (Bennett 2011: 5), it is a state equally promoted by encountering the eerie. In an eerie encounter, propose philosophers Jana Cattien and Richard Stopford, 'you feel suspended in time and space, frozen to the spot. Something is "there" – but eerily so' (2022: 113). The Dog's appearance in the kitchen is eerie because he represents a preternatural presence where there should be nothing. In another legend Rudkin charts, a murder victim in Knaith returns as a Black Dog with a human face, causing locals to fear walking past her homestead at night (121). Though her appearance does not portend death, her presence as an eerie revenant is strange and frightening enough to be actively avoided.

To explore the dimension of eeriness in Rudkin's accounts, the selected description particularly embodies the dialogue between absence and presence that evokes the sensation. A woman walking a long route alone is startled to find a Black Dog following behind her – a sudden presence – and moves to strike him with her umbrella, only to find her weapon passing through him – the strange absence of corporeality:

“‘Quick as lightening [sic],” she said “I ‘upped wi’ the umbrella I was a-carryin’ an’ lammed ‘im one as ‘ard as I could.” But she nearly fainted at the result, for the umbrella “went clean *thruff* ‘im” and the Dog trotted on beside her to the ash tree at the end of Chapels Lane where he vanished up the tree, or into the tree.’ (125)

By the witness’ own description, the events occurred ‘quick as lightning’: the progression of events from the Dog’s appearance to the alarm of the witness, to her attempted violence and the resolution as he disappears, within the text take place over the course of seconds.

Visualising this account through the lengthy practice of printmaking allowed for a meditation upon the moment an encounter with a frustrating but seemingly mortal dog shifted into the realm of the preternatural, the eerie and the unknown.

Through this prolonged creative rumination, the atmosphere of the moment revealed itself – the image puts one in mind of the stomach-turning beat of missing a stair: a limb, expecting solid contact, meeting with no resistance and sailing through the air, as the Dog fixes the viewer with his gaze. Returning to the absence/presence model of the eerie, in this account, and its illumination through print, the Dog simultaneously embodies both. Where his feet are firmly planted on the ground and his gaze rests on the viewer, the umbrella passing through his side calls into question his presence in this world. Cattien and Stopford suggest that the eerie arises not only from the dialogue between absence and presence but from their blurring, arising when objects, creatures or landscapes have ill-formed or ill-defined boundaries:

‘where does this object begin; where does it end; how far back does it go?’ (2022: 119). The process of etching accentuated this blurring of boundaries within the encounter, as the process of aquatint requires identifying and assigning tone to spatial boundaries, raising questions of where the dog begins and ends. If the eerie thrives in places where boundaries blur, physical space and time are disrupted and objects become untethered from space, the Black Dog – throughout Britain, and in Lincolnshire specifically – inhabits the realm of the

eerie by its very nature. It appears out of thin air, where there ought to be nothing, or disappears suddenly and unnaturally. It haunts in and out of time, bringing back the dead to walk their homestead hills or reappearing calendrically. The umbrella passing through the Dog's form makes it clear that he is a spectre of permeable boundaries, untethered by time,



Figure 3: etching with aquatint of the Black Dog with boar-bristle fur, highlighting the characteristics from the farmer's description, 2025.

space and physicality.

The Sensory and the Boar-Bristle Dog

The discussion now moves to explore the sensory qualities that pervade Rudkin's Black Dog accounts, the potentially these sensorial encounters hold to enchant the witness, and the representation of a sensorial ghost that forms the final print of this investigation.

It is now evident that Rudkin's Black Dog inhabits the realm of the eerie, evoking fear and uncanny sensations in witnesses despite the removal of his ominous reputation. It therefore becomes surprising that Rudkin should have claimed he is never feared, going on to warmly conclude her paper: 'I am glad that it has been my privilege to work on such a kindly beast' (131). To identify an eerie and often fear-inspiring spectre to be kindly and devoid of fearsomeness suggests that some aspect of the Black Dog compelled her to write of him so positively. The hypothesis which has emerged through the process of this investigation is that the unique sensorial quality of these accounts produces an enchanting effect. Where enchantment has already been defined and considered in the discussion of the leaping dog, a core component of Bennett's theory of enchantment has not yet been discussed: the sensory. She states:

'Enchantment includes, then, a condition of exhilaration or acute sensory activity. To be simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by sense, to be both caught up and carried away – enchantment is marked by this odd combination of somatic effects.' (2011: 5)

She continues, stating: 'you notice new colours, discern details previously ignored, hear extraordinary sounds, as familiar landscapes of sense sharpen and intensify' (5). To consider enchantment as arising from acute sensory activity, being transported by sense, and characterised by somatic effects, leading to the perception of new colours, details and sounds lends a new perspective to the Rudkin's accounts. In her paper, the Dog pushes his way through hedges, crackling foliage (122), or leaps in and out of them, rustling leaves as he

makes his exit (113); he is felt to stand on hind-legs and push a man against a gatepost, remaining invisible, giving only the impression of a Dog by touch (123). He is heard in the leaves, branches and in the echoing ‘voice’ of distant trains (117); is felt by his strong paws pushing on shoulders (117) or brushing against legs with his wiry fur (118); and seen as a black shape ‘laid on the greensward’ (118), a figure in the hedgerow, or a shadowy companion on a dark lane (125). The Dog remains visible even on the darkest night: ‘*you can allus see the Dog* because ‘e’s so much blacker’ (124), set apart from the darkness by his impossibly darker fur. Rudkin’s opening line – ‘The Black Dog walks in Lincolnshire still; and there are a number of living people who have seen him, heard him, and even felt him’ (111) – establishes not only the continued presence of the Black Dog in her home county, but also the centrality of the sensorial to encounters with him. Contrasted against the Norfolk Snarleyow, of which writer William A. Dutt warns ‘you will do well to shut your eyes if you hear him howling; shut them even if you are uncertain whether it is the dog fiend or the voice of the wind you hear’ (1901: 216), where a sensory encounter with the Dog elsewhere is a threat to be avoided, in Lincolnshire it is a crucial part of the experience. While the sensory may play a role in Black Dog legends elsewhere – described by their dark fur, large size, red eyes, and even sulphurous breath (Hewett, 1900: 40) – the sensory is rarely, if ever, held at the same level of importance as fear, omens or actions. Considering the relationship between somatic and sensorial experience and enchantment, in which the senses both lead to an enchanted state and are sharpened by it, the Black Dog of Lincolnshire becomes an enchanting figure despite the potential fear, eeriness and uncertain boundaries he presents.

To engage the hypothesis of the Lincolnshire Black Dog as a sensorial being, and the potential enchanting effects of this situation, the final account selected is that of the Dog with fur blacker than the night:

‘One night I met ‘im on Old Leys an’ instead o’ goin’ by me a bit away off, as usual, e’ rubbed by me legs an’ ‘e reached above me knee, an’ it was like a *pig’s* skin rubbin’ agen me, bristly, an’ not like a dog’s coat at all! I watched ‘im by, an’ ‘e went into th’edge an’ made it crackle in the same fashion as ‘e generally did. [...] No matter ‘ow dark a night it is, *you can allus see the Dog* because ‘e’s so much blacker.’ (123–124)

The description embodies the three lenses applied in this paper: the Dog is eerie through his ‘failure of absence’ (Fisher, 2016: 61), appearing even on the darkest night as an impossibly darker shadow. The Dog engages the sensory through his strikingly black fur, his crackling through the hedge, and his boar-bristle fur as he brushes against the farmer’s leg. He can be seen to enchant the witness through the breathless description, where the sensory perceptions of the farmer appear invigorated by the presence of the Dog, issued in fast succession in his account.

Realising this narrative in print (fig 3), the sensorial nature of the Dog is further engaged: the aquatint tone that lends a fuzzy static quality to the plate enhances the lines of the fur, granting them a degree of weight and texture that feels as if it could be reached out and touched. The composition and posing of the Dog lends a heraldic quality to the image, suggesting the grandeur or reverent nature of the description. The Dog’s gaze confronts the viewer, raising questions of who is encountering whom, and what agency may be at play. If disenchantment is defined as ‘losing the mysterious in the world’ (Radulovic and Dordevic, 2021: 9), the Dog that is darker than the night with pig-skin fur possesses enchanting qualities from the very outset of his strange and implausible physicality.

In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram writes of a reawakening of the sensory:

When we begin to consciously frequent the wordless dimension of our sensory participations, certain phenomena that have habitually commanded our focus begin to lose their distinctive fascination and to slip toward the background, while hitherto unnoticed or overlooked presences begin to stand forth from the periphery and to engage our awareness. (Abram 1997: 47)

The notion that active engagement with the sensorial world, and our sensorial bodies, can lead to the softening of focus on certain aspects of experience – slipping ‘toward the background’ – and the sharpening of our sense of ‘unnoticed or overlooked presences’, can be applied both to Rudkin’s Black Dog and the artistic interpretation of him: to witness the Dog is to experience a shift in perception, unnoticed presences jumping to the fore. Proposing a new understanding of perceptual experience with reference to viewing art, philosopher Alva Noë states that our sense of seeing, of experiencing the richness of detail in the world, is ‘not something static, but something temporally extended and active.’ (2000: 128). He takes the view that perceptual experience takes place through the active and conscious engagement of our senses, exploring the possibility that interacting with artworks might enable us ‘to catch ourselves in the act of perceiving and can allow us thus to catch hold of the fact that experience is not a passive interior state, but a mode of active engagement with the world’ (128). This extends Abrams’ view, strengthening the argument that engagement with the sensory – through encounters with the preternatural Black Dog, through conscious participation in folkloric experiences, and through active engagement with artworks – can lead to new presences sharpening into view, new understandings of the world around us, and a new comprehension of our own sensorial experience. If, to Bennett, enchantment is ‘to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and everyday [...] a feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one’s default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition’ (2001: 4–5), then Abram’s and Noë’s description of perceptual and sensory

encounters – in nature and in art – both promote the idea that the sensory can enchant.

Through Rudkin's depiction of the Black Dog in Lincolnshire, the 'unnoticed or overlooked' (Abrams 199: 47) dimensions of the eerie and spectral engage witnesses, the sensory colours the encounter, and certain aspects of experience are brought into sharp relief while others melt away.

Conclusion

Having explored the Black Dog of Lincolnshire through close analysis of Rudkin's depicted accounts, the notion she presents of a kindly spectre who does not inspire fear in witnesses appears contested. Though there are instances of the Dog acting protectively, witnesses still report feelings of fear in his presence, and the Dog appears and behaves in ways that situate him within the realm of the eerie. Rather than a benign and kindly ghost, this paper has expressed the complexity of the Black Dog of Lincolnshire that Rudkin presents: the Dog is deeply sensorial, mysterious, and is seen to be enchanting as a direct result of these conditions. The rich sensory aspect of these encounters, emphasised by Rudkin in her writing, appears largely unique among the wide and varied body of Black Dog folklore in Britain, where episodes typically centre around ominous associations or violent actions. Through the application of Bennett's theory of enchantment, these encounters shaped by the sensory – in which colours become sharper, new details appear suddenly visible, and extraordinary sounds become audible – can be seen as the effects of, and conduits for, enchanting encounters. In re-conceptualising this Black Dog as enchanting and sensorial, the fear and eeriness evoked by the spectre are accepted and even celebrated, rather than swept away by claims that the Dog is kindly and un-feared. Exploring Rudkin's depiction through the practice of printmaking allowed – by methods of thinking through making and attuning to narratives through drawing

– these qualities to escape their textual form and resonate through the language of the visual. These works further reveal and accentuate the characteristics that Rudkin captures: of joyfulness and spectacle, as explored in the leaping Dog; eeriness, as depicted in the umbrella passing through the Dog’s side; and the richness of the sensory, as is exemplified by the boar-bristle Dog. The witnesses’ descriptions of the Black Dog, Rudkin’s interpretations of them, and the creative artefacts produced in conversation with her text all carry a sense of what Bennett describes as the mood of enchantment, creating the feeling of ‘a shot in the arm, a fleeting return to childlike excitement about life’ (5). Through this paper, the exhilarating and enchanting qualities of Rudkin’s Black Dog have been drawn out both textually and visually, returning the Dog to the mind of the reader and allowing him to travel beyond the pages of Rudkin’s paper once more.

ⁱ As Rudkin, and many of her respondents, characterise the Black Dog in her writing as ‘he’, the Dog is predominantly referred to in this paper with male pronouns (if any) as an attempt to preserve the specific and familial way he is referred to throughout her paper.

ⁱⁱ Chthonic beings are those associated with the underworld. The word takes its meaning from the Greek ‘khthon’, meaning earth, associated with the chthonian deities that inhabited the underworld of Greek mythology. Cerberus, a black dog with many heads, acted as a guardian for this underworld, allowing spirits passage into it but never to leave. Further associations of canines with the chthonic include Anubis, the canine headed Egyptian god associated with funerary rites and passage to the underworld, and the white and red-eared Welsh fairy-dogs Cwn Annwn, the hounds of Annwn – the underworld of Welsh mythology.

List of figures:

Please note that all images are © author; created for this study and integral to the argument.

Fig 1. Marland, K, etching with aquatint of the Black Dog leaping a fence, 2025.

Fig 2. Marland, K, etching with aquatint of the Black Dog at the instant the umbrella passed through him, 2025

Fig 3. Marland, K, etching with aquatint of the Black Dog with boar-bristle fur, 2025.

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