SPIRIT WRITING: THE INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUALISM ON THE VICTORIAN GHOST STORY

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the connection between the spiritualist movement and the literary ghost story, both of which came to prominence and mass popularity during the second half of the nineteenth century. While existing critical literature has viewed both phenomena as symptoms of a wider Victorian fascination with the supernatural and the nature and possibility of an afterlife, little attention has been paid to the relationship between the two movements. By examining spiritualist literature alongside the work of both canonical and lesser-known writers, I attempt to address this area. My thesis argues for an understanding of the post-1850 ghost story as a dramatic representation of a new conception of the dead largely created by spiritualism, and reads the appearance, actions, behaviour and narratives of literary ghosts as an ongoing reflection and discussion of this idea.

Contents

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all critical and other sources (literary and electronic) have been specifically and properly acknowledged, as and when they occur in the body of my text.

Signed:

Date:

Introduction

This is the Rat-revelation, the gospel that comes by taps in the wall, and thumps in the table drawer.
 (Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1852; quoted in Goldfarb and Goldfarb 1978, 51)

If one but grant the hypothesis of Spiritualism, what vistas open up for the novelist!

(Scarborough 1917, 76)

To begin with, Marley was dead. The ghosts of the early nineteenth century emerged largely unscathed from the eighteenth-century trend of domesticating and commercialising the supernatural, carrying medieval traditions into an age of science, secularism, and progress; by 1844, the ghost of Jacob Marley still had more in common with its distant predecessors than its immediate successors. Along with centuries of ghosts that came before, Marley's ghost is essentially a revenant, serving as a particularly moralistic *memento mori* in its portrayal of death's permanence. It was not until the 1850s that the ghosts of supernatural fiction began to transform into a new idea of the spectral, and that change when it came was substantial. Freed from those earlier conventions, later Victorian ghosts could become radically different figures: beautiful, powerful, and central to their own narrative rather than peripheral

to another's. Among all the criticisms since levelled at the Victorian ghost story for being repetitive and formulaic, it is deceptively easy to forget that the nineteenth century saw the genre's reinvention.

This thesis seeks to explore the progress and development of the Victorian ghost story through a focus on the ghosts at its centre. While the history of criticism on the subject has typically taken into account the spectrum of nineteenth-century cultural discourse about ghosts, which extended outside the bounds of the literary ghost story to a preoccupation with the spectres of the spiritualist movement, there has been little critical examination of the interplay between literary and non-literary movements in this regard. The ghost story and the ongoing discussions over spiritualism may have become isolated in recent discussions, but they were far from separate during the nineteenth century, sharing not only readerships and publication venues but a uniquely nineteenth-century approach to the ghost as a figure of power, transformation and liberation. Just as spiritualism viewed death as a transition to a higher plane of life, so did the ghosts of the Victorian ghost story, as this new conception of spectrality infused their pages, begin to move away from the chained and bound form of Jacob Marley and towards a radically different model of ghosts which exceeded and elaborated upon the limits of ordinary life.[1]

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1. Spiritualists overwhelmingly preferred to use the term 'spirit' rather than 'ghost', a clear indication of the difference they saw between these apparitions and those of the ghost narratives which came before. Since both describe the souls of the dead appearing to the living, however, I will use the term 'ghost' universally to avoid confusion in the discussion.

Early critical approaches to the ghost story attempted to mark it out as a genre thematically and chronologically distinct from its Gothic forebears, whose ghosts were typically horrifying and macabre, the animated corpses echoed in the form of Jacob Marley. From Dorothy Scarborough's 1917 *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction*, the first major work on the subject, to Peter Penzoldt's *The Supernatural in Fiction* (1952), Julia Briggs's *Night Visitors: The Rise ad Fall of the English Ghost Story* (1977), and Jack Sullivan's *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from LeFanu to Blackwood* (1978), these works provided an invaluable service in their attempts to catalogue comprehensively the genre as a whole. As Briggs's title states and Sullivan's implies, these earlier works were instrumental not only in cementing the definition of the ghost story as short fiction focusing upon an interaction between living and dead, but in locating that genre within a broader history of supernatural and fantastic fiction.[2]

In arguing for critical consideration of the genre as a distinct whole, however, the critics cited above leave little room for considering more subtle developments

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2. As thus defined, the term 'ghost story' does not encompass all examples of narratives within which the supernatural plays a prominent role, but is restricted to short fiction focusing upon apparitions of the dead. While the first definition is sufficient for my purposes here, other critics differ in their interpretations of what constitutes a ghost story. Both Jack Sullivan and Julia Briggs, for example, include a relatively broad range of supernatural phenomena in the term; Lynette Carpenter and Wendy K. Kolmar favour a narrower definition, arguing that 'the encounter with an individual human history distinguishes the ghostly encounter from other supernatural experiences,' and including in their annotated bibliography only those stories 'which contain an actual, probable, or suspected ghost' (Carpenter and Kolmar 1998, xii). In using this second definition, I do not intend to imply that none of the conclusions drawn here can be extrapolated to other forms of supernatural literature; however, for purposes of clarity and detail, I have chosen to concentrate on only those stories in which a ghost actually or arguably appears.

within its conventions. While they do discuss particular authors individually, with Penzoldt's claim that most wrote as 'desperate attempts to free themselves from particular complexes' (Penzoldt 1952, 7) giving way to more culturally nuanced interpretations in the arguments of Sullivan and Briggs, such comprehensive approaches can afford to pay only brief and limited attention to broader thematic developments within the genre. In establishing the legitimacy of the ghost story as a distinct genre in itself, it is necessary to emphasise the unifying features of the genre, rather than dwelling overmuch on the various complexities within it.

More recently, criticism has moved away from arguing for the ghost story as a genre and towards a more detailed approach to the relationship between the texts and the society that produced them, examining the genre in terms of Victorian ideas of class and gender. This approach has not been limited to academic criticism in the strictest sense of that term; since Montague Summers published *The Supernatural Omnibus* in 1931 and prefaced it with a lengthy introduction on the genre as a whole, a large portion of debate and discussion over ghost stories has taken place in the anthologies which collect and republish them. The preponderance of female ghost story authors during the nineteenth century, something largely ignored by many earlier critics (Jack Sullivan, for example, discusses male authors exclusively), has become a particular focus of attention in this regard. Anthologies of female-authored ghost stories, such as Richard Dalby's *Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories* (1988), Jessica Salmonson's *What Did Miss Darrington See?* (1989), and Catherine A. Lundie's

Restless Spirits (1996), combine efforts to draw attention to the contributions female authors made with speculation and commentary over why so many of those authors chose to write in the genre. The selective focus of anthologies like these allows for particular insight into the relationship between text and world as well as text and writers. Jenny Uglow, for example, in her introduction to Dalby's anthology, argues that 'because these are women's stories, they grant an insight into women's longings, women's fears, suppressed resentments, buried angers and firmly held beliefs' (ix).

The new focus of these anthologies was reflected in criticism proper. As critical focus on the ghost story moved from the historical and biographical to the psychological and thematic, so too did critical attention shift to the figure of the ghost itself as representative of liminal and marginalised figures within Victorian society. Lynnette Carpenter and Wendy K. Kolmar's edited collection *Haunting the House of Fiction* (1991) played an influential role in linking feminist readings of ghost stories to a feminist interpretation of the ghost story form: '[i]n women's stories,' they argue, 'we perceive a set of common reasons for turning to the ghost story, a set of similar perceptions among many women writers of the possibilities of the form for exploring dangerous territory' (2). Vanessa D. Dickerson, whose *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide* (1996) extends the connection between women and ghosts to a broader field of nineteenth-century literature, locates the origin for this connection in Victorian ideas of femininity. In the dual perception of women as morally elevated while excluded from most forms of practical power, Dickerson argues, Victorian

society placed women in a position that was 'equivocal, ambiguous, marginal, ghostly':

> Striking as it is, this paradox finds a most interesting expression in women's relations to the supernatural, particularly the ghost, a figure of indeterminacy, of imperilled identity, of substance and insubstantiality. Although the figure of the ghost bespoke a general discomfort with the interstices opened up by rapid technological change, economic and political reform, and "religious life … intense and disputatious," the ghost corresponded more particularly to the Victorian woman's visibility and invisibility, her power and powerlessness, the contradictions and extremes that shaped female culture. (5)

Neither ghosts nor Victorian women were uniform in their behaviour and presentation, however, and more recent critics have been cautious in making generalisations about either. Carpenter and Kolmar do note that they are speaking of tendencies, rather than unequivocal rules – some male-authored stories might express the same ideas, some female-authored stories might not – but nevertheless argue for a fundamental divide between male and female approaches to the supernatural. Women 'explore different areas of concern, and express their responses differently' (Carpenter and Kolmar 1991, 10); while male-authored stories are more concerned with presenting the supernatural as terrifying or repulsive, female authors describe living women finding sympathy and commonality with the equally marginalised figures of the ghosts.

In the introduction to her 1996 anthology, Catherine A. Lundie agrees that female ghost story authors express different concerns to their male counterparts, but argues for a wider consideration of the social and cultural contexts informing these

stories. She cautions that 'even critics who champion [female-authored] stories tend to describe them in terms of the "female fears," "female rage," or "female pain" that emerge through their focus on issues of vulnerability and marginality' without giving equal weight to the 'intellectual, economic, and political milieu' from which these stories emerged (2). Nina Auerbach even expresses doubt over the developing critical tendency to 'claim ghost stories as women's property'; while she concedes that '[p]robably something could be made of the distinctiveness of women's stories', she expresses considerable doubt over generalisations made on those grounds, pointing out that the gender balance of published ghost stories suggests that Victorian men were equally preoccupied with the subject of the spectral (Auerbach 2004, 280).

While many Victorian ghost stories did deal both explicitly and implicitly with matters of class, gender and social exclusion, a focus on the ghost as representative of these wider social concerns has tended to detract from the supernatural as an element in itself. Whatever purposes they may have deliberately or unconsciously served, ghost stories were fundamentally narratives about the interaction between living and dead, and were shaped as such by cultural conceptions of death and spectrality. That such conceptions were neither uniform nor unchanging makes wider speculation about the symbolic value of Victorian ghosts problematic, at best. While it is not my intention to contest the assertion that ghosts carried such symbolic value, or that they ever represented the particular anxieties and cultural concerns of any groups marginalised on grounds of gender or class, a more detailed understanding of how

the Victorian ghost developed indicates that such values belonged to a particular conception of ghosts, located within a specific cultural and chronological context.

From its appearance to its actions to its place within the narrative, the Victorian ghost was in a state of transition. Coding them as powerless, for example, ignores stories such as Margaret Oliphant's novella *A Beleaguered City*, in which a host of the dead expel the living from their town; coding them as powerful neglects figures like the chained and mournful Jacob Marley, condemned to walk the earth as punishment for his behaviour while living. This broad spectrum does not, however, constitute an anarchy of conventions; rather, Victorian ghosts were moving from one set of conventions to another, as macabre revenants such as Jacob Marley were gradually being replaced with ghosts more powerful, more psychologically complex, and less limited by death. Likewise, the status and significance of the afterlife was being re-imagined, with the liminal space moving from an embodiment of exclusion and limitation to one representing freedom and power. To discuss what ghosts and ghostliness meant to the Victorian authors and readers who participated in the creation of the ghost story genre, it is first necessary to trace how, why, in what form and under what framework these transitions occurred.

Since the predominant form of publication for the ghost story today is in multiple-author anthologies, a selection bias in the stories chosen for inclusion has a significant effect on what later readers understand to be typical for the Victorian

ghost story as a whole. As Jessica Salmonson has observed, assumptions that the ghost story was a largely male-dominated genre meant that earlier anthologies contained a high preponderance of male authors, rather than reflecting the actual gender balance of the genre. While Nina Auerbach's caution against overcompensating for the exclusion of women by treating the ghost story as a predominantly female sphere is well-placed, she does not disagree that female authors were largely excluded from earlier anthologies and subsequent critical consideration. More recently, and with the assisting influence of exclusively female anthologies such as those edited by Jessica Salmonson, Catherine A. Lundie and Richard Dalby, editors and collectors have made a conscious effort to correct this, producing a wider range of fiction that more accurately reflects what was being published and read in the nineteenth century.[3]

The gender balance is not, however, the only one addressed in recent developments in editing and publishing practice, and a tendency among critics to assume that newly-discovered thematic variety in the genre is due to the inclusion of female authors neglects another significant shift in the balance of stories being chosen for anthologies. Before the work of critics like Penzoldt, Sullivan and Briggs, when the ghost story was still largely considered an outgrowth of the Gothic rather

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3. This is, of course, still a far from comprehensive picture. With periodicals being the main arena of publication for the ghost story, and with the nineteenth century seeing the arrival of a large number of short-lived periodicals that never reached a large audience, numerous ghost stories published in less prestigious venues have doubtless been lost altogether to modern readers and researchers. Julia Briggs notes the same, even going so far as to remark that most ghost stories 'were written to fill pages of forgotten periodicals by forgotten writers' (Briggs 1977, 15).

than a genre in its own right, anthologies concentrated disproportionately heavily upon the work of authors better-known for fiction outside the genre, such as Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens. With a general consensus on the ghost story's existence as a genre in itself, along with a more inclusive ethos nurtured by the growing interest in the contributions female authors made to that genre, came a new focus upon including the work of neglected or forgotten authors, most of whom were neglected and forgotten largely because they were better known for their supernatural fiction than anything else.

It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that those who considered themselves ghost-story authors might have produced different kinds of ghost stories to those who did not, or that authors who did not have an established reputation and readership before turning to the ghost story might have felt less pressure to follow existing conventions. It is not my contention, however, that there was a significant gulf between authors known for their supernatural fiction and authors more often recognised for more mainstream literature. Rather, the relatively limited number of ghost-story authors better known for more mainstream fiction is a small and specialised sample from which to draw conclusions about the ghost story as a whole, both for early anthologisers and commentators and for later critics attempting to use these examples as typical of male-authored stories. Most significantly, the frequently-anthologised stories of Charles Dickens, Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Walter Scott come relatively early in the ghost story's history.

The division between the macabre, horrific or threatening ghosts which appeared in these stories, and the more psychologically complex and sympathetic ghosts which more recent critics have presented as essentially female, is more accurately described as a chronological one. Just as the early ghost stories of Elizabeth Gaskell, Alice Cary and Dinah Mulock Craik presented macabre and horrifying ghosts,[4] the later stories of writers like Sabine Baring-Gould, Barry Pain and even E. F. Benson are frequently marked with pity, sympathy and sentiment. Such a division is reflected, although frequently unacknowledged, in critical literature on the subject; the essays in Carpenter and Kolmar's edited collection *Haunting the House of Fiction*, for example, concentrate predominantly on stories written after 1880. Their arguments remain compelling, and their conclusions about the individual stories and authors discussed insightful, but the underlying view about the origins of the shift in presentations of spectrality is, I will argue, incomplete. The ghost story was already transforming into a narrative genre through which cultural and social anxieties about power, position and mortality could be expressed. The forces driving this change, however, lay outside the literary sphere altogether.

The Victorians' fascination with the supernatural has been well-recognised enough in modern criticism to become almost a cultural platitude: concerned with the widening gap between scientific knowledge and religious faith, the Victorians turned

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4. One might, arguably, make an exception for the ghostly child in Gaskell's 'The Old Nurse's Story' on the basis that it is a figure of pity, but would be hard placed to ignore the threat it presents in trying to lure the living child out into the cold with it.

to ghosts, clairvoyance and psychical research in search of an empirically verifiable spirituality compatible with an increasingly rationalistic age. Certainly, the nineteenth century saw an explosively popular interest in the supernatural, with the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research in 1880 following massive interest in mesmerism and spiritualism and the huge publishing success of books such as Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature* (1848). While I would not disagree with the prevalent critical view that all of these were symptomatic of a wider preoccupation with the limits of science and the nature of the afterlife, I would caution that discussing them as individual lines of interest radiating out from a central core invites a neglect of the interplay between them. It was not only approaches *to* the supernatural which were changing in the nineteenth century, but ideas *of* the supernatural, and while literary ghost stories rarely advocated belief in the ghosts they described, nineteenth-century movements such as spiritualism were actively producing new ideas of the ghost as they developed.

If the figure of the ghost is considered separately from other supernatural ideas, such as mesmerism and clairvoyance, it is nineteenth-century spiritualism that was producing and popularising most of the period's ghosts outside the pages of the literary ghost story. The spiritualist movement, which began in suburban New York in 1848 and achieved an international popularity that crossed lines of class, gender and religious belief during its first decade, relied for its metaphysical strength upon two convictions: firstly, that the dead could move freely between this world and the

next; secondly, that death itself represented expansion of the spirit rather than restriction, with the dead now able to provide spiritual and moral guidance to the curious as well as consolation to the bereaved. In presenting ghosts as fully individual figures freed from life's restrictions rather than subject to death's, spiritualism situated ghosts at the centre of a uniquely Victorian reformation, embodying in them a hope for the afterlife that could be weighed, measured and embraced. As such, these ghosts were starkly opposed to spectres such as Jacob Marley; rather than exemplifying the permanence and limitations of death, they presented death itself as a transformation to a purified and powerful realm of life.[5]

Spiritualism and the literary ghost story, then, shared a common fascination with bringing the figure of the ghost into the contemporary setting of the Victorian world, presenting it not as something distanced and alien to serve as a contrast to the present but as something inextricably bound up with the world of the living. While they approached the subject for different purposes and from different angles, they shared roughly the same span of popularity, from the 1850s to the first decades of the twentieth century, and often the same venues for distribution and discussion in the form of literary periodicals. To suggest that two discourses about the supernatural which were so interconnected should have developed in isolation from one another appears far-fetched in itself, but when the ghosts of spiritualism seemed so clearly to be serving as a model for the new conception of ghosts that was emerging in the

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5. In spiritualist writings, 'spiritualism' is frequently capitalised. Since I aim to discuss spiritualism as a movement rather than a set of religious beliefs, however, I have opted for the lower-case form used in the majority of modern criticism.

literary ghost story, such a claim would be nothing less than absurd. In exploring the connection between the two, I will demonstrate the strong influence spiritualism had upon the literary ghost story, and how the conception of the ghost thus formed is central to the Victorian ghost story as we understand it today.

The Victorian debate over spiritualism took place on the printing press. Spiritualist tracts, pamphlets, books and periodicals were produced in numbers to match the movement's explosive growth, and along with the counter-attacks made from religious sources and the mainstream press, were aimed at the as-yet unconvinced as well as those secure in their own position. For the spiritualists, further, such publications were not useful merely to interest the curious; their collections of detailed anecdotes, impassioned testimonies and quasi-scientific apologetics aimed to convert even the most sceptical of readers. An advertisement in the *Medium and Daybreak* for that periodical's most recent evangelistic issue summarises this approach well: 'Do not argue with sceptics, but hand them the dialectical number of the "Medium" […] For Distribution, 1s. per dozen, 8s. per 100.'[6]

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6. Advertisements, Feb. 11, 1876. Advertisements in spiritualist periodicals provide an interesting (if rather eccentric) insight into the wide spectrum of their readership; the issue referenced here, for example, lists its editor's phrenology business above "Dr Nichols' Sanitary Soap", and the new edition of a book titled *How to Live Well on Sixpence a Day* alongside an advertisement placed by F. Fusedale, Tailors, selling "Office, Seaside and Tourists' Suits from Two Guineas."

The *Medium and Daybreak* ran from 1871 to 1895, quickly becoming one of the most prominent British spiritualist periodicals.[7] Each weekly issue began with the same illustration of the title, above which the lettering of the title itself hangs on a flowing banner. In the foreground, a robed, bearded man sits beside a young woman in a dark dress, surrounded by symbols of knowledge; his arm rests on the globe beside him, his hand holding a scroll, while at his feet lies a book taken, perhaps, from the bookcase behind them. In the distance, a church spire is barely visible in the shadowy gloom that surrounds the tableau. In the centre of the picture, three female figures provide a bright, ethereal contrast to the seated couple. Their pale, flowing gowns leave the suggestion of wings behind them, and cover the ground below so that they appear to float across the landscape.[8] They wear light circlets with glowing white gems decorating their foreheads, and cast no shadow, instead illuminating the couple they seem to be addressing. They are pointing to the rising sun in the distance; behind them, a procession of similar figures stretches back to the horizon. (See Appendix.)

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7. For more on spiritualist periodicals in general and the *Medium and Daybreak* in particular, see Janet Oppenheim's *The Other World* (1985), Logie Barrow's *Independent Spirits* (1986), Geoffrey Nelson's *Spiritualism and Society* (1969) – particularly page 295, on which he lists the titles and print runs of all major British spiritualist periodicals – and Frank Podmore's 1902 work, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism*. Anne Braude's 'News from the Spirit-World: A Checklist of American Spiritualist Periodicals, 1847-1900' (1989) is an invaluable resource in listing information about the lesser-known, short-lived periodicals alongside the more successful, such as the *Medium and Daybreak*.

8. Descriptions (either metaphorical or literal) of such figures as angels is common in spiritualist literature, probably due to the role of heavenly messengers that spiritualists saw them as playing. For one example of many, see the description related by spiritualist writer and lecturer Joseph Osgood Barrett, in his work *Looking Beyond: A Souvenir of Love to the Bereft of Every Home*, of figures that 'did not appear with the wings of fowls, as angels are commonly painted, but […] were in the perfected human form' (Barrett 1871, 53).

The 'daybreak' of the periodical's title and its accompanying illustration refers to the dawn of the spiritualist movement, which at the time of first printing was less than twenty-five years old. Its central doctrine was that the spirits of the dead were only severed from the living in the latter's limited, fallible conception of reality; that these spirits existed in an afterlife alongside this one, and would communicate with the living to provide moral, practical and religious guidance if invited to do so. Death was merely the soul's ascension to this higher plane of existence, and that plane itself but one stage in a series of such ascensions, concurrent with spiritual purification. The followers of spiritualism saw it, in the words of the spiritualist writer Robert Dale Owen,[9] as 'a new revelation' (Owen 1872, 123), come either to enhance or to replace existing religions with its message that humanity no longer needed to rely on abstract speculation about the afterlife; here, instead, was physical and material proof from the dead themselves.[10] Among an increasingly sceptical and rationalistic Victorian public, the idea of scientifically verifiable revelation spread with a rapidity that, to spiritualists themselves, seemed to have supernatural assistance.

In contrast to its otherworldly teachings, however, spiritualism began in suburbia.[11] The Fox family, living in Hydesville, New York, in 1848, heard peculiar

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9. The son of the social reformer Robert Owen, and a notable politician in his own right, Robert Dale Owen was frequently considered one of the more reasonable and mainstream spiritualist voices by spiritualists and non-spiritualists alike. See Chapter One, pages 77-79, for more on his place within the movement.

10. The relationship between Christianity and spiritualism is a complex one, and spiritualists took a wide variety of positions on the issue. Janet Oppenheim (1985) discusses this issue at more length.

11. There is a distinction to be made between the spiritualist movement itself and its individual ideas, several of which are already reported as existing before 1848. Specifically, the work of

'rapping' sounds in their house that seemed to come from the walls and furniture themselves. Addressing the invisible source of the sounds, twelve-year-old Kate Fox asked that it copy her by following the stamps of her foot. After complying with this, it proceeded to rap out any number it was asked to, including a request by Kate's mother Catherine that it give the respective ages of her children (it was correct on all of them, including a daughter that had died some years previously). After a code of communication was established, the 'spirit' claimed to be that of a peddler who had been murdered in the house. It was not the peddler, however, who drew the country's attention; by 1850, Kate and Margaret, along with their older sister Leah, were touring America with their séances, and other Americans were also discovering themselves to be 'mediums' capable of producing more spirits to rap out more messages.[12]

In its first five years, spiritualism spread across all states of the Union and established a firm presence overseas, most significantly in Britain.[13] Exact numbers of spiritualists at any point in the movement's history are difficult to gather, or even

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Franz Anton Mesmer in the late eighteenth century provided the framework both for spiritualist trances and the physics of spiritualism itself (while Mesmer's 'animal magnetism' was not generally accepted in spiritualist doctrine, the idea of a superfine, invisible fluid often figured prominently in explanations of how the dead could materialise). R. C. Finucane cites the example of German women in mesmeric trances claiming to communicate with the dead in the 1830s (Finucane 1996, 179). There is also, of course, a debate lying outside the scope of my discussion regarding the influence of existing mythology and religious movements upon spiritualism; John J. Kucich's work *Ghostly Communion* discusses the role played by Native American beliefs.

12. The story of the Fox sisters and the rappings in Hydesville is retold by the majority of works on spiritualism, whether contemporary accounts or modern criticism; the Fox sisters themselves are discussed in more detail by Alex Owen (2002) and R. C. Finucane (1996).

13. For a more in-depth examination of spiritualism's growth state by state in the US, see Emma Hardinge Britten's *Modern American Spiritualism* (1870).

estimate; the lack of any centralised organisation,[14] the wide variety of beliefs that were encompassed under the term of 'spiritualism',[15] the tendency of both spiritualist and anti-spiritualist writers to exaggerate for effect,[16] and the absence of any accurate way to distinguish between the truly dedicated and the merely curious at any spiritualist meeting,[17] all add to the difficulty of any attempt. However, the large amount of print coverage from both spiritualist and mainstream sources in Britain and the US, the vast majority of which discusses spiritualism with the assumption that readers will be familiar with the existence and claims of the movement, suggests that awareness, at least, was high.

Critical attention to spiritualism has been growing in recent years, with the general pattern of literature on the subject mirroring that of the ghost story. Works such as Ruth Brandon's *The Spiritualists* (1983) and Janet Oppenheim's *The Other World* (1989) have provided a wealth of detail about the movement's history and

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14. There were numerous smaller spiritualist organisations, and Geoffrey Nelson provides a useful compilation of various records and censuses on the subject. The data is, unfortunately, often completed only with the aid of speculation and estimation, and could at any rate only provide numbers for spiritualists who belonged to an organisation.

15. There were spiritualist controversies over the nature of the afterlife, the existence or otherwise of any gods, the truth of Christianity and other religions, the extent to which spirits at seances could be trusted to provide truthful information, and which, if any, of the numerous causes attributed to them (feminism, free love, and vegetarianism, among others; Ann Braude discusses these in more detail) were indeed supported by the spirits. Disagreement between spiritualists often grew heated enough to warrant special attention and explanation by the movement's practitioners. The spiritualist writer J. B. Angell, for example, recounts one apparently common criticism: '[i]t is said if the Spiritualist doctrine is one of love, then why do we see among them at their meetings at times, such a want of harmony?' (Angell 1873, 19).

16. The Reverend Uriah Smith, for example, warns in his 1896 polemic *Modern Spiritualism: A Subject of Prophecy and a Sign of the Times* that the number of unacknowledged spiritualists alone 'might in all probability be millions' (Smith 1896, 30).

17. Charles Dickens's son Charley was the subject of such a misunderstanding in 1860; the periodical *The Spiritual Magazine* trumpeted his conversion after attending a séance, to be met by a blistering denial from his father in his own periodical, *All the Year Round*. See footnote 31 of Chapter One for more on this subject.

development, with Anne Braude's *Radical Spirits* (1989) coming at the forefront of later critical developments into the underlying thematic concerns and psychology at work in the movement. Although spiritualism was not a predominantly female activity in terms of the gender balance of its followers, it did afford an egalitarian approach to power and authority through the idea of mediumship, something a large number of nineteenth-century women embraced. Anne Braude chronicles the various ways in which women understood and developed their role as spiritualist mediums in terms of the world around them, and the subsequent growing relationship between spiritualism and more mainstream issues of female emancipation and women's rights in general; Alex Owen's *The Darkened Room* makes these connections even more explicit by viewing the role of the medium as an exaggeration of Victorian ideals of femininity, and thus giving women power through the semblance of passivity.

Recent critical focus upon the psychological complexity and social relevance of the Victorian ghost, whether appearing in the literary ghost story or in the séance-room, has begun to draw connections between spiritualism and literature. Where explored as such, however, such connections have frequently faltered, becoming either too tentative to form the basis for future conclusions or too general to provide useful insights into the unique nature and development of the Victorian ghost. Julian Wolfreys' *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* extends the idea of Victorian hauntings and spectrality beyond the sphere of supernatural fiction, but, as Nina Auerbach notes, loses any specificity in doing so, as 'individual ghosts

disappear in sonorous generalisations' (Auerbach 2004, 278). Vanessa D. Dickerson's *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide* is more particular in its focus, but pays surprisingly little attention to supernatural fiction, dwelling instead on more mainstream texts such as *Jane Eyre*.

While I do not dispute the potential discoveries to be made in extending ideas of Victorian ghostliness outside the immediate confines of the Victorian ghost story, such discoveries would necessitate a clear understanding of how Victorian ghostliness was constructed, and this is an area in which more recent criticism is notably lacking. Overwhelmingly, Victorian ghosts are discussed as if their appearance, behaviour, framing narratives and wider significance are so obvious as to require neither explanation nor elaboration, and as if the term 'ghost' is itself something which has remained fundamentally unchanged over the history of supernatural fiction.

It is for this reason, perhaps, that critical discussions of the Victorian ghost story seem to have reached an impasse. Nina Auerbach concludes 'Ghosts of Ghosts', her paper on the current status of literature on the subject, with questions rather than answers, arguing that '[g]host stories are fiendishly difficult to generalise about' and that even the most enthralling and illuminating books on the matter 'captur[e] a wealth of subjects but leav[e] alone the ghosts at their heart' (Auerbach 2004, 280, 283). Even these accounts are relatively scarce and considerably limited in , as Srdjan Smajic points out: '[d]espite the immense popularity of ghost stories in the

nineteenth century', he states, 'it appears we are today as unlikely to see new scholarship on the subject as we are to see an actual ghost' (Smajic 2003, 1107). The purpose of this thesis is to supply remedies for such omissions, and point to future directions in research on the subject by looking more fully at the ghost of the Victorian ghost story itself, and demonstrating its origins in the séances and lecture circuits of the spiritualist movement.

With its plethora of séances, materialisations, ectoplasm and table-rappings, as well as its obvious concerns with the same matters as its literary counterparts, spiritualism is a strange omission from the supernatural fiction with which it shared decades of popularity. Spiritualism made few appearances, however, and even in those stories in which it did play a substantial role, narratives concentrated on the movement's follies rather than its ghosts. Henry James's 'Maud-Evelyn' criticises spiritualism as a denial of both death and fully-embraced life; Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's 'The Day of My Death' attacks its numerous absurdities: these are platforms built for a didactic or irreverent commentary upon the movement, rather than narratives which use the movement's conventions to assemble a story.[18] And even these were rare exceptions. Viewing the Victorian supernatural from the perspective of the ghost story, a reader might emerge from decades of tales about ghosts ancient

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18. There are a small number of ghost stories which do use the idea of spiritualism uncritically, but these typically fall after the end of the nineteenth century and spiritualism's ensuing decline in popularity, suggesting that the growth and immediacy of the spiritualist movement contributed largely to its exclusion from the literary ghost story in a direct sense. Richard Dehan's 'A Spirit Elopement' (1914) is one such; Agatha Christie's 'The Last Séance' (1933) another.

and fashionable, old and young, vengeful and pitiful, loved and feared, with little idea that a religious movement centred upon them had ever existed.

A lack of explicit references to spiritualism in the ghost story, however, does not preclude a lack of influence. Spiritualism's contribution to supernatural literature was not the séance and all of its trappings, but a subtler transformation within the figure of the ghost itself, from the *less*-than-human apparitions of earlier narratives into the *more*-than-human characters of the later nineteenth century. Beneath its claims of a new revelation, its meticulous preoccupation with every spiritual, physical and moral detail of the life of the world to come, and its often grandiose, often fantastic performances and rituals, spiritualism carried a new understanding of spectrality as something inherently powerful and transformative. Agency, too, *requires* individuality; power exercised without deliberate and conscious action is no more than a force of nature, undirected in its destructive power and largely lacking in any ability to create. As they assumed a more central role in their own narratives, the spectral figures of the literary ghost story brought with them the kind of power and psychological depth that this new conception of the spectral introduced.

Section One of this thesis discusses the connection between the ghost story and the spiritualist movement by placing both within the pages of the nineteenth-century periodical, as the primary force for popularising and debating both discourses. John J. Kucich, discussing the role American periodicals played in the

spiritualist debate, argues that 'accounts of spiritualism were surprisingly slow to appear in the national magazines' (Kucich 2004, 42); while 1849 saw a slew of reports on the Fox sisters and the Hydesville rappings in the national newspapers, periodicals were not commenting on the movement in any depth until 1852. The importance of the contributions they made to the debate, however, cannot be underestimated. Unlike the newspapers, which by their nature focused primarily on recent events, periodicals in both Britain and the US discussed the movement itself in an abstract, considered manner over the course of half a century. The multiplicity of contributing authors and the genres in which spiritualism was presented, from serious editorials to light-hearted anecdotes, poetry and short fiction, present a detailed insight not only into the debate itself, but into its changes and developments throughout the movement's history.

Spiritualism did not provide the only ghosts on the pages of nineteenth-century periodicals. The last half of the century also saw the rise to popularity of the literary ghost story, which appeared primarily in periodicals and no doubt owed a large amount of its growth to a print medium that encouraged short stories. Kucich argues that the inclusion of sentimental fiction concerning ghosts and angels undermined the periodicals' predominantly sceptical and rationalistic approach towards spiritualism, but I would locate this apparent juxtaposition instead within a more complicated debate over the purpose ghosts and ghost narratives should serve, a matter dealt with explicitly in the periodicals which form the body of this chapter.

By discussing the American *Harper's Monthly Magazine* and the British *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, I aim to show not only that mainstream periodicals with a decidedly anti-spiritualist tendency in their editorial policies still showed the effect of spiritualist conceptions of the spectral in their ghost stories, but that the ghost story as a literary form in itself emerged out of this spiritualist-imbued framework.[19]

While American and British short stories of the nineteenth century are far from interchangeable in every aspect, the nineteenth-century ghost story contained remarkably few transatlantic distinctions. With the growing importance of contemporary settings, it was rare for American ghost story authors to base a story in Britain or vice versa, but the substance of the stories – and of the ghosts presented within them – remained largely consistent across the national divide. This is mirrored in both the popularity and general public views of the spiritualist movement, a movement which had very little in the way of national distinctions. As such, my choice of both American and British periodicals in Chapter One serves to illustrate the transatlantic commonality of the discourses in which the literary ghost story developed. Through examining the development of both this particular form of ghost narrative and the attitudes towards ghost narratives in general, I will demonstrate that

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20. Although the periodicals discussed here are those with a reasonably wide circulation, the nineteenth-century ghost story was not restricted to such relatively prestigious venues. This, in turn, has contributed to a disproportionate sampling of the better-known (and more frequently anthologised) authors' work in later criticism; Jessica Salmonson estimates from her own research into women's supernatural fiction in Victorian periodicals that 'the majority of it [was] never reprinted in any form and only haphazardly reproduced' (Salmonson 1989, x). While pragmatic constraints would exclude any attempt to correct this balance for the purposes of my current discussion, the potential differences between widely-distributed and more obscure supernatural fiction provide a promising, and as-yet neglected, area for further research and discussion.

the connections between spiritualism and the literary ghost story were wide-ranging, comprehensive, and inescapable.

Section Two elaborates on the interrelationship between spiritualism and the literary ghost story through examining the two aspects of the ghost most affected by the emerging spiritualist conception of the spectral: ghostly agency (in Chapter Two) and ghostly appearance (in Chapter Three). Chapter Two takes as its central premise the assertion that spiritualism brought a kind of freedom to the ghosts of non-spiritualist narratives, who were previously largely powerless figures. Even those pre-spiritualist ghosts which serve a central role in their own narratives, such as Jacob Marley or Old Hamlet, demonstrate a degree of limitation and restriction which places them far below the living in terms of their ability to act as agents in their own right; pre-spiritualist ghosts may have required action, but they typically appeared in order to request the living to act on their behalf. Further, pre-spiritualist ghosts were restricted psychologically as well as physically; the later Victorian ghost, which lost none of its humanity with death, contrasts with its forebears in literature which presented a conception of the spectral far more limited in scope. These predecessors were fragments of their former selves, restricted from entering the afterlife proper by some unresolved circumstance surrounding their death, and defined primarily in the narrative by their status as embodiments of that circumstance itself.

Spiritualism's idea of the powerful dead, freed from life's restrictions and able to appear and act at a time and in a manner of their own choosing, imbued the ghost story after 1850 and fundamentally changed the narrative form itself. Ghosts not only became more powerful, but more psychologically complex, as their narratives demonstrated a wider range of ghostly motivations and actions. It is for this reason that I place agency, rather than power, at the centre of this discussion. Spiritualist-influenced ghosts were defined not merely by having a greater scope of possible actions available to them, but by a framework within which they were fundamentally human figures, serving as characters in their own right. Through discussing the development of this idea within the literary ghost story, and illustrating the emergence of this new conception of ghostly agency, this chapter will place ideas of that agency within a wider range of discourse about ghosts, and demonstrate how the changes within the literary ghost story in this regard grew out of the new developments in spiritualism.

Chapter Three extends this argument to the developments in ghostly appearance which took place in nineteenth-century supernatural literature. From an earlier aesthetic of the macabre, in which ghosts' typical appearance in the form of animated corpses emphasised the horror of the manner of their deaths, later Victorian ghosts tended towards figures that were either unremarkably human or angelically beautiful. Through a description of the history of ghostly appearance before the 1850s, this chapter establishes that the macabre ghost was not isolated to

Gothic literature, but was rather the conventional form of the pre-spiritualist ghost, exemplifying as it did the conception of ghosts as a horrific and undesirable interruption to the natural order. As spiritualism portrayed the ghostly as an ascended state of humanity, so too did the ghosts of the literary ghost story develop into a different aesthetic mirroring such conceptions. Further, this chapter argues, the new conception of spectrality was not only incidental to the narratives in which it appeared, but rather a fundamental feature both of individual narratives and of the Victorian ghost story as we retrospectively view it today.

While Section Two focused on the figure of the ghost within ghost narratives, Section Three moves the discussion to the form and mechanics of those narratives themselves. Chapter Four turns its attention from the ghost onto its living witnesses, and sets out to investigate the narrator's central role within the developing genre. The Victorian ghost story is, after all, fundamentally preoccupied with the interaction between the living and the dead, whether that encounter is horrifying, touching or comical. While the genre is frequently viewed as a reaction against increased scepticism and rationalisation, the reality, I argue, is a more complex interrelation of knowledge, rationality and the spectral, epitomised in the narrator-protagonist at the centre of so many ghost stories. The sceptic, where present, is in turns sympathised with, mocked, confronted, and justified; there is no unifying trend in the figure's presentation, except for the overall focus on one character's attempts to understand the supernatural. As such, this chapter draws the influence of spiritualism outside the

figure of the ghost itself and into the narrative surrounding it, demonstrating how a changed conception of the ghost affected the understanding of those around it, and the narratives in which it appeared.

Finally, Chapter Five views the narrators and protagonists of the literary ghost story in a broader light, considering not only their relationship to the ghosts but also their relationship to the ghost story form in itself. By the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the conventions of the spiritualist-influenced ghost story had become fully established, narratives began to demonstrate a clear tendency towards the use of this form by individual narrators and authors as a stage on which particular anxieties could be acted out, and particular situations could be reframed and understood. Beginning with narratives which are strictly Victorian in chronology but only arguably ghost stories in content, such as Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper', this chapter will move on to discuss how ghost-story conventions took on particular symbolic significance by a case study of a series of veridical narratives, those surrounding the supposedly 'most haunted house in England', Borley Rectory, from the 1920s to the 1950s.[20]

In a discussion of literary ghost story customs and conventions outside the framework of the literary ghost story itself, this chapter concludes by demonstrating

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20. I use 'veridical' in Montague Summers' sense, to describe ghost narratives which supposedly describe real events and are presented as factual accounts (see Summers 1931, *passim*). In this, veridical narratives are distinguished from folkloric accounts, a form with a far more complex relationship to narrative convention and objective reality.

how the spiritualist-influenced ghost story became the textual equivalent of a spiritualist medium in its own right, allowing for particular concerns, demands, debates and ideas to be voiced through the ostensible context of interaction with the dead. It is in this sense, then, that the literary ghost story could rise to critical focus as a forum for particular cultural or personal anxieties, whether based on class, gender, or more individual concerns. The ghost story's seemingly frustrating tendency to escape the kind of generalisations which Nina Auerbach describes as the fundamental flaw in most criticism on the subject, arises from just this development: the ghost story presents potential and possibility for a broad variety of uses, without limiting itself to those of any set of authors, readers or groups. The Victorian ghost story as we view it today, and the criticism which has grown up around it, arise only through the nurturing and transformative influence of the spiritualist movement.

Chapter One. Ghosts and Spiritualism in the Victorian periodical press: two case studies.

This appetency for communion with the dead, and the credence which is accorded to the practitioners and mediums through whom the secrets of the nether world are disclosed, are characteristics of the current years, which as chroniclers and critics of the times, we cannot wholly overlook.
(Anonymous writer on 'Spiritual Manifestations', 1853)

The title of Robert Dale Owen's *The Debateable Land between This World and the Next*, his lengthy 1871 apologia for spiritualism and its claims, has a twofold meaning in the broader context of nineteenth-century spiritualism. While Owen no doubt intended to suggest that his argument would centre upon the existence of a gradual continuum between heaven and earth, rather than a sharp division, the large body of writing on spiritualism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries indicates that this 'land' itself was a space of and for debate. Interest in spiritualism was far from limited to spiritualists and their own publications, and for several decades the mainstream periodical press assumed the mantle of this discussion space, reporting developments, opinions, discoveries and exposés of the movement and its associated phenomena.

To consider the pieces on spiritualism published in these periodicals as isolated documents would, however, be doing a disservice to the substance of the

periodical form itself. While attitudes towards spiritualism are intertwined with those on rationalism, popular fads, trans-Atlantic cultural exchange and religion more generally, it is upon the accompanying developments in supernatural literature that this chapter will focus. In addition to the spiritualist ghosts dissected and debated on their pages, the spectres of the ghost story also gained a forum in these periodicals. Ghosts and ghost stories are most often associated with the Christmas numbers of periodicals such as Dickens's *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, but they were not restricted to individual issues (or, indeed, individual magazines) in particular; indeed, as Carpenter and Kolmar argue in the introduction to their select bibliography of women's ghost stories, monthly magazines aimed at a middle-class readership were more important to the development of supernatural fiction in the nineteenth century than the serial publication of Gothic and sensation fiction targeting the working classes (Carpenter and Kolmar 1998, xvi).

Influential figures such as Charles Dickens, Joseph Sheridan LeFanu and Rhoda Broughton contributed to the explosive popularity of the ghost story in both authorial and editorial roles, and featured in a complex interrelation of familial and professional relationships in creating and feeding a growing appetite for the ghost story in periodical form. After becoming proprietor and editor of the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1861, for instance, LeFanu continued to publish his own supernatural fiction alongside that of other authors, including his niece, Rhoda Broughton, whose early career was significantly thus assisted. Other examples of

LeFanu's ghost stories appeared in several other well-reputed periodicals of the period, including *Temple Bar* ('Squire Toby's Will', Jan. 1868) and *Belgravia* ('Mr Justice Harbottle', a revision of the earlier 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street, published in the December 1853 issue of the *DUM*), which appeared in the January 1872 issue). The latter, at the time LeFanu's story was published, was under the editorship of M. E. Braddon, whose reputation for ghost stories and sensation fiction was already well established; LeFanu also published one ghost story, 'Dickon the Devil', in *London Society* when the magazine was under the editorship of Florence Marryat, whose first ghost stories were also published in *Belgravia*. Marryat's father, Captain Frederick Marryat, published his serialised novel *The Phantom Ship* in *The New Monthly Magazine* in 1839.

As the popularity of the ghost story grew, the ghosts presented in their pages did not remain static. The nineteenth century in general, and the decades from 1850 to 1900 in particular, saw drastic developments in the form and behaviour of these ghosts and in their place in the narratives within which they featured. In tracing the history and development of spiritualism as presented in Victorian literary periodicals, this chapter will draw connections between the ghosts of both, arguing that spiritualism provided a new conception of the appearance, behaviour and origin of ghosts which was gradually taken up by the ghost story despite wide-ranging scepticism of the movement itself. While I do not wish to reduce the broad spectrum of the Victorian periodical press to a small number of examples deemed

ultimately representative, the constraints of time and space in this discussion restrict

me to a limited number of periodicals for the purposes of this discussion; as such, I

will concentrate primarily on *Harper's Monthly* magazine and the Dickens-edited

Household Words and *All The Year Round*, with the caveat that my observations form

a case study of the journals in question rather than a set of firm conclusions about

literary periodicals as a whole. In selecting both British and American periodicals,

however, and in choosing those with a relatively wide circulation (in contrast, for

example, to the limited audiences reading the pricier *Blackwood's*), I hope to

demonstrate that the common trends evident in these examples can be usefully

extrapolated to a broader Victorian reading public as a whole.[21]

Harper's New Monthly Magazine

In 1853, when sixteen spiritualist periodicals were already in print in the US

and the Fox sisters were touring the country with their séances,[22] the editor of

Harper's New Monthly Magazine penned one of the mainstream periodicals' first

lengthy attacks on spiritualism.[23] '[T]his new form of demonology', Henry J.

Raymond's editorial claims, is no more than 'a rank Sadducceism, that impudently

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[21]. Although I have chosen periodicals from Britain and America, none of the periodicals discussed here were read exclusively in their home country. *Harper's* produced a European edition from 1880; both *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* were reprinted in America, although the latter was far more successful than the former. For a lengthier discussion of the Dickens periodicals in this context, see William Buckler's '*Household Words* in America' (1951) and Gerald Grubb's 'The American Edition of *All The Year Round*' (1953).

[22]. Finucane (1996, 179) gives a figure of ten, while Ann Braude, in her extensive 1989 bibliography of spiritualist periodicals and periodicals primarily concentrated on the subject, lists 16 in print by 1853.

[23]. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* became *Harper's Monthly Magazine* in 1900, and *Harper's Magazine* in 1913. For simplicity, I will be abbreviating the title to *Harper's* throughout this discussion.

pretends to be converted to a belief in devils and spirits of its own making'; all its claims, and all its supposed phenomena, are only 'sheer naturalism, under an assumed spiritual form' (Raymond 1853, 699).[24] As the last statement implies, these accusations of 'demonology' refer not to real activity with supernatural beings, but to the 'awful blasphemy' of the replacement of the spiritual with a materialistic system of belief, in which spirit itself was naturalised (700). It is not spiritualism's focus on ghosts that is criticised here, but its presentation and use of them; by speaking of electricity, progress and physical laws to explain its phenomena, spiritualism drags the soul itself into the mundane discourse of scientific rationalism.

While a condemnation of spiritualism and the modern, naturalistic attitude towards ghosts forms the focus of the article, the body of its length is taken up with a detailed discussion of its suggested antidote. Ghost stories, Raymond begins, have 'ever been regarded as forming a legitimate part of our more serious, as well as our lighter literature' (699). While potentially dangerous to readers (they may 'disturb the healthy balance of the soul', especially in children), they provide a much-needed counterbalance to the 'arid scientific tangibility' of dogmatic rationalism (699). Raymond is careful to emphasise his – and by extension, his periodical's – own position as one of moderation, condemning 'all the horrors of the worst novels' of

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[24]. It is a testament to the strength of Raymond's opposition to spiritualism that his name appeared in a spiritualist text of 1869 shortly after his death, in which his spirit recanted his former scepticism. He had attended séances in spirit form, he described; he wrote in order to 'assur[e] my friends that I have the prospect of as active a life before me as the one I had just closed on earth' (Horn 1869, 19).

the Gothic tradition, but remains unequivocal in his support; 'if compelled to choose between the two poisons' as reading material for schools, he would rather have Radcliffe or Maturin than Spurzheim's *Phrenology*, or Combe's *Constitution of Man* (699).

Harper's itself had been printing ghost stories in various forms since its inaugural issue in 1850. Raymond's 1853 editorial divides these into three categories: anecdotes 'either supposed to be true or to have a sufficiency of evidence demanding, at least, a philosophical investigation' (699), serious fiction, and lighter fiction frequently written with an intention to ridicule. This combination of the fictional and the anecdotal, as equally illustrated by other literary periodicals, is very much a property of its period; by the 1870s, 'ghost stories' would become primarily fiction. (For the 1850s and 1860s, the broader term 'ghost *narratives*' is more useful in describing periodical coverage of ghosts for this reason.) Since the narratives themselves vary, the functions Raymond ascribes to them are inflected differently depending on their tone. It refers to 'cultivating the imagination, or enhancing its religious awe, which was always more or less the effect of the old ghostly tales' (699), but expands the category of ghost narratives in *Harper's* to include the comedic 'tales of a lighter character' (699), to which this would not seem to apply. The connection here lies in the idea of promoting an ideal; these lighter stories are intended to mock not the ghosts themselves, but 'the absurd and trifling evidence on which such appearances are sometimes credited' (699). As such,

they do not contradict the purposes of the serious fiction, but rather enhance its scope. Ghost stories should serve a beneficial purpose in promoting truth, be it moral, aesthetic, religious or empirical.

Despite ghost stories' variety, then, Raymond maintains that the variety of forms these narratives took does not detract from their common purpose. Although its presentation may differ, the ghost will appear, and act, in the same manner (and with approximately the same effect) as it does in all ghost narratives. Moreover, with the illustration of a story related by Pliny the Younger,[25] he argues that ghost narratives - and their ghosts - have remained fundamentally unchanged for several thousand years. '[N]othing new has been introduced', it concludes.

> In ancient times as well as modern, ghosts ever appeared by night; they ever vanish mysteriously at the first symptoms of dawn […] [t]here is the same pale raiment, the same fear-inspiring aspect, the same undefined and vanishing form. (701-2)

The similarity of ghost narratives over time is exaggerated here, and the other classical ghosts the editorial mentions (Patroclus and Clytemnestra) were not identical with their Jacobean or early nineteenth-century counterparts. There is a commonality of appearance and action, however, and this is especially pronounced

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[25]. LXXIII in the General Letters, written to Licinius Sura. In Pliny's story, the ghost of an old man draped in rattling chains haunts a house rented by the philosopher Athenodorus. When the ghost leads Athenodorus into the garden, it vanishes over a particular spot; digging in the ground the next day, Athenodorus discovers a man's skeleton wrapped in rusting chains. The skeleton is given proper burial rites, and the ghost vanishes. (See chapter 5, footnote 7, for more on later developments of the core features of this narrative.) An increasing movement towards the strictly fictional nature of the ghost story can be seen in the *Harper's* editorial's decision to give it a title ('The Haunted House at Athens'), but the more secular nature of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century ghost stories is implied by other translations; where Memoth's 1746 translation has Pliny asking Sura whether ghosts 'exist and have […] a measure of divinity' (Melmoth [1776] 1915, 69), Betty Radice's 1967 translation reads 'exist and have […] some sort of supernatural power' (Radice 1967, 202-3) for the same passage.

in the general understanding of ghosts by the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. By the later decades of the nineteenth century, the fictional ghosts which the editorial holds up as a counter to spiritualism would be changed, fundamentally, by its effect.

Despite Raymond's editorial's claim to maintaining an eternally unchanging presentation of the ghost, the new ghosts of spiritualism were already starting to establish a presence in *Harper's* pieces by 1853. An anonymous 1852 piece, titled 'New Discoveries in Ghosts', even presents a reasonably favourable approach to the idea of empirically-verifiable spectres. The ghosts of older narratives, those lauded in Raymond's 1853 editorial, are here presented as both outdated and ridiculous; the author

> [has] no faith in ghosts, according to the old sense of the word, and I could grope with comfort through any amount of dark old rooms, or midnight aisles, or over church-yards, between sunset and cock-crow. I can face a spectre. Nevertheless, I do believe that the great mass of "ghost stories," of which the world is full, has not been built entirely upon the inventions of the ignorant and superstitious. In plain words, while I, of course, throw aside a million of idle fictions, or exaggerated facts, I do believe in ghosts – rather, I do not believe them to be supernatural. (Anon. 1852, 513)

Believing ghosts to be explainable on naturalistic grounds does not, therefore, necessitate *dis*belief. Further, seeing them does not indicate an inability to become a fully rational being in separating one's imagination from reality; rather, 'there are powers latent, or nearly latent, in the ordinary healthy man, which […] [can] become active, and develop themselves in an extraordinary way' (513), and

reluctance to investigate is a hallmark not of rationalism and sanity but of those who 'have no leisure for a fair enquiry' (513) Indeed, the 'wondrous truths' to be revealed through such measures are directly equated, as the article's title suggests, to scientific and technological progress; Reichenbach's investigations into magnetism and mesmerism are part of a more general trend towards discovery and control over the forces of nature, 'down to the recent improvements in street-lighting and steam locomotion' (512).

Although the author of this piece does not claim to be a spiritualist, the assertions that the apparently supernatural can and should be investigated as a new level of human knowledge echoes spiritualist claims. At this early stage in the movement's history, its connections to the theories of figures like Reichenbach and Andrew Jackson Davis, both of whom were instrumental to the formation of spiritualism in bringing the idea of empirical verifiability to bear on the apparently supernatural, were clear. It seems unlikely that spiritualism would ever have achieved such popularity had its future audience, especially that of the wider New England community within which the Fox sisters began their ascendancy to fame, not already become familiar with Davis's life and work. Indeed, the idea that trance communication with spirits could result in moral and spiritual enlightenment owes as much to the connections between trance states and metaphysical wisdom popularised by Davis as it does to the exchanges between the Fox sisters and the murdered pedlar whose spirit claimed to be buried in their basement.

Davis claimed to have communicated with the spirits of the physician Galen and the theologian-mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg, resulting in what Robert W. Delp summarises as 'lengthy explanations of the origin of the universe and equally protracted discussions of visionary schemes for the reorganization of human society' (Delp 1967, 44). Davis first published *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelation, and a Voice to Mankind* in 1847, and integrated himself and his work smoothly into the developing spiritualist movement over the next decade. From the beginning of his career, he was adamant in his determination to connect his revelations to scientific practice and progress, as exemplified in the following from *Principles of Nature*:

> Not that the mind should leave its rational resting-place, and cleave to that which is miraculous, superstitious, or without demonstration: but the reasoner upon these subjects should be like the chemist, and not base his conclusions upon the visible *appearance* of the substance, or form; but rather *analyze* the composition to find its *elements*, and *invisible reality*. Then the arguments based on these internal principles will lead synthetically to irresistible conclusions, irrespective of the form or appearance of the substance external. And then the truth will become manifest; and to it, as such, you should respond with the deepest, internal, true affection and veneration. (Davis 1852, 102)[26]

With this general trend in mind, the 1852 *Harper's* piece, and its author's advocacy of scientific methods in uncovering a new, spiritual wisdom, takes on a particularly spiritualist light. At this stage in the movement's history, the ghosts of spiritualism

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[26]. For more on Davis's contributions to early spiritualism, see Robert W. Delp's 'Andrew Jackson Davis: Prophet of American Spiritualism' (1967), as well as Davis's own autobiography, *The Magic Staff* (1857).

were not marked out as distinct because of their appearance, but rather because of the ways in which their supporters suggested they be treated. The materialism which the 1853 editorial associates with spiritualism is thus a response to that movement's ideas of ghosts' narrative place and purpose; spiritualist ghosts should be approached with a spirit of scientific veneration, presenting moral and spiritual progress as something to be attained through empirical means.

The narrative function of the pre-spiritualist ghost, by contrast, is well illustrated by a story in the issue of *Harper's* immediately following Raymond's 1853 editorial. In an anonymously authored narrative titled "Fisher's Ghost", the silent apparition of an injured man appears near the site of his death, visibly showing the blood and wounds from the blow that killed him. After the witnesses investigate, the man's body is found, his death is revealed to be a murder, and an acquaintance of his brought to trial. The accused claims innocence, and states that both God and the murdered man would support him; however, the ghost's appearance is implied to be testimony that both have already spoken out his guilt, and he later confesses. The story ends with the narrator's claim that it is 'very extraordinary, but is, nevertheless, true in substance, if not in every particular' (781).[27]

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[27]. 'Fisher's Ghost' is based on a murder committed in Sydney in the 1830s, and the subsequent court case. For more on the legend, see Andrew Lang's 'The Truth about "Fisher's Ghost"', first published in *Blackwood's* and subsequently reprinted in *The Valet's Tragedy and Other Stories* (1903).

In substance, if not in every particular, Fisher's ghost also typifies the pre-spiritualist ghost. This apparition does not guide its witnesses towards the enlightenment to be gained from an empirical study of the apparently supernatural, and cannot be understood through such methods itself; instead, it exemplifies the ideals promoted by Raymond's editorial, serving to reinforce morality and an appropriately deferential attitude towards the supernatural (here situated closer to the divine than to the scientific). Not every fictional ghost of the early nineteenth century appeared for a purpose so dramatic as to reveal a murder; in fact, the seventeenth century had already seen the introduction of narratives in which ghostly behaviour tended towards the mundane, with ghosts appearing for what R. C. Finucane describes as 'trivial social and familial problems' (Finucane 1996, 150). However, the conventions governing its appearance are the same as those of its earlier counterparts. Typically, in pre-spiritualist ghost narratives, a person's ghost appears due to something left unresolved or incomplete at their death – an unsolved (or unavenged) murder, a lack of necessary burial rituals, an unpaid debt, inadequate provisions made for the surviving family – which has left their ghost unable to transition fully to the afterlife proper. When the situation is recognised and corrected, the ghost disappears. Fisher's ghost, then, fits into an already established pattern where ghosts appear to signify an interruption to the desirable status quo; the ghosts of spiritualism, heralding a new era of enlightenment, occupy a wholly different narrative space.

As the supposedly folkloric basis of 'Fisher's Ghost' suggests, and as Raymond's 1853 editorial explicitly notes, ghost narratives of the mid-nineteenth century and earlier often made little distinction between the veridical and the strictly literary. While the editorial makes an effort to separate and categorise these, the tendency of ghost narratives in *Harper's* during the 1850s and 1860s towards fiction presented as anecdotes demonstrates the unclear boundaries which would continue to exist for several decades.[28] The qualifier placed upon "Fisher's Ghost" suggests that such anecdotes were already tending towards the fictional, affirming that they need only be considered 'true' in a symbolic sense, but nevertheless, veridical ghostly narratives greatly outnumber the purely fictional in the 1850s contributions to *Harper's*.

Framing devices of overheard stories, found manuscripts and related tales, common to veridical narratives, are probably deliberately reminiscent of the early Gothic tradition; by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Gothic literature (although by now only rarely claiming to be a true record of events) certainly provided virtually all examples of purely literary ghosts. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that the Victorian ghost story is a direct descendant of the Gothic novel, or that the anecdotal and folkloric ghost narratives of previous

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[28]. There is, of course, no stage in the history of ghost stories in which *all* such narratives have been presented as fictional; the twentieth century's enthusiasm for supernatural anecdotes was no less than that of the nineteenth. (Gillian Bennett further argues that the existence of such anecdotes supports her findings that overall belief in ghosts among the British population has not decreased during the interval.) However, the lines between the fictional and anecdotal have been drawn increasingly firmly since the mid-nineteenth century, and narratives of separate categories have only rarely appeared in the same for a, as they did in the mid-nineteenth century literary periodicals.

centuries were subsumed beneath it. As Raymond's 1853 editorial emphatically claims, ghost stories had existed in folkloric and anecdotal forms since classical times, and the overlap between these and fictional forms which clearly still existed at the time of writing strengthens their role in forming ghost narratives as they were understood in the nineteenth century.

These blurred boundaries between fictional and anecdotal narratives strengthen the editorial's claim to the moral purpose served by 'ghost stories'. In previous centuries, such anecdotes were not merely associated with moral lessons but used specifically to advance them. Medieval ghosts existed in a specifically Christian, and purgatorial, construct of the afterlife; medieval ghost anecdotes accessible to the modern researcher have survived in written form, intended for use in sermons and religious writings. Their ghosts were souls in Purgatory, permitted to return to the living in order to seek repentance or confession for sins which had prevented them going to Heaven.[29] The cliché of a ghost unable to rest until a specific duty is carried out applied in a literal, and frequently horrific, sense to the medieval narratives of ghosts condemned to the tortures of Purgatory.

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[29]. It is possible, of course, that medieval ghost-lore extended beyond this construct, and that our conclusions are influenced by the fact that only the written religious narratives have survived; however, the significance given to ghost narratives in these writings affirms that ghosts were predominantly associated with such a purpose. For more on medieval ghost narratives, and some examples of the narratives in question, see Chapter 3 of Finucane's *Ghosts*. The medievalist and ghost-story author M. R. James also published a collection and translation of twelve such narratives in the *English Historical Review* of 1922; Gillian Bennett comments further on their connections to English and Scandinavian folklore in *Alas, Poor Ghost*.

By the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ghost anecdotes were still being compiled for use in sermons. With the removal of Purgatory from the prevailing doctrine of the time, however, the ghosts' purposes became less clear. Without a specific location in which to exist, and therefore without a definite set of rules governing their reasons for appearing as ghosts, they were far less likely than their medieval counterparts to affirm the importance of a particular piece of doctrine, such as the sacrament of confession.[30] The convention of ghosts appearing due to unresolved matters regarding their death remained in a more general sense. R. C. Finucane and Keith Thomas both note the increasingly trivial nature of these ghosts' motivations, something which, although always present in ghost narratives, seems to become predominant during this period. Seventeenth-century ghosts did appear to the living in order to confess their sins (or to accuse their murderers, or to demand revenge), but also to request that their relatives clear debts left outstanding at their death, to find money they had intended for the provision of their family, to fulfil a promise they had made, or to search for a hidden copy of their will. Ghosts no longer needed the intercession of prayers and indulgences to release them from Purgatory, but they remained unable to join the afterlife proper until the incomplete circumstances of their deaths had been resolved.

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[30]. For more on the importance of Purgatory to ghost narratives, particularly those of the previous century, see Stephen Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory*. I discuss this more in relation to the Victorian ghost story in Chapter Three.

It is with these conventions, always implied by the language of ghosts being *condemned* to walk the earth or *unable* to rest, that the majority of pre-spiritualist ghosts in literature should be understood. Their appearance as ghosts is due to the circumstances which surround them, rather than a decision made wholly (or even partly) on their part, and the role of the living is to identify and resolve the disrupted situation. Pliny's ghost, haunting the site of his murder until reburied with the correct rituals; Hamlet's father, appearing in order to both identify his murderer and request that his son avenge his death; Jacob Marley, literally chained to the earth by his own avarice and disregard for the poor and needy, doing his own penance in convincing Scrooge to choose a different path. They may not be held within the borders and doctrines of Purgatory, but these ghosts, and countless others like them, are still unable to leave the earth for the afterlife until the living act on their behalf.[31]

By contrast, spiritualism introduced a concept of ghosts in which these conventions no longer applied. In spiritualist doctrine, the afterlife was never truly separate from this one, and the only journey that must be undertaken towards it was complete once the soul had left the body. Spiritualist ghosts did not appear because their transition to the afterlife was incomplete, or because they were

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[31]. The ghost of the murdered pedlar, communicating with the Fox sisters in Hydesville at the beginning of the spiritualist movement, would of course fall into this category. It is worth emphasising, however, that not only this ghost but the Fox sisters themselves quickly became unnecessary, if not irrelevant, to spiritualism as a movement. The nature of spirit communication, by which any group of curious individuals could communicate with the dead themselves without need of leaders or professional mediums, led to a movement in which the transition from one conception of ghosts to another could happen rapidly.

prevented in some way from reaching it; instead, they could appear to the living at any time they chose, in order to pass along whichever messages they wished.[32] These ghosts had their own motives beyond a need to resolve the unfinished circumstances surrounding their deaths, and as a result, acted in ways that demonstrated their own personalities rather than the laws governing their appearances to the living.

When *Harper's* editorials returned to the subject of spiritualism throughout 1853, in the May, June and October issues, the idea of ghosts initiating communication of their own choosing was frequently brought to the fore as a subject of derision and concern. The 'spirits' of séances produce nonsense (answering 'Yes' to the question of 'Had the ghost of Hamlet's father *seventeen noses*?', for example [Anon. 1853c, 133]) and untruth (listing the age of one sitter's father as 60 and his cause of death as illness, when he was in fact killed in an accident at the age of 37 [Anon. 1853b, 851]). In cataloguing the 'follies' of spiritualism, 'like flies in amber' (Anon 1853c, 133), the nature of communication earns especial mention, with the author seeming to relish its inaccuracy and absurdity:

"Does James miss his children?"

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[32]. While spiritualism was based on the fundamental point of these ghosts appearing willingly, some spiritualists saw this as happening at significant cost to the ghosts themselves. Due to a construction of the physical body as inherently corrupt and sinful (one indication among many that spiritualism borrowed many of its assumptions from the Victorian evangelical tradition), the phenomenon of 'full-form materalisations', in which ghosts temporarily clothed themselves with physical matter during seances in order to be visible and tangible to their witnesses, led at least one commentator to refer to them as angels. See footnote 9 of my introduction for more on this,

"Yes!"
(He never had any.)
"How many had he?"
"Yes!!"
"How many boys?"
"Yes!!"
"What did he die of?"
"Wafer!" (ibid, 133).

'We might better believe that Bacon, and Shakspeare [sic.], and Calvin, and Franklin, and Channing, had forever ceased to exist,' the author continues, 'than that their ghostly state should have reduced them to such a condition of drivelling idiocy' (127).

That figures such as Shakespeare, Calvin and Franklin should initiate communication with the living in order to convey such trifling and ridiculous information is at the heart of the objections to spirit-communication made here and elsewhere. Such reports indicate not merely the potential of fraud, but of irreverence: if spiritualist ghosts do not appear in order to mend a fault in the social and moral status quo, they and their advocates must by inference be causing such a fault themselves.[33] While spiritualists drew substantially different conclusions from the idea of ghosts appearing outside the framework of a set narrative purpose, they noted the distinction nonetheless, making it a central tenet of spiritualist philosophy. The dead communicate with the living to bring comfort, or moral and

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[33] The first of these was also a frequent subject in anti-spiritualist *Harper's* pieces. See, for example, Charles H. Webb's 'The Confessions of a Reformed Planchettist' (December 1868), in which the author relates a history of fraudulent spiritualist activity which eventually led him to deceiving his own mother: 'from Planchetting one might turn to pocket-picking, easily, and with no other preliminary practice' (Webb 1868, 102).

spiritual advancement, or to suggest social restructure under wiser spirit guidance, but they do so of their own initiative, and often at substantial cost to themselves. The dead are not restricted to the world of the living, but can pass between it and the afterlife at will. For spiritualists, the transition of death represented liberation.

Within the charge of triviality which these *Harper's* editorial pieces aim at spirit communication lies another echo of the accusations of materiality, of degrading the spiritual, made in Henry J. Raymond's 1853 editorial on ghost stories. The ghosts of spiritualism may have been exotic in nature, but they were domestic in circumstance: séances typically happened in the home, the movement belonged to the contemporary years of the nineteenth century, and its phenomena were immediate rather than being detached through existing in written narrative alone.[34] Their separation from the ghost narratives of Gothic fiction, in this, is dramatic, and made clearer by the tendency of mid-eighteenth century fictional ghost stories to rely upon Gothic conventions. In this aspect, the ghost narratives in *Harper's* during the second half of the nineteenth century show an increasing trend away from pre-spiritualist ghosts and towards a conception of ghosts more in accordance with that of spiritualism. The Gothic trappings of distant times and exotic settings become increasingly replaced by the mundane and domestic, and the ghosts themselves begin to operate according to the freer rules and conventions governing

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[34] Many literary ghost stories would later echo this preference in their claims to prioritising oral narratives above their written equivalents. I discuss the ideology and consequences underlying this in Chapter Four.

spiritualist appearance, rather than the pre-spiritualist conception of ghostly apparitions being reliant upon unresolved external circumstances.

Other contributions to *Harper's* of this period connect ghost narratives to the distant past, or to appropriately exotic foreign locales: rural Ireland in J. Sheridan LeFanu's 'Ghost Stories of Chapelizod' (March 1851), or India in the anonymous 'Ghosts and Sorceresses of India' (November 1853). Gothic castles and distant pasts were still associated with ghosts and the ghostly as late as 1861, with John Berwick Harwood's 'Horror: A True Tale' appearing in the March issue. Increasingly, however, ghosts and ghost narratives were being presented as something contemporary. Indeed, the book review of Catherine Crowe's *Night Side of Nature* in the September 1850 issue refers to 'the literature of Ghosts and Ghost-Seers, which, like the furniture and costume of the middle ages, seems to be coming back into fashion' (Anon. 1850, 574).

Although it may have been initiated by spiritualism, this relocation of ghosts from exotic to domestic nevertheless started to filter into supernatural fiction. 'An Incident in the Life of Mademoiselle Clairon', published in *Harper's* in its inaugural issue of 1850, shows a ghost narrative which still draws strongly on the Gothic tradition, and in doing so still places ghosts at a geographical and chronological distance from their readers.[35] Set over a hundred years before the time of its

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[35]. As with many of the submissions to *Harper's* in its earliest years, *An Incident* had previously been

inclusion in *Harper's*, it concerns a dead man haunting the lover who left him several months before his death and refused his dying wish to see him on his deathbed. The narrative takes place in the mid-eighteenth century, and the introductory preface draws particular attention to this distance between the narrative and its time of publication, concentrating its focus not on the date of writing but on the time passed since. Mademoiselle Clairon died in the first decade of the nineteenth century; this narrative was 'written in her old age, of an occurrence which had taken place half a century before' (Hogarth 1850, 83).

The narrative itself also draws attention to the importance of its distanced setting. Describing the situation of the characters before the man's death, the narrator states that '[h]e lodged at that time on the Rempart, near the Chausee d'Antin; I resided in the Rue de Bussy, near the Abbaye St Germain' (83). The attention to detail of location here does not merely emphasise its importance in the narrative, but literally prioritises it over character by making specifics of location, while irrelevant to the plot, the focus of the narrator's and reader's attention. Other references to the narrative's setting have the same effect; the narrator is in Versailles since 'all the public performances had been transferred [there] on account of the marriage of the Dauphin' (84), for example. With both physical and chronological

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published in a British literary periodical, in this case the Dickens-edited *Household Words* (March 30, 1850). The only alteration in *Harper's* is to the title, prefaced here with "Ghost Stories". Its authorship is not given in either periodical, but Anne Lohrli's 1973 work on *Household Words* (using the original *HW* account book in which contributors were listed), gives the author as George Hogarth and further adds that the narrative is 'from [a] letter appended to *Memoires d'Hippolyte Clairon*' (Lohrli 1973, 58), a French actress of the eighteenth century. Hogarth's connection to the work, and the veracity of the claim about its attached letter, remain unclear.

distance established, the additional distancing effect of the introductory preface's explanation that the narrative took place '[i]n an age of corruption, unparalleled in modern times', and 'amidst a generation of infidels and scoffers' (83), serves to complete the deliberate construction of a narrative separated from the time of its intended readership, while still suggesting a connection between the mentalities of that time and those of the reader's own.

The narrative's ghost belongs to its distanced setting rather than one more familiar to its readers. The melodramatic language used to describe both the 'long and piercing cry of unearthly horror' (83), and the reactions of those who hear it ('[t]he company looked aghast; I fainted, and remained for a quarter of an hour totally insensible' [83]) are reminiscent of the Gothic novel and its ruined castles, rather than the late Victorian ghost story and its drawing-rooms and suburbs. In the description of the dying man's vow to haunt his former lover after death, such language is combined with a pre-spiritualist conception of ghosts as remaining on earth in order to resolve something left incomplete:

> After a moment's silence, he took me by the hand with a frightful expression of despair. Barbarous woman! he cried; but she will gain nothing by her cruelty. As I have followed her in life, I shall follow her in death! I endeavoured to calm him; he was dead. (85)

Although the form and content of this narrative comply with the conventions described and implied in the April 1853 editorial, the idea of a ghost narrative as a means of promoting some form of truth is made predominantly in the

afterword. Here, the narrator of the introduction suggests that the anecdote has a naturalistic explanation, and that the noises were caused by Mademoiselle Clairon's maid. There follows a lengthy speculation on the role of adolescent girls in creating such illusions, including that of the Cock Lane ghost of the eighteenth century. Although there are no direct references to the Fox sisters nor the spiritualist movement, given both the evident awareness of spiritualism among the American public at the time and the narrative's proximity to the earlier editorial, the connection seems likely to be deliberate. The conclusion emphasises this focus:

> A thousand instances of long continued deception on the part of young women, begun in mere folly, and continued for the reasons just mentioned [youthful mischief combined with the desire to be powerful and important], though continued at an immense cost of trouble, resolution, and self-denial in all other respects, are familiar to most readers of strange transactions, medical and otherwise. (86).

Comparing the portrayal of the supernatural here to that in stories *Harper's* published in subsequent years shows a definite trend away from the exotic, and towards ghosts who shared both chronological and geographical space with their readers. The protagonist of Emma B. Cobb's 'What Did Miss Darrington See?', published in the December issue of 1870, is '[s]prung from one of the oldest and best families in Massachusetts', and working as a governess for a family in Kentucky, 'not so very long ago' (109). Clara F. Guernsey's 'The Walking Boy' is set 'in the lake country of New York', with no indications that the story took place any significant distance into the past (275); Georgiana S. Hull's 'A Legend of All-Hallow Eve' is set in Surrey, and the narrator's admission of having 'book-shelves filled

with works upon spiritualism' dates the story to a relatively recent year (Hull 1879, 833).

While the coverage of spiritualism in *Harper's* remains predominantly negative for the rest of the nineteenth century, the nature of this coverage reflects the changing conceptions of ghosts during the period, moving away from the archaic and Gothic towards the modern and domestic. It is worth noting here that the acrimony of the early contributions and editorials (such as Raymond's 1853 example) seems to be a direct response to the movement's rapid rise to popularity, and that this correlation does influence the type of coverage. An article in May 1857 notes the apparent decline of spiritualism in America, while suggesting that future generations may look upon it more kindly: '[t]he monks who imprisoned Galileo only evinced the bigotry of common sense. With their light, they were entitled to consider him an impostor; and with ours, we laugh at turning tables' (Anon. 1857a, 772). Another contribution later in the year relates the narrator's own experiences with the supernatural, and his inability to reconcile them with his avowed disbelief in spiritualism (Anon 1857b, 350). By 1858, when the American medium Daniel Dunglas Home was expanding the popularity and phenomena of spiritualism,[36] the conclusions made in *Harper's* material returned to the unequivocally negative, with one editorial referring to 'the monstrous delusion which is absurdly named Spiritualism' (Anon. 1858, 407).

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[36]. See footnote 33 of this chapter for more on Home's career.

While this reaction towards the movement's popularity may explain the varying levels of ferocity directed at the movement, however, it does not explain the general trend seen in the content of such criticism. The attacks of the 1850s focused primarily on spiritualism's differences, both from both pre-spiritualist ghosts and the religious concepts they were used to advance; the editorial of February 1858 echoes Raymond's earlier example in its assertion that 'no man who has a just idea of spirituality can recognise any spirits, celestial or diabolic, in the agents who rap on the tables' (407). After this, spiritualism becomes increasingly criticised on rationalistic and scientific grounds. As the idea of ghosts became increasingly associated in the popular consciousness with the modern variety criticised in Raymond's *Harper's* editorial, comparisons were not made between old ghosts and new ones, but between belief and disbelief in the ghostly. It is not the identity of the spirits rapping on the tables, but the idea of spirits rapping on tables itself, which is the focus of attack.

With this shift in approach to the subject matter comes a corresponding difference in the attitude taken towards followers of spiritualism in the pages of *Harper's*. These, for their part, changed from being portrayed as culpable agents or hapless victims of a growing moral evil to being portrayed as willing or unwilling accessories to a superstitious absurdity. In J. W. De Forest's 'Lieutenant Barker's Ghost Story', published in late 1869, the narrator suggests that a man who believes

himself to have seen a ghost 'might argue himself out of his senses, and come to believe in spiritualism' (718). Three years previously, in February of 1866, an unattributed 'Editor's Drawer' made a similar claim about the gullible subject of a ghost-related anecdote:

> We regret to say that Smithers has a distressing pecularity in his disposition. He is superstitious to the last degree. He listened to ghost stories when he was a comparative infant, and isn't well of it yet. (Anon. 1866, 407).

It is noteworthy here that ghost stories and spiritualism are conflated; all ghost narratives, spiritualist or otherwise, are considered to have the same nature and the same effect. Not only has the spiritualist conception of ghosts become the norm, but this conception has now come to dominate all ghost narratives.

Fiction in *Harper's* shows the same trend, with ghosts becoming increasingly influenced by spiritualism. An anonymous story entitled 'Birchknoll: A New Ghost Story of Old Virginia', published in the February, 1856 issue, illustrates the earliest stages of this transition. Here, as the subtitle implies, spiritualist ghosts are treated as a fashionable novelty, and contrasted with the older ghosts recorded in oral folklore. The narrator's belief in spiritualism contrasts with that of her nurse, who 'had a sovereign contempt for all "made up lies," which came in the heterodox shape of books and newspapers', and affirms that 'the only legitimate vehicle of ghostly lore is oral tradition' (337). Since the story's self-proclaimed medium is revealed as a fraud, the nurse's position is partially vindicated, but she remains a

portrayal of superstitious belief herself; the point is that ghosts, and belief in them, belongs in the more primitive, less rational past.

The contrast between old and new ghosts is made explicit from the beginning of the story, with spiritualism monopolising modern ghost narratives. 'In exchange for her marvels,' Caroline says of her old nurse, Susannah, 'I gave her the newest wonders of modern spiritualism – how the dead talk with the living, and not only talk, but write, through the spiritual telegraph' (887). Caroline's knowledge on spiritualism is gathered from 'the books, and newspapers, and Angelina,' the fashionable schoolfriend who rapidly becomes the household's centre of attention. 'Angelina was the oracle,' Caroline explains; '[s]he had the newest wonders and the most of them' (337). While the eventual relevation of Angelina's deceit means that spiritualism as a movement is presented as at least partially corrupt, its popularity is here ascribed to its status as new and fashionable rather than any inherent corruption in its followers. Spiritualism is the source of the most up-to-date, desirable ghosts, and its young adherents, like Caroline, are merely following the latest trends in the supernatural.

Susannah remains unimpressed by spiritualism and its marvels throughout the continued discussions of the subject, which are later augmented with the séances to which Angelina takes Caroline and her widowed brother. 'Don' believe it,' she counters; 'Dey isn't true spirits.' Real ghosts would not only avoid the

limitations of spiritualist appearances ('S'pose dey can come, can't dey show theirselves?' [337])[37], but also exist in far more reliable media than books and newspapers. Despite the narrator's eventual conclusion that '[s]piritual manifestations are only the old story in a new dress', the nurse draws a definitive line between the old ghosts in oral tradition and the new ones in print, placing her anecdotal knowledge and experience of ghosts above the narrator's faddish interest (337). It is not only the revelation of Angelina's deliberate fraud which vindicates her, but the narrator's eventual realisation that spiritualism relies for its effect on 'playing upon our sensibilities, and making traitors of our affections' (338).

Susannah's adamant refusal to ascribe any worth to ghost stories appearing in print rather than in oral tradition seems an archaic oddity to any reader familiar with the popularity of printed ghost stories in the last half of the nineteenth century. While her belief that '[d]ere is things […] dat ain't to be printed' (357) may complement the pre-spiritualist concept of ghosts and their narratives as serving a particular moral and sacred purpose, the sentiment would rapidly become out of place in the ghost narratives of the decades which followed. The nineteenth century saw the separation of the literary and the veridical ghost story for the first time,

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[37]. The phenomena associated with spiritualism developed over a period of decades, with the full-form manifestations of physical, visible ghosts only beginning to occur at seances in the 1870s. The first spiritualist ghosts communicated only through raps on furniture (using a code to reply 'yes' or 'no', or to spell out words); communication through trance mediums, who relayed the ghosts' messages either through speech or in writing, followed before the ghosts started to become visible.

While the number of ghost narratives in the 1850s and 1860s contributions to *Harper's* remained high, the ghosts which they featured still echoed their spiritualist forebears.[38] Here, again, were ghosts remaining on earth due to external circumstances outside their own choice and a need to rectify something unresolved at their deaths. One of the ghosts in LeFanu's 'Ghost Stories of Chapelizod' (March 1851) strikes down its murderer; 'Rather Ghostly' (August 1858) features a ghost returning to reveal the location of buried money, and another who appears nightly to tend to her children, her husband watching with 'mingled dread and love' (368). These ghosts appear as the result of some disruption in the natural or moral order, and only act in such a way as to correct it. Their limited agency would become greatly expanded in decades to come, in a fundamental change to this tradition which I discuss more comprehensively in Chapter Two. As spiritualism introduced the concept of ghosts who appeared through time and circumstances of their own choosing, the ghosts of the literary ghost story assumed a much greater degree of autonomy.

In the earlier *Harper's* ghost stories, this new idea of ghostly agency has yet to permeate the form's conventions. Typically, ghosts' actions are presented as the result of a set of rules governing their appearance, rather than as decisions made willingly by the ghost as active agent. The narrator of 'Horror: A True Tale' (March

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[38]. Including editorials and poetry concerning ghosts, there were typically five or more ghost narratives per year in these decades; the inaugural year of 1850 was exceptional in containing six during its six-month run. (For the most part, these were reprinted from other periodicals).

1861),[39] for example, refers to tales she has heard concerning 'spirits of wicked men forced to revisit the scenes of their earthly crimes' (520) and 'corpses of wicked men [which] were forced to rise and haunt in the body the places where they had wrought their deeds', all 'compelled to fade as morning brightened' (521).[40] The absence of the ghosts' own agency as characters able to make choices and act on their own behalf, as suggested here by the use of 'forced' and 'compelled' in describing their actions, is echoed in the majority of ghost narratives printed in the periodical during the 1850s and 1860s.

By the 1870s, this remainder of pre-spiritualist ghost narratives begins to fade. Ghosts still appear due to unresolved circumstances surrounding their deaths, but the narratives suggest that not only this, but also the actions they take in response, is their own choice; the situation left unresolved is now an opportunity, and their response is rarely as simple as to request that it be resolved and disappear. In Emma B. Cobb's 'What Did Miss Darrington See?' (December 1870), two lovers are separated both by social prohibitions and their own wildly differing personalities; one promises to return to the other after his death, and seems in fact to do so. The subsequent apparition that Miss Darrington sees might initially seem to belong with the pre-spiritualist ghost of 'An Incident in the Life of Mademoiselle

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[39]. Written by John Berwick Harwood, this was originally published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* earlier in the same year.

[40]. The concept of ghosts as animated corpses had already become relatively infrequent by the nineteenth century, although it was relatively common in medieval folklore. The majority of the apparitions in M. R. James's paper 'Twelve Medieval Ghosts' fall into this category, as, of course, do the fictional ghosts in his own narratives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Clairon', but unlike the earlier narrative, the emphasis here is upon the ghost as a character and agent in its own right.

Where Mademoiselle Clairon's narrative had a ghost that existed only as a hideous and terrifying scream, its counterpart in Miss Darrington's appears as he did in life. He does not speak, but is clearly a conscious agent; 'his lips parted with a tender smile, and his eyes dwelt on her with a glance so intense, so full of fathomless love and sorrow' (115). More significant, however, is the importance placed upon his reasons for appearing. While both ghosts promised before their deaths to return to their former lovers, Mademoiselle Clairon's narrative presents the subsequent appearance as the result of a decision made before death, its importance enhanced by being the last words spoken on the man's deathbed: 'As I have followed her in life, so shall I follow her in death!' (55). By contrast, his counterpart in Miss Darrington's narrative phrases his promise so as to imply that the actions taken in the future will be a result of his own choices: 'Do you think I would frighten her, or harm one hair of her little head? Not to terrify, but to bless, would I seek her', he says (113). His appearance, with 'a look of rapturous joy – a smile like the sunshine of heaven' (115), affirms his motivations.

In Clara F. Guernsey's 'The Walking Boy' (January 1873), the unresolved circumstances surrounding the eponymous boy's death are unconnected to the actions and motivations of his ghost. Murdered in unclear circumstances by his

grandfather, who was never directly accused of his death, Elon Merrion continues to haunt the family home. Some generations later, the narrator and several friends hear the story of Elon's life and death from an old servant while staying in the house, and are later woken during the night by the sound of ghostly footsteps. These, however, do not lead to a discovery of the truth behind the boy's death, nor a posthumous conviction of his grandfather; instead, one of the visitors is discovered attempting to steal money which the owner of the house receives for the care of a young orphan in his ward.

The supernatural source of the footsteps in Guernsey's story is never confirmed, although the narrative establishes that they belonged neither to the would-be burglar, nor to any other living inhabitant of the house. The narrator suggests that they must have been the wind, an explanation whose veracity is undermined by David Van Epps, the first witness to the burglary, who maintains that they were indeed footsteps '[i]f ever I heard a step in my life' (281). As a result of the interrupted burglary, the owner of the house 'thinks a sight of David' (282) and gives his blessing to David's subsequent marriage to his daughter. It is this consequence which convinces Flora, the servant who originally told the ghost story, that Elon Merrion's footsteps were those heard; she discovers that David Van Epps is a descendant of the Merrion family, and was therefore the target of the ghost's attention. The tradition surrounding the ghost, she relates, is that 'that boy's spirit'll never be quiet till some of Parson Merrion's folks gets good luck out of this house'

(279), and indeed, after David's marriage, the narrator affirms that 'I have never again heard any thing of the Walking Boy' (282). Elon Merrion's ghost appeared in order to reveal a burglary, to protect the interests of a child also without the protection of its family, and to arrange a marriage for his great-nephew. Nowhere in this are the ghost's actions implied to be or described as being governed by outside forces, and nowhere does the ghost show any interest in revealing the still-unresolved circumstances of its own death.

In ghost narratives over the next two decades, this shift in conceptions of ghosts becomes more definite. Here, when the older, pre-spiritualist ghosts are contrasted with the newer ones, it is the latter whose significance and importance is reinforced by the narrative. In Georgiana S. Hull's 'A Legend of All-Hallow Eve' (November 1879), the narrator, a young woman whose bookshelves are filled with works on spiritualism and 'weird and mystic' novels (834), visits friends whose house she discovers to be haunted. She reacts initially to the figure of an old woman and the 'wailing, sobbing' sounds by advancing a pre-spiritualist, purgatorial theory of ghosts (839). This, after all, is All-Hallow's Eve, 'the night on which the dead come out of the graves to haunt their old homes', as 'their penance and expiation for deeds done in the flesh'. This applies only to the ghosts whose deeds need such penance; '[t]he good ghosts sleep, and are troubled with no waking' (839).

The narrator's conception of ghosts, however, proves inadequate to explain the apparition she sees. Later in the narrative, she discovers the ghost to be that of her friend's grandmother, returning out of a desire to mend an old quarrel with her son. While this still suggests an element of the expiation suggested in the earlier conception of ghosts, this is now subsumed into the wider notion of the ghost as a character with its own motivations; this ghost appears out of a desire to end a family argument, rather than out of a literal inability to rest. The story ends with a discussion on 'the agency of ministering spirits', in which another witness to the initial haunting agrees that 'we have better warrant than superstition for the belief', and the narrator herself confirms that 'the belief in the agency of these spirits is certainly confirmed and sanctioned by the language of Scripture' (847).

Other fiction contributions from *Harper's* in the later decades of the nineteenth century show a conception of ghosts entirely divorced from their pre-spiritualist progenitors, suggesting that even the residual conventions of ghost narratives shown in 'What Did Miss Darrington See?' and 'The Legend of All-Hallow Eve' are no longer necessary. In Mary E. Wilkins's 'A Gentle Ghost' (August 1889), pre-spiritualist conceptions of the ghostly are presented as inadequate; moreover, the spiritualism-influenced conception of the dead as retaining the personality, motivations and agency of the living are assumed to be the norm. 'If it were not delusion,' the narrative asks, 'pray what exorcism, what spell of

book and bell, could lay the ghost of a little timid child who was afraid alone in the dark?' (371).

The 'little timid child' here is a target for pity rather than fear. With the emphasis on the ghost's youth and angelic innocence (Nancy, the child witness, claims that another 'used to wear a white dress, an' a wreath on her head. She used to come here an' play with me' (367)), Nancy's own life – impoverished, lonely and neglected – is held up for contrast. Indeed, the wailing cries initially assumed as ghostly in origin come from Nancy, and the conclusion of the narrative resolves Nancy's situation rather than any ghost's. 'She had found her place in a nest of living hearts, and she was getting her natural food of human love,' the narrator affirms (372). With the idea of a ghost as an individual, as human in its psychology if not in its physical form, comes a far broader scope of spectres available for ghost narratives.

By the 1890s, the spiritualist-influenced conception of ghosts had become the default template for the construction of ghost narratives. It was still occasionally described as being a recently-created conception, rather than a universal one; an August 1893 article on the eighteenth-century Cock Lane Ghost, for example, argued that both the 'rappings' and the domestic setting of the ghost demonstrated that it was 'of a more modern fancy' (328). Other contributions and editorials, however, show more clearly the degree to which this conception had become

integrated into ghost narratives. An editorial on ghost stories in the September 1890 issue, for example, shows a markedly different understanding of the narratives in question than Raymond's April 1853 editorial, which praised their moral and religious qualities. By 1890, this author claims, ghost stories 'have no conscious law'; they terrify without consequently enhancing the imagination, in the manner of 'fantastic or horrible dreams' (636). In a subtler, yet no less significant, deviation from the conclusions drawn in 1853, ghost stories are now praised only in that they 'bring us nearer to the life of other lands' (637), in contrast to Raymond's claim that they reinforce the morality of this one. Ghost narratives, it seems, no longer demonstrate the universal rules by which a soul can be trapped in the world of the living, but instead show the proximity of the afterlife and its inhabitants to our own.

While the September 1890 debate does not distinguish between fictional and anecdotal ghost narratives, an editorial from January 1887 concentrates its disappointed summary of the ghost story's failings specifically upon fiction. Here, ghost stories are described as 'going the way of so much that was once admired, like the fine language, the beauties of style, and the ornate manners of the past' (323). They remain popular only due to the human nature that, 'secured from storm and danger in a well-lighted room before a cheerful fire, likes to have these things imaged for it', and the imagination that responds readily to the fantastic and supernatural after 'having been fed mostly on gross unrealities' (322). In addition to

these declining aesthetic qualities, the moral dimension of such narratives has almost entirely disappeared:

> People always knew […] that a ghost cannot do much towards reforming an inordinately selfish person; that a life cannot be turned white, like a head of hair, in a single night, by the most allegorical apparition […] Yet the ethical intention was not fruitless, crude as it now appears. (322)

The most significant point about this editorial's stance on ghost stories, however, is the term used to describe them. It defines these narratives not only with reference to ghosts, mysteries and the supernatural, but also the Christmas period with which Victorian ghost stories were strongly associated. This, in itself, is not unusual; as the editorial emphasises, the connection between ghosts and Christmas was established before the nineteenth century, and given a particularly Victorian focus when Charles Dickens's first specifically Christmas story, *A Christmas Carol*, was published in 1843. In discussing the moral and aesthetic qualities of stories in which ghosts and the supernatural are used to advance particular moral messages, however, the editorial refers throughout to 'Christmas stories'. Ghost stories were still immensely popular in the contemporary literary periodicals, but narratives based on this pre-spiritualist conception of ghosts could no longer, it seems, be classed as such without this kind of qualification.

Household Words and *All the Year Round*

If the Victorian ghost story's popularity could be attributed to the sole efforts of one individual, Charles Dickens's name would undoubtedly be the first suggested.[41] *A Christmas Carol*, published in 1843, was wildly successful, selling six thousand copies on its first day; *The Haunted Man*, which followed five years later, sold three times as many copies the day it was published (Altick 1957, 384).[42] Although the association between ghosts and Christmas precedes Dickens, it was cemented in the nineteenth-century public imagination with his name, and for good reason.[43] With the editorship of his weekly periodical *Household Words*, begun in 1850, Dickens introduced the concept of separately-published Christmas numbers

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[41]. Although, perhaps, unfairly. Joseph Sheridan LeFanu's role is frequently underestimated in this regard, perhaps because he is more frequently associated with the 1873 collection *Green Tea* than his earlier stories, and perhaps because critics distance his work, often more folkloric and fantastic than the main body of Victorian ghost stories, from its contemporaries (see, for example, Bleiler 1977 xvii). LeFanu had, however, been popularising the ghost story as a short fiction narrative in his contributions to the *Dublin University Magazine* since the 1830s, before Dickens published *A Christmas Carol* in 1843 and before the inaugural issue of *Household Words* in 1850 (Dickens was an editor of *Bentley's Miscellany* from 1837 to 1839, but his influential role in shaping the periodical form did not truly begin until *Household Words*). Although *Green Tea* is much better known now, as indeed it was to its contemporary audience, LeFanu also published *Ghost Stories and Tales of Mystery* in 1851, compiling much of his supernatural fiction into a single volume. His editorship of the *Dublin University Magazine*, which covered an eight-year span after he purchased it in 1861, led to a level of success and financial stability unprecedented in the magazine's history, and the continuing association of LeFanu with literature of suspense and the supernatural: contributions to the magazine during this period saw the first serialised form of LeFanu's *Uncle Silas* and the ghost story 'Wicked Captain Walshawe of Waulding', a ghost story by Felicia May Francis Skene titled 'A Glimpse of the Supernatural in the Nineteenth Century' which, as its title suggests, placed its ghosts firmly in a modern setting, several pieces discussing spiritualism and its relation to veridical ghosts (see, for example, L. J. Trotter's 'Spiritualism' and Mortimer Collins's 'The Ghosts of the Day'), and the start of Rhoda Broughton's career through two serialised novels. While neither of these latter were in themselves supernatural, it was through the *DUM* that she established the reputation with which she later became a well-known author of the ghost story.

[42]. *The Chimes* (1844) and *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845) also concern the supernatural, although neither are, strictly speaking, ghost stories. *The Battle of Life* (1846) is the only one of Dickens's five Christmas books which does not feature the supernatural; although it is far from the finest example of Dickens's prose, its relative lack of success and critical acclaim compared to the other Christmas books may not be entirely unrelated to the growing trend which its subject matter interrupted.

[43]. It also seems likely that Dickens alone was responsible for the tradition by which ghost stories are linked in their subject matter to Christmas, rather than just being told during the festive season. See, for example, Jerome K. Jerome's *Told After Supper*: 'The experienced reader knows it was Christmas Eve, without my telling him. It always is Christmas Eve, in a ghost story' (Jerome 1891, 2). I would suggest that the unique format of the Christmas numbers of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, in which disparate narratives (often supernatural) are linked together by a broad framing narrative explaining that they were told at Christmas.

for Victorian periodicals, with content predominantly consisting of short fiction and that fiction itself often in the form of ghost stories. The tradition was continued into *All the Year Round*, the periodical which succeeded *Household Words* after Dickens discontinued the former, and which vastly exceeded its predecessor in popularity.[44] The circulation of both peaked seasonally with the Christmas numbers, and other periodicals rapidly followed suit, often dedicating a wealth of material in their Christmas editions to ghost stories.[45] Dickens discontinued the Christmas numbers in 1867, explaining to his readers that they had become 'so extensively and regularly, and often imitated, that [they are] in very great danger of becoming tiresome' (Dickens 1868, 337), and to his friend Charles Fechter that he felt 'as if I had murdered a Christmas number years ago (perhaps I did!) and its ghost perpetually haunted me' (*Letters* 1999, 67). In the context of the periodical market of the 1860s and successive decades, both statements are reasonable; the ghost of the Christmas number, in the form of numerous other publications by other authors and other periodicals, ensured that Dickens's contribution to the Christmas ghost story did not end with his own editorship.

Ghost stories were not restricted to the Christmas numbers of either periodical. Within the normal yearly run of both, fictional ghost stories shared space

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[44]. Altick gives a typical circulation figure of 40,000 copies for *Household Words*, after it debuted at 100,000 (Altick 1957, 23). *All The Year Round*'s first issue sold 120,000 copies, and peaked at 300,000 in 1869; Christmas numbers published until Dickens put an end to them in 1867 ranged between 185,000 and 250,000.

[45]. Charlotte Riddell's *Fairy Water* and *An Uninhabited House*, for example, formed the Routledge's Christmas Annuals in 1873 and 1875. The tradition reached beyond the periodical form, too: Rhoda Broughton's first collection of supernatural fiction was, appropriately, titled *Tales for Christmas Eve*.

with editorials, reports and speculative articles on spiritualism and the supernatural in general. Dickens was an exceedingly conscientious and involved editor, who was still actively inspecting every contribution to *All The Year Round* by as late as 1867 (Grubb 1943a, 81), and who took his role seriously as an individual with a perceived responsibility to the public. Gerald Grubb links the two in Dickens's determination to make sure that none of the articles in his magazines advocated socially detrimental or factually inaccurate views, stating that he

> considered himself personally responsible to the public for the truth and authenticity of every article that went into his periodicals, because none of the articles and few of the stories were signed, but were supposed to express the collective opinion of the whole staff. (Grubb 1943b, 1110-11).

While the culture of authorial anonymity at this point in the periodical's history means that this editorial stance is hardly unusual, few editors enforced it with the same rigour as Dickens. On the subject of spiritualism, and indeed on the reality and proper narrative function of the supernatural in general, Dickens's particularly strong views infused his periodicals; in discussing the developments evident in the portrayals of both, I aim to show that the changing figure of the ghost not only took place throughout the Victorian literary sphere, but that one of spiritualism's most vocal opponents nevertheless contributed to and participated in the transformation which spiritualism initiated.

Several months before the Fox sisters reported strange rapping sounds in their suburban New York home, the *Spectator* published Dickens's review of another

product of the growing Victorian interest in the supernatural, Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature*.[46] In this collection of anecdotes and speculation, soberly written and widely received, Crowe set out to establish and promote the evidence of continued existence and interaction with the living after death. Dickens's review was relatively gentle in contrast to the scorn with which he would later respond to the spiritualist movement; concentrating on the issue of rationalism and scientific proof, he suggested with reference to several of Crowe's anecdotes that the book itself might not present as compelling an argument as the author wished.[47] There are only two points in which his tone slips into outright ridicule: a comment of the triviality of many of her ghosts' actions, and a criticism of the idea of 'animal magnetism', a pseudo-naturalistic mechanism that Crowe, as well as numerous others, suggested might explain ghosts, telepathy, and hallucinations. The first of these is a reasonably light-hearted aside, concerning one of the anecdotes Crowe classes collectively under the category of ghosts returning to provide for disadvantaged family:

> Without observing on the cases of ghosts in fustian jackets, who come express from the other world to order a family's coals, […] further than to remark that it is a proof of an obliging disposition, which would be greatly enhanced if they paid for them also, […] we will roof in our Doubting Castle. (Quoted in Slater 1996, 89)

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[46] The review itself is anonymous. Dickens's authorship was first established by Philip Collins in 1963, in *The Dickensian* ('Dickens on Ghosts: An Uncollected Article'); Michael Slater briefly recaps the evidence for this connection in Dickens's own letters (*The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens's Journalism*, vol. 4 (1996), 381).

[47]. Although of little import in the present discussion apart from to indicate that Dickens clearly held no hostility for Crowe and her work, it is notable that Catherine Crowe later contributed three articles to *Household Words*.

In the second, however, his tone is less generous.

> But surely this is to make animal magnetism, in which [Crowe] is a
> believer, a very stupid, dull affair – a very miserable and swinish
> influence. A power that can heal the sick, and give the sleepless rest,
> and carry the *clairvoyante* girl among the stars, produce nothing better
> [...] than a stereotyped absurdity of a lecherous old man giving
> indecent supper parties! (87).

Absurdities are one thing, and appropriately treated with dismissal in the form of gentle humour; absurdities which aspire to spiritual profundity are quite another, and it is this division which fundamentally shaped his later attitude towards spiritualism. While Dickens's review of *The Night Side of Nature* indicates a general scepticism of the supernatural, his view of the subject is not one of unqualified scepticism. The review even promises a subsequent article on ghosts, 'to sum up what may be said in their favour' (82).[48] It is not the subject matter of Crowe's book to which Dickens objected, nor her tone of honest enquiry, but the two points already raised as significant: a conflation of the trivial and mundane with the uplifting and sacred, and any attempt by advocates of the former to pass it off as the latter. In Dickens's subsequent role as both an author and editor, the same issues were brought to the fore repeatedly in matters of the supernatural. Spiritualism, which Dickens saw as the absurd and undignified combining forces with the manipulative and mercenary, was the target of absolute and vitriolic combination in the pages of his magazines.

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[48]. This article never appeared, something both Collins (1963) and Slater (in vol.4 of the Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens's Letters, 1996) attribute to the *Examiner's* suddenly increased focus on political news from France.

In ghost narratives where the supernatural is not bound up with faddish modern movements like mesmerism and spiritualism, Dickens's approach was, accordingly, quite different. His own contributions to the ghost story, in the Christmas books which began with *A Christmas Carol*, presented the ghost story as a morally uplifting form of entertainment. While Elizabeth Gaskell's 'The Old Nurse's Story', published in the Christmas number of *Household Words* in 1852, is hardly reminiscent of the jokes and heart-warming endings that marked Dickens's own supernatural Christmas books, its ghosts serve a clear moral purpose. Not only does a dead child return to haunt the family home from which she and her unmarried mother were cast, providing a constant reminder of her death and her family's culpability, but a ghostly tableau re-enacts the scene in which the mother's own father and sister refuse her pleas for mercy and send her and the child out into the snow. Dickens responded to the manuscript with praise: the story was '[n]obly told, and wonderfully managed', '[a] grand story, and the very thing for the Xmas No', he wrote to Gaskell (in *Letters* 1988, 799, 800).

He did, however, suggest an alteration, made for reasons of dramatic effect rather than narrative consistency. The ghosts, he proposed, should be made less visible; while all those present would see the phantom child, it would only be the youngest witness, a child herself, who would see the others. 'I don't claim […] that it would have made it a bit better,' he explained to Gaskell when she rejected his proposed revisions, '[o]nly that it is what I should have done myself' (ibid., 823).

Dickens's proposed version would not be substantially different to Gaskell's, although it would extend the ambiguous, uncertain horror of the unseen into the story's conclusion; the story still avoids the charge of attempting to directly manipulate its readers into accepting any unorthodox metaphysical worldviews in its proposal of a moral rather than empirical cause for its ghosts. Arguably, the revised story would have emphasised the ghosts' position as spectral emissaries of morality rather than as spectacle, but the possibility of such a distinction seems a dubious one here, especially in the light of Dickens's later editorial commentary on other depictions of ghosts.

The day before praising Elizabeth Gaskell for her 'very fine ghost story' (ibid., 799), Dickens wrote to his friend and co-editor W. H. Wills concerning a forthcoming article on spiritualism. The first title he suggests, 'Spirits Far Above Proof', combines his own fondness for wordplay with the idea of mediumistic fraud; the second, 'The Ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost', does the same in linking spiritualism to the eighteenth-century curiosity associated with deception and opportunistic commercialisation. Although Dickens preferred the second, believing it 'a great thing in such a case to shew [sic.] that the imposition is an old and exploded one' (*Letters* 1988, 799), and it was this title under which the article was eventually published, both clearly reflect the attitude towards spiritualism which Dickens made his magazines' as well as his own.[49] 'The Ghost of the Cock Lane

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[49]. Dickens later re-used the title for a short follow-up to the article ('The Ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost:

Ghost' was far from an unsolicited contribution; Dickens, who considered spiritualism a movement better combated than ignored, sent Wills and Morley to investigate a séance with the intended aim of a subsequent article on the movement as a whole.

Eight years later, he treated a proposed article by Lynn Linton on the same topic with considerable scrutiny, making sure the version which appeared in print was consistent with the earlier sceptical approach. Writing to Wills, he expressed unease over the original closing paragraph, in which the author suggested that a large residuum of phenomena were yet to be accounted for. 'I think this wants qualifying,' he cautioned; '[a]t all events, I would take out 'large' and let her know it' (*Letters* 1997, 271). In the final article, what remains of this paragraph is moved to the opening statements, with the offending passage changed to read that spiritualism 'retains only the due residuum of scientific truth' (Linton 1860, 370). The closest spiritualism ever came to a favourable reception in the pages of the Dickens periodicals, in an 1867 article titled 'Is It Possible?' which suggested the possibility of a mechanism allowing a dying person's spirit to appear to a loved one at the moment of death, contained both a condemnation of spiritualist practice as 'revolting to rational beings' (Anon. 1867, 615) and an afterword by Dickens which,

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Wrong Again', 15 Jan 1853); with the first article being published under the typical anonymity of the magazine and the period, the idea the of Dickens himself attending a séance was a possibility which presented itself to some readers, including a number of spiritualists who saw it as welcome publicity for the movement. Dickens evidently felt it necessary to respond with strongly-worded displeasure at the idea of having his name connected with the movement 'to enlighten its very dreary performances' (Dickens 1853, 217).

unusually for his editorial practice, affirmed that the views expressed were the writer's own rather than the journal's as a whole.

Despite many spiritualists' hopes to the contrary, Dickens's position towards spiritualism never mellowed.[50] Where he and his magazines distinguished between tactfully phrased disagreement and vitriolic mockery, the differing attitudes reflected not a variety of positions towards the spiritualist movement in general but rather differing views of its individual advocates. Consider, for example, the contrast in coverage of Daniel Dunglas Home and Robert Dale Owen, where the first is presented as a charlatan peddling absurdities for profit and the second treated with guarded respect. Home, a professional medium and one of the most influential figures in both British and American spiritualism during the late 1850s and early 1860s, had a fondness for showmanship that verged on the mercenary; Dickens saw him as a manipulative fraud, and responded accordingly. Home was, he wrote in a letter to Lynn Linton, 'an Imposter' deserving no respect (quoted in *Letters* 1988, 300).[51] Dickens's own review of Home's autobiography, titled 'The Martyr Medium', made his opinions clear: Home is compared to Baron

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[50]. It is particularly ironic given his hostility to the movement, for example, that the 'completed' *Edwin Drood* (Thomas James, 1871) makes Dickens's name one of the best-known of the posthumously published spiritualist works.

[51]. Home, who died in 1886, was the centre of controversies throughout his career and never fully recovered from a scandal concerning a large sum of money given to him by a supporter, ostensibly on the advice of her dead husband. She later changed her mind and brought a court action against him; the judge ordered Home to return the money on the grounds that it had been obtained under false pretences. He was not wholly discredited among spiritualists themselves, however, many of whom continued to support him throughout and after the trial. In a debate on spiritualism between Arthur Conan Doyle and Joseph McCabe in 1922, the former was still defending Home against the accusations of the latter: 'I have read the case very carefully, and I believe that Home behaved in a perfectly natural and honourable manner' (28).

Munchausen, and the spiritualist circles he moved in described as 'A Mutual Admiration and Complimentation Company (Limited)', neatly summarising Dickens's accusations of uncritical flattery and unethical profiteering (Dickens 1863, 133).[52]

Dickens's letter to Lynn Linton about Home came on the heels of her *All the Year Round* review of another spiritualist's book. Robert Dale Owen was an equally influential, and arguably an equally controversial, figure in the 1860s spiritualist movement. *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*, which he published in both Britain and America in 1860, advocated spiritualist doctrine while maintaining a careful distance from spiritualist practice. Regardless, his conversion to spiritualism came at the expense of much of the general respect his career had gained him. He was already an established figure in the American political sphere and well known as a prominent agnostic before he grew interested in spiritualism in the late 1850s, a move that brought him under considerable criticism from former friends, colleagues and supporters.[53] Richard William Leopold, whose 1940 biography of

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[52] This was far from the only piece in which Dickens made such an accusation; see 'The Spirit-Business' (1853) for one example of many.

[53]. In his biography, Richard William Leopold recounts Owen's earlier attitudes towards spiritualism and related subjects: he took a brief interest in mesmerism in 1842, but this proved insubstantial, and when Robert Owen converted to spiritualism, he wrote to a friend that he regretted 'as every judicious son must, the strange infatuation which has overtaken my good father' (quoted in Leopold 1940, 322). During a prolonged stay in Naples in the 1850s, he witnessed some of Daniel Dunglas Home's manifestations, and was apparently convinced in the reality of at least some of spiritualism's claims. He was never one of Home's vocal supporters, and indeed kept his distance from the organised spiritualist movement in general; Leopold says that he 'never attended national conventions, and spoke only once at a state gathering […] seldom contributed to the spiritualist press and declined to use his unquestioned journalistic talents to improve its tone' (381). His scrupulous, methodical and honest approach to all spiritualist claims sat uneasily with the movement's more unquestioningly accepting supporters, and he disliked the tendency of the national conventions to entangle spiritualism with radical politics (while

Owen details the reception his spiritualist writing received on both sides of the Atlantic, points to harsh reviews in British newspapers and periodicals as evidence that *Footfalls* earned harsher criticism in Britain than in America. Lynn Linton's review in *All the Year Round*, however, was relatively generous, expressing deep scepticism of the subject matter but never ridiculing Owen or accusing him of carelessness, fraud or insanity. Further, Dickens's letter to Owen regarding the article maintains the stance: 'Allow me to add that I have carefully read your book myself,' he wrote, 'and that I have derived from it a genuine regard for its writer' (in *Letters* 1997, 300).[54]

These efforts to treat Owen as separate from his subject and Home as inextricably tangled up with it speak to the same attitude regarding spiritualism itself. While individual spiritualists might warrant respect or condemnation, the movement as a whole, exploiting honest enquirers such as Owen or providing occupation and fame to charlatans like Home, deserves only attack. While Home as an individual is certainly the target of scorn, Linton's 'Modern Magic' aims particular criticism at the movement around him, with its ridiculous claims, grandiose statements and uncomfortably modern ghosts. Spiritualism itself, she

vehemently supporting the right of individual spiritualists to advocate whichever positions they wished). Despite his reservations about some of the movement's practices, he was considered, and indeed considered himself, one of its most respected public voices. *Footfalls* was the first book of its kind to be published by a mainstream, non-spiritualist publisher (Lippincott in the US, and Trübner in Britain) and was wildly successful, selling 2000 copies in its first week and becoming the most financially successful book of its season after its US publication (Leopold 1940, 334, 332).

[54]. See also Henry James's 1872 review of Robert Dale Owen's *The Debatable Land between This World and the Next*: 'Whether the "Spiritualists" have got any insight into [explanations] may reasonably be questioned; but no one who knows Mr. Owen, and his perfect title to men's respect, can wantonly slight his deliberate testimony to the facts of experience he recounts' (James 1872, 359).

states, is nothing new; 'on the contrary, [it] has burnt its feeble light from the earliest times of the Old Testament […] It has been forgotten, then "discovered" again' (Linton 1860, 374). Regardless, its ghosts remain ghosts of their particular time, 'not advancing a hair's breadth beyond what was considered orthodox and final by living men' (370-1). The 'modern spirit' epitomises both the arrogance and the absurdity of its supporters; in 'the definite manner in which they speak of indefinite things and indefinite places' (371), they commit the same sin of reducing the spiritual to the material and temporal that Henry J. Raymond criticised in his *Harper's* editorial.

When it comes to depictions of the ghostly in the pages of the Dickens periodicals, a continuing condemnation of spiritualism does not imply a continuous portrayal of the spectral itself. It is true, of course, that the more typical pre-spiritualist ghosts, typified by their lack of agency, their status as somehow reduced or limited by death, and the narrative suggestion that both of these things are the result of a metaphysical system governing their appearance and behaviour, still occur in earlier contributions to the magazines. In Dudley Costello's 'The Ghost of Pit Pond', which appeared in *Household Words* in 1854, a man who stole money from his brother swears when accused that if he is guilty his soul will never leave his body; after his suicide, his body needs to be staked down in the grave to prevent it from rising, and his ghost still walks through the village in which he lived. In its macabre appearance as an animated corpse and its narrative's suggestion that ghosts

arise from a disruption in the social or moral order, this ghost embodies the pre-spiritualist apparition, something still evident in the Dickens periodicals for the next two decades. Robert Stephen Hawker's story 'The Botathen Ghost' (1867), for example, recounts the story of a ghost which haunts a childhood friend due to a past wrong for which no confessions were made. In both of these stories, the ghost finally confesses its crimes to a clergyman brought in to exorcise it, and so is allowed the rest it desires.

Even in the narratives of these 'older' ghosts, however, there is a suggestion that the influence of spiritualism was beginning to infiltrate the wider understanding of what a ghost was, why it appeared, and how it behaved. 'The Botathen Ghost' echoes its Gothic forebears not only in subject and style, but in its setting, taking place over a century before its time of publication. Against the background of a general trend towards more domestic and contemporary ghosts, a trend as evident in periodicals generally as it is in the *Harper's* narratives already discussed, 'The Botathen Ghost' is a deliberate anomaly. The events of 'The Ghost of Pit Pond' occur in more contemporary surroundings, but the ghost's witnesses draw attention to its anachronistic behaviour and appearance in their observations, clearly shaped by a different kind of ghost. 'He warn't a bit white, like a ghost, as most of 'em expected,' one villager remarks, 'but was dressed just the way he used to walk about the farm, only his head was more on one side […] and he guggled in his talk when he spoke' (Costello 1854, 175). While white-shrouded ghosts have appeared in

ghost narratives since at least the Middle Ages, the reanimated corpse of the figure itself was a far more common figure until the nineteenth century; the villager's claim that this example was not 'like a ghost' speaks to a general transformation in the figure of the ghost itself.

Responding to this shift, narratives in the Dickens magazines began to build upon the contrast between the older ghosts and the newer spiritualist-influenced figures for both comedic and dramatic effect. The juxtaposition of new and old conceptions of the spectral in 'The Ghost of Pit Pond' leads to a greater sense of disruption to the order of the world of the living, as the ghost does not comfortably match its witnesses' expectations of the supernatural. The increased tendency towards commercialising and trivialising the supernatural, which E. J. Clery traces from the mid-eighteenth century, certainly played a part in more comical portrayals of ghosts which juxtaposed ancient and modern; the dissatisfied spectre in W. H. Wills's 'The Ghost of Mr James Barber' (1850), for example, does not require any spiritualist-influenced understanding of ghosts:

> What do you think I have got to do every night of my – never mind – what do you think is now marked out as my dreadful punishment?"
> "Well, to walk the earth, I suppose," said I. […]
> "Worse. Ha! ha! […] I'm condemned to rush about from one evening party and public house to another. At the former I am bound for a certain term on each night to dance all the quadrilles, and a few of the polkas and waltzes with clumsy partners; and then I have to eat stale pastry and tough poultry […] The whole to end on each night with unlimited brandy (British) and water, and eternal intoxication. (Wills 1850, 89-90).

His punishment is absurd, but it is nevertheless a punishment; after spiritualism began to change the depiction of the spectral, ghosts appeared not because they were made to, but through their own choice. The influence of modernity, however, is already apparent in Wills's story.

As a narrative device, bringing the ancient ghost into the nineteenth century would later become directly associated with spiritualism. The anonymous 'Haunted Hoxton', published in *All The Year Round* in 1863, features a credulous narrator and aficionado of Gothic novels searching for ghosts in a rather prosaic district of London. Although the narrator still expects to see ghosts cast in the pre-spiritualist model of macabre figures epitomising death, it is noteworthy that by this time, such ghosts had to be associated with the eighteenth century rather than the nineteenth, with no references more recent than Walter Scott's 1821 story 'The Tapestried Chamber':

> When the student seated in the tapestried room finds "the lights begin to burn with a blue and spectral hue," I shake: when there "reverberates through the long passages dismal clanking of chains," I shiver; finally, when "the door bursts open with a tremendous crash," and there enters "a tall figure clothed in white, with one clot of gore immediately below the heart," I am in a state of transcendent bliss. (420)

I will discuss the subtleties of ghostly appearance and what these various conventions signify more fully in Chapter 2, but it suffices to note here that the narrator both notes and takes clear pleasure in the archaic nature of this ghost.

Reports of a haunting in nearby Regent Street are far less satisfying; '[a] ghost in juxta-position to electrical machines, a diver who raps his helmet with half-pence, and the awful creatures in the drop of water' (421), while far more suited to the 1860s, proves poor entertainment for a narrator in search of a different kind of ghost altogether. When it, too, is shown to be no more than a tawdry, unconvincing prop in a stage show, the narrator's refusal to accept the evidence before him in favour of his own idealistic naivety reflects not only upon this ghost but upon the countless others theatrically exhibited in suburban séances around the country.

Dickens's own fiction consciously addressed the introduction of these newer ghosts and the contrast between these and their predecessors. In his introductory story to the Christmas 1859 number of *All the Year Round*, titled 'The Mortals in the House', profound and prosaic language are used as two separate discourses for spiritualism (the former to which it aspires, and the latter to which it frequently deteriorates); the narrator, having 'the highest respect' (Dickens 1859, 1) for spiritualists but not being counted among their number, allows readers to draw their own judgment about the vapid, absurd prose. When he encounters a spiritualist on a train, the man proceeds to convey 'the conferences of the night' (2) in as nonsensical a manner as possible, beginning with a message from Socrates:

> "My friend, I hope you are well […] There are seventeen thousand four hundred and seventy-nine spirits here, but you cannot see them. Pythagoras is here. He is not at liberty to mention it, but hopes you like travelling." Galileo likewise had dropped in, with this scientific

intelligence. "I am glad to see you, *amico. Come sta*? Water will freeze when it is cold enough. *Addio!*" (2)

The subject of spiritualism is not directly raised again after the narrator leaves the train, but the tone of this preface imbues the language used to describe the subsequent ghosts. While musing on the nature of death and loss in the supposedly haunted house during the early hours of the morning, the story's narrator draws such conclusions as any pre-spiritualist narrative serving as a *memento mori* would have been proud to convey:

> [T]here is something awful in the being surrounded by familiar faces asleep – in the knowledge that those who are dearest to us and to whom we are dearest, are profoundly unconscious of us, in an impassive state, anticipative of that mysterious condition to which we are all tending – the stopped life, the broken threads of yesterday, the deserted seat, the closed book, the unfinished but abandoned occupation, all are images of Death. (3)

The ghosts, however, fail to live up to these exalted expectations. When the narrator asks for more information, he is met with the bathetic description of a local villager: "'Ooded woman with a howl," said Ikey, in a state of great freshness' (3). The comic effect is clearly intended, but does not detract from the serious point that the narrator – and Dickens, speaking through him – has to make about such subjects:

> I can no more reconcile the mere banging of doors, ringing of bells, creaking of boards, and such-like insignificance, with the majestic beauty and pervading analogy of all the Divine rules that I am permitted to understand, than I had been able, a little while before, to yoke the spiritual intercourse of my fellow-traveller to the chariot of the rising sun. (3)

Although Dickens's views on spiritualism remained firm, and although he connected spiritualism and ghost stories in both his editorial and authorial roles during the 1850s, the ghosts in his own fiction nevertheless began to change under its influence. In 1843, the ghost of Jacob Marley in *A Christmas Carol* is not only a typically pre-spiritualist apparition in its appearance – with the jaw of the corpse tied shut, and with the ghost itself having the limited agency that comes from being condemned to walk the earth as a punishment – but in its narrative function, existing primarily for Scrooge's benefit to restore moral order. By 1866, when he wrote 'The Signalman' for the Christmas number of *All the Year Round*, Dickens no longer matched his ghosts to this same cut of narrative cloth. Indeed, 'The Signalman' and its enigmatically disturbing ghost prove a poor fit for the model of moralistic Christmas ghost fiction idealised in the *Harper's* 1887 editorial, despite the fact that it was Dickens with whom that custom of moralistic Christmas ghost fiction was most often associated.

The ghost in 'The Signalman' serves no clear purpose, moral or otherwise. It is unclear to the end of the narrative exactly what this ghost is or why it appears; a figure waving to the eponymous signalman in apparent warning, it nevertheless gives him no opportunity to prevent the tragedies which follow shortly afterwards, and he is left in traumatised confusion:

> [W]hy not tell me where that accident was to happen – if it must happen? Why not tell me how it could be averted – if it could have been

> averted? […] If it came, on those two occasions, only to show me that its warnings were true, and so to prepare me for the third, why not warn me plainly now? And I, Lord help me! A mere poor signalman on this solitary station! Why not go to somebody with credit to be believed, and power to act? (24)

The significance of the signalman becomes clear at the end of the story, when he is himself the subject of the next accident, cut down by a train as its driver unknowingly replicates the words and gestures of the ghost. The significance of the ghost, however, remains tantalisingly out of reach. From the signalman's initial comments on its appearance, and from the narrator's confirmation that the words the train-driver spoke just before the final accident mirrored those he had mentally ascribed to the ghost from the signalman's description, it seems clear that the ghost and the narrator are in some way connected, although the latter's lack of knowledge about the former would seem to rule out the possibility that the two are the same.

David Seed, discussing 'The Signalman' in the light of Dickens's attitude towards and depiction of ghosts in general (particularly in the *Spectator* review of Crowe's book), draws attention to the inconclusive uncertainty of the narrative and both the narrator's and signalman's attempts to rationalise the apparently unexplainable. Both of these he connects to the lack of anything fantastic in the ghost's appearance: 'Dickens introduce no special dress, no unusual sound-effects' (Seed 1981, 54). Its witnesses are left disoriented, finding the ghost's mystery in its mundanity; there is nothing otherwordly or even unusual in anything it does, only in the circumstances surrounding those actions. With its 'strikingly "modern"' ghost,

Seed claims, this story 'pulls against the conventional label of ghost story rather than confirming it' (54); certainly it does not fit the criteria outlined by Dickens himself in 1850, who in 'A Christmas Tree' described ghost stories as 'reducible to a very few general types and classes; for, ghosts have little originality, and 'walk' in a beaten track' (quoted in Seed 1981, 43). The ghost of 'The Signalman' provides no answers and teaches no lessons, walking in none of the tracks established by earlier ghost stories.

Considered in the context of the story's original publication in one of the *All the Year Round* Christmas numbers, the peculiar ambiguity of 'The Signalman' comes a fraction closer to a concrete resolution. The narrator is a newly-retired man, who 'had been shut up within narrow limits all his life, and who, being at last set free, had a newly-awakened interest in these great works' (20). In other stories in the number, he gives his name only as 'Barbox Brothers', the name of the company he worked for; he is 'the man from Nowhere' in the number's self-description. In the branch lines radiating out from the junction at which he finds himself, each represented in one of the number's individual stories, this nameless man with no history of his own discovers various curiosities of the world around him for the first time.

In 'The Signalman', this narrator's interest is initially directed at the ordinary rather than the supernatural. The signalman's life seems a strange and isolated one,

punctuated with signals and messages in the place of real human interaction and confined within the dark, damp walls of the railway cutting. He carries out his appointed charges well, and neither particularly enjoys nor complains about the repetitive, lonely nature of his job. The parallel with the narrator's former life, marked by psychological rather than physical isolation, are no less clear for the narrator's own failure to recognise them as such, and given this, the connection between him and the ghost takes on new significance. The signalman's job is to indicate and direct, rather than to control; just as his flags and communications relay information to others outside his railway cutting, his report of the ghost carries a message to the narrator. The narrator himself cannot save the signalman, any more than the signalman can divert the train; he can, however, come to understand his own position as one tangled in a complex interrelated web of humanity, despite his lifetime of isolation. His own existence can affect the lives and thoughts of those around him whether or not he is aware of the fact.

But none of this, of course, erases the supernatural elements of the story. The ghost of 'The Signalman' remains enigmatic, something that cannot be reduced to a fragment of the narrator's consciousness or a prop in a morality stageshow. The story ends with no neat revelation, and no discovery of an overarching truth governing the interaction between the natural and the supernatural in this signalman's encounter with a ghost. David Seed is surely correct to point to a contrast between Dickens's earlier views on literary ghosts and the presentation of

the supernatural espoused in 'The Signalman'; while the former argues for ghosts as fundamentally psychological projections, or what Dickens described to Elizabeth Gaskell as 'ghosts-stories illustrating particular states of mind and processes of the imagination' (quoted in Seed 1981, 47), the latter story presents the supernatural as interacting with the natural rather than illustrating it. While Marley's ghost appears in order to realign Scrooge's conscience, the living characters in 'The Signalman' seem oddly subservient to the ghost, which not only knows more than either of them but also speaks out loud what the narrator only thinks. As M. R. James describes it, 'The Signalman' 'conform[s] to the modern idea of the ghost story […] [t]he setting and the personages are those of the writer's own day; they have nothing antique about them' (James 1985, 7).

By this stage in the ghost story's development, then, the form has already begun a distinct move from the ideals outlined by Henry J. Raymond in his 1853 *Harper's* editorial. 'The Signalman' goes some way to promoting a psychological insight, if not an ideal; the narrator does learn something about his own relevance to the world around him by the ghost's appearance, even if that knowledge does not help him make sense of the immediate circumstances of the signalman and his story. Even in this, however, more questions are asked than are answered. The narrator is left with the realisation that he is part of a larger and more complex world than he had imagined, but is given no indications of how to understand the supernatural aspects of that world; while there is certainly more beyond his own

limited understanding, and beyond the walls of the signalman's railway cutting, it is neither self-evidently explainable nor directly relevant to the narrator's own existence.

The very strangeness of 'The Signalman' affirms its position in the changing form of the ghost story. As ghosts have gained their own autonomy, their own psychology, and their own central position in the narratives around them, they can no longer be contained within nor understood according to the simplistic conventions of their forebears. Dickens followed the majority of ghost story writers in never advocating spiritualism, implicitly or explicitly, in his fiction; despite the fervent wishes of spiritualists , he never changed his views on the movement or its ghosts, and would have been an unlikely candidate for compromising his principles by accepting its truth even within the world of one story.

While the ghost of 'The Signalman' is not a spiritualist ghost in an explicit sense, then, it nevertheless carries the influence of spiritualism in its actions and its appearance. In presenting the supernatural with an independent existence of its own, with mechanisms and practices that the living can report but never truly understand, and with an ensuing degree of autonomy and psychological complexity that lies outside the range of ghosts in fiction from even two decades earlier, 'The Signalman' shows the influence of spiritualism upon ghost narratives as a whole. That a figure so opposed to the movement as Dickens himself should be

participating in the developments it caused shows not capitulation on the author's part, but rather the rapid transformation within the ghost story itself towards presenting the new conception of the spectral as the norm. Spiritualist ghosts could no longer be usefully contrasted with their non-spiritualist counterparts without contrasting past and present; by the end of the 1860s, spiritualism had permanently shaped the form of the Victorian ghost.

Chapter Two. The development of spectral agency in spiritualist and literary ghost narratives.

[F]or the most part the Gothic ghosts were misty wraiths through which the sword could plunge without resistance. They were fragile and helpless as an eighteenth-century heroine when it came to a real emergency, and were useful chiefly for frightening the guilty and consoling the innocent.

(Scarborough 1917, 88)

Only through perfect freedom (from the physical fetters) can the soul become cognizant of its own objectivity in every and through every sense.

(Friese 1883, 171)

The opening words of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* speak to a readership that already understands the lessons Scrooge will learn. Marley's death, the narrator assures us, is as permanent as it is indisputable; his death register signed, his funeral conducted, his affairs set in order and his business transferred to his partner, all that remains of him is the name that lingers next to Scrooge's over the warehouse door. The subsequent appearance of his ghost drives Scrooge to repentance not by questioning death's permanence, but by affirming it. Scrooge's revelation, after all, is not that the dead can walk but that they are unable to atone for their previous crimes, and that only the living can alter their own conduct to avoid a similar fate. What returns is not Marley, but the echo of Marley, the supernatural equivalent of

the name left on the warehouse door and on the lips of Scrooge's customers. The full substance of Marley himself is dead and gone; all that remains of him is, as the title of the first chapter reminds us, Marley's ghost.

In the next few decades after Dickens's first publication of *A Christmas Carol* in 1843, the presence of ghosts in literature underwent a dramatic shift. For centuries, they had been identified in the same way as Marley's, with their names linking them not only to the individual they were in life but also to the reduced, abbreviated state of that individual they constitute in death: Marley's ghost, chained and remorseful; Banquo's ghost, blood-soaked and silent; Achilles' ghost, mournfully explaining to Odysseus that he 'would rather work the soil as a serf on hire to some landless impoverished peasant than be King of all these lifeless dead' (173). Later ghosts cast aside shackles, silence and regret to become active figures, empowered rather than restrained by their deaths. The threatening, malicious figure of the former governess in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* is, after all, Miss Jessel, not Miss Jessel's ghost.

The tendency towards more complete and psychologically complex ghosts started to become evident in the 1840s, with *Wuthering Heights* providing the most famous example of a deliberate ambiguity in the figure of the ghost. The apparition of the child Cathy that Lockwood encounters at the beginning of the novel is presumably a spectral illustration of a fragment of the adult Cathy's personality,

forever shut outside the house and begging to be let in, but the retrospective knowledge of this does nothing to lessen the horror of Lockwood dragging the child's wrist over broken glass. Likewise, the ghosts of Cathy and Heathcliff rumoured to walk the moors together might represent an echo of their previous life as well as a final union of souls beyond the grave; the reader is denied the knowledge of which, an illustration of the violently selfish exclusivity of the bond between the two as well as of the metaphysical boundary between life and death.

The novel's suggestion, however, leans towards the pre-Victorian presentation of ghostly existence as a compromise, an intermediate ground between this life and the next for those who do not belong in either. 'Do you believe such people are happy in the next world, sir?' Nelly asks Lockwood of Catherine's death, having already related Catherine's dream of being cast out of the heaven which 'did not seem to be [her] home', only to wake, 'sobbing for joy', on the heath above Wuthering Heights (202, 120-1). Heathcliff responds to Nelly's concern over his unrepentant soul with a similar view, snarling on his deathbed that 'I have nearly attained *my* heaven; and that of others is altogether unvalued and uncoveted by me' (363). If Cathy and Heathcliff do wander the moors after their deaths, their story follows the pattern of much older ghost narratives in viewing a ghostly existence as somehow less than an existence in heaven. They differ, and are unusual in that difference, only in their eager acceptance of this; heaven is each other, and not a paradise shared with the saved.

It was the middle decades of the nineteenth century that fuelled a dramatic change in literary ghosts from the powerless to the powerful, and from the echo of the living figure to its fulfilment, gaining the full realisation of everything denied to or limited in it while alive. In providing a view of death as empowering, and in introducing a conception of ghosts as fully individual and complex figures freed from life's restrictions rather than subjected to death's, the spiritualist movement introduced psychologically complex ghosts, whose motivations need be no different to those of the living and whose agency was increased, rather than decreased, by their deaths. The literary ghost story built upon this concept, moving the ghost to a central role in the narrative and making its own actions and motivations paramount.

Medieval and Gothic ghosts were defined by what they lacked. Their skeletal forms and rotting cadavers served as visual testimonies of their absence of vitality; their wounds, usually indicating the manner as well as the fact of their deaths, were signs of incompleteness.[55] Consequently, it is the living rather than the dead who provide the central role in pre-1850 ghost narratives, with ghosts only providing warnings or revelations to those whose actions bear more significance. From the prophetic ghost of the seer Tiresias in Homer's *Odyssey*, to Old Hamlet on the castle

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[55]. Death itself, however, was not necessarily presented as absence and negation, and indeed the reliance upon a Christian afterlife when ghosts appeared in medieval sermon narratives suggests precisely the opposite. Death and the dead are not synonymous, however, and where the latter act as representations of the former in ghost narratives, it is to suggest death's impact on the living and their world rather than as a concept in itself.

battlements, to Jacob Marley in Scrooge's dressing-room, ghosts act as catalysts to another's action rather than as the agents of that action themselves.

It is difficult to imagine how these ghosts could ever have done otherwise. The absence and negation represented in their images presents itself overwhelmingly as a limitation, and ghosts limited and restricted in their very being are consequently compromised in their ability to act as agents in their own right. In Marley's case, the reprehensible actions taken in his life are represented by heavy, restrictive objects after his death: a chain made of 'ash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel' (25). The emphasis on objects associated with confinement and limitation, such as padlocks and boxes, along with the double meaning of 'deeds', to illustrate the legal detail and moral substance of Marley's sins, demonstrate further that these chains represent not merely the consequences of his actions but the negation of action itself. Unable to correct his past misdeeds, and unable to atone for them by his own means, Marley is left with Scrooge's agency as a substitute for his own, explaining to Scrooge that it is only through persuading the living to change their ways that he himself can be freed. Significantly, it is this specific lack of agency, rather than the more general restriction to an earthly sphere, which is presented as a punishment; seeing a host of other ghosts through his window after Marley's departure, Scrooge realises that 'the misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever' (37).

While lending itself particularly well to stories like *A Christmas Carol* which call ultimately for social action on the part of the living, this emphasis on restricted ghostly agency is a common feature throughout pre-Victorian ghost narratives. Even illustrations of ghosts produced at the turn of the eighteenth century present this visible representation of the ghost's loss of agency openly, connecting both striking and subtle aspects of the ghost's appearance with its inability to act in its own right. William Blake's *Richard III and the Ghosts* (c.1806), for example, illustrates the scene in Shakespeare's play in which Richard, the night before the Battle of Bosworth Field, is commanded to 'despair and die' by those whose deaths he caused (V.iii, *passim*). The spectral figures surround the armour-clad king, their bodies curving away from his; where Richard's stance is indubitably that of an active figure, shown mid-stride with his sword drawn, the ghosts are merely reacting to him as they draw away (see Appendix, Fig.4). Their movement is limited to demonstration rather than action, with several of the ghosts pointing to their own wounds and those of the child princes pointing to Richard's sword. Unlike the ghosts of *A Christmas Carol*, these do not appear to the living as a consequence of their own punishment but as a visual representation of Richard's guilt. As such, they are granted no agency of their own, and their clearly restricted movement is attributed directly to Richard himself, whose armoured foot stands upon the feet of the murdered children.

Blake's illustration of another Shakespearean spectre, in *Hamlet and his Father's Ghost* (1806), demonstrates the limited agency of the ghost while still emphasising its narrative significance in the action which follows. Here, Hamlet kneels, his hands held up in a gesture simultaneously defensive and supplicating, as the standing figure of Old Hamlet leans down to address him (see Appendix, Fig.5). Old Hamlet's feet are close together, his arms hang down at his sides, and the resultant posture is so unnaturally limited as to seem almost mechanical; although his body is not wrapped in chains, as the ghost of Marley after him or the ghost Pliny describes before, its movement could barely be more restricted if it were. Robert Thew portrays an earlier scene from the play in *Hamlet, Horatio, Marcellus and the Ghost* (1796), where Old Hamlet appears on the castle battlements as Horatio struggles to hold Hamlet back. Thew's Old Hamlet is less restricted than Blake's, but he still seems almost stationary beside the exaggeratedly dynamic forms of Hamlet and Horatio, and when he points Hamlet's figurative way with a scepter held like a sword, the action thus indicated must be taken by Hamlet rather than himself (see Appendix, Fig.2).

In these illustrations, Blake and Thew neither re-interpret nor misrepresent the agency attributed to ghosts in the original dramas. Stephen Greenblatt, who sees the ghosts of the Renaissance stage as a replacement (or displacement) of the ghosts of 'legitimized, sanctioned belief [...] featured in stories told from the pulpit by friars and priests', notes that 'the predominant theatrical figures of the dead are

spirits from the underworld who, like the ghost of Thyestes in Seneca's *Agamemnon*, long to see the stage run with blood' (Greenblatt 2001, 152, 153). The fulfillment of this desire must, however, be transferred to the living, the family members and spectators appealed to for revenge. Shakespeare's ghosts, Greenblatt argues, may not be the 'purgatorial spirit[s], begging for suffrages from the living' of medieval narratives (195), but they remain figures asking for specific action from the living, whether that action is revenge, remembrance, or (in the case of Old Hamlet) both.

While Greenblatt's allusion to Seneca situates the visually horrific ghost narrative in its own history, Seneca's Greek antecedents rarely dwelt on the macabre or the spectacle of violence. Murders in these tragedies happen offstage, with death thus one level removed from the audience, and later illustrations of Classical ghosts reflect this aversion to the macabre. John Downman's *The Ghost of Clytemnestra Awakening the Furies* (1781) seems also to suggest a more active, powerful conception of the ghost; a radiant, glowing white, Clytemnestra stands surrounded by the hideous forms of the Furies in what is almost a reversal of Blake's *Richard III*, one arm lifted in summons. Contextualised, however, what seems to be power becomes understood as an intense, yet ineffectual, passion for revenge. The painting depicts a scene in Aeschylus's *The Eumenides* in which Clytemnestra commands the Furies to punish her son for her murder:

> In dreams you hunt your prey, baying like hounds whose
> thought

> Will never rest; but what of deeds? Has weariness
> Conquered and softened you with sleep, till you forget
> My pain? Rise up, torment his heart with just reproach;
> For whetted words goad the quick conscience. Storm at him
> With hot blood-reeking blasts blown from your vaporous
>   wombs,
> Whither his hope of respite, hunt him to the death!
> (*The Eumenides*, l.138-134)

For all her apparent power, in her words or in her appearance, Clytemnestra in Thew's painting is no more able to act upon the living than is the ghost of Jacob Marley (see Appendix, Fig.3). Her raised arm points past the Furies, indicating as with Thew's *Hamlet* the direction they must take in her stead. Moreover, the Furies, whose cosmological purpose in the Greek pantheon was specifically to punish crimes such as her children's matricide, are neither coerced nor forced into action by Clytemnestra's summons; she can only wake them and remind them of their duty. While the anger is indisputably hers, the agency remains with them.[56]

Later Victorian ghosts, by contrast, show their spiritualist influence in being active figures whose agency often surpasses that of their living counterparts. Spiritualism relied for its metaphysical strength upon the conviction that ghosts appeared to the living through their own active choice, one which need not be fuelled by unresolved circumstances surrounding their deaths or by a desire for

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[56]. Clytemnestra's ghost is a rare exception in Greek tragedy. While Classical epic featured a considerable number of ghosts (see R. C. Finucane's *Ghosts* for a more detailed description of the move towards a more grotesque view of the supernatural in this regard), only two ghosts appear on stage in drama, with Clytemnestra's appearance preceded by the ghost of Darius in Aeschylus' *The Persians* (c.472 BC). This earlier ghost lacks even Clytemnestra's semblance of agency, appearing only when summoned; his power lies in knowledge, not in action, and he is unable to prevent the catastrophic hubris which leads to his son's defeat in battle. Even the wisdom of his influence has faded, as his ghost describes: 'Xerxes my son, green in years / Thinks green / and forgets what I taught him' (l.1287-1289).

revenge; spiritualist ghosts could appear for any reason, however undramatic, minor, or personal. In contrast to the vengeful bloodlust of Gothic ghosts and the mindless reiterated actions of Renaissance ghosts before them, and to the animalistic, instinctive malice of M. R. James's revenants afterwards, later Victorian ghosts demonstrate a spectrum of motivations hardly indistinguishable from the living, and a power of agency not limited by death.

While the transition from spiritualism's status as a local curiosity to an international movement was rapid, it was not instantaneous, and the level of power and agency held by spiritualist ghosts increased over the movement's first decade. At the Fox family's house in Hydesville, and at the early séances which followed, communication took place in a strict question and answer format with the ghosts rapping out a response via a coded number of knocks, either simply for 'yes' and 'no' or in a more complicated system for individual letters.[57] The limitations this laborious process imposed soon led to more direct forms of communication, either written (using a planchette or unassisted automatic writing) or spoken (through the body and voice of the medium).[58]

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[57]. See Chapter One for more on the mechanics of séance communication.

[4]. The planchette, a small wooden board on wheels to which a pencil was attached, was used to write messages via a medium's hand laid lightly on its surface. The device became widely used in the late 1860s, and was discussed at some length in the periodical sphere, particularly in the US; December of 1868, for example, saw both an article in *Putnam's* which accepted the phenomena's reality (Sidney Hyde's 'Planchette in a New Character') and an article in *Harper's* which provided readers with the detailed confession of a former spiritualist who admitted to faking them (Charles H. Webb's *The Confessions of a Reformed Planchettist*), For more on the history of the planchette and automatic writing, see Ruth Brandon's *The Spiritualists* (for a non-spiritualist account) and Emma Hardinge Britten's *Modern American Spiritualism* (for a spiritualist history).

Full-form materialisations, in which the visible form of the ghost appeared and communicated in its own right, followed rapidly. Ruth Brandon gives the date of the first recorded full-form materialization as 1860, when 'Katie King' appeared to Robert Dale Owen, but my research indicates that the practice was already at least partially established by the late 1850s; an 1857 pamphlet by Jabez C. Woodman, for example, refers to spirits that not only 'produce raps with or without contact' and but 'produce their own natural handwriting with or without the medium's hand', and '[exhibit] their spiritual forms to seeing mediums, (sometimes many mediums seeing the same spiritual form at the same time)' (Woodman 1857, 67).[59]

Also firmly established was the connection between freedom from the physical body and freedom of agency in a wider sense. Woodman illustrates this in

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[59]. I have so far been unable to date either visual manifestations in general or full-form materialisations in particular more specifically than the late 1850s. Allen Kardec (the pseudonym of Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail), who produced the first substantial introduction to spiritualist philosophy with *The Spirits' Book* in 1857, stated in that work that a spirit 'is sometimes able to make himself visible […] and can even take on a form that may be visible, and even palpable, for the senses' (Kardec [1857] 1973, 36), but did not describe this overtly in the context of séances; such a link would wait until the publication of *The Mediums' Book* in 1861, in which he described the mechanics of 'spirit-materialisation' without reference to this being a new phenomenon (Kardec [1861] 1975, 75). Epes Sargent traces full-form materialisations back to the mediums Ira and William Davenport in the early 1850s, and 'the rooms of J. Koons, in Athens County, Ohio' in 1854, but since the Davenports do not seem to have produced full-form materialisations as later recognised, he appears to be describing precursors to the phenomenon here rather than the phenomena itself (I have been unable to find any more information about J. Koons).

It seems most likely that the practice never had a definitive beginning. With the popularity of ghost narratives in the years immediately preceding the Hydesville rappings, the idea of visually present ghosts was unlikely to be unfamiliar to any spiritualists; indeed, later works of spiritualist philosophy (most notably Robert Dale Owen's *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*) linked these narratives to spiritualist thought explicitly, following the precedents laid out by Kardec in *The Mediums' Book*. Spiritualists, after all, did not need to invent the concept of ghosts being visible to spectators.

one of the earliest examples of what would soon become a spiritualist tradition in itself, as he draws on the Bible as a vehicle for validation and authenticity, listing the various references he sees in its pages to mediums, trances and spirit communication in an attempt to both demonstrate spiritualism's ancient origins and pre-empt criticisms of its doctrinal soundness. Here, these include Woodman's own gloss of St Paul's description of a man 'caught up into paradise, [who] heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to hear' (1 Corinthians 12:3-4):

> These words could only be uttered by spiritual organs of speech, when divested of external matter. Paul was still clothed by an external body of matter. It was not possible for him to utter these words, because he could not freely exercise his internal organs of speech. (31)

The equivocation between the possible and permissible here is a deliberate one, as natural constraints are equated to metaphysical laws. To be freed from practical restrictions on movement and speech is, therefore, to be freed also from divinely imposed restrictions on knowledge. If the physicality of the flesh is described in conceptual terms, as earthly bodies become punishments, prisons, fetters and masks, then conceptual restrictions can become physical; movement between the current world and the next one is merely a matter of one's ability to act.

The setting of the séance-room, predicated as it was upon the appearance of a ghost to an audience of sitters, emphasised not only the ability of the living to reach over the boundary between life and death but also the power of the dead to cross it. The dead, those freed from physical, earthly restrictions, held the greater

power, while the living listened, requested and observed. The practical arrangements of séances reflected and reinforced this difference in agency. Sitters joined hands around the table, both as a measure against potential fraud and as a means of unifying them as a physically and emotionally connected whole. The limitations this imposed upon their movement contrast with the freedom granted to the active figure of the ghost, which lifted objects, played instruments, walked around the room and interacted with various sitters. Contemporary séance accounts stress the control the ghost had over proceedings, even without being fully visible; the following account from Arthur Conan Doyle describes events at a séance in which only disembodied spirit hands materialised:

> Several hands appeared […] among them the hand of a child. After a space, Sir Charles returned amongst us and stated that while he held the two brothers, several hands touched his face and pulled his hair; the instruments at his feet crept up, played round his body and over his head - one of them lodging eventually on his shoulders. During the foregoing incidents the hands which appeared were touched and grasped by Captain Inglefield, and he stated that to the touch they were apparently human hands, though they passed away from his grasp. (Conan Doyle 1926a, 263).

In their range of action and freedom of movement, it is difficult to separate the physical representation of the 'spirit hands' Conan Doyle describes in his account from the agency they represent. These hands, a common occurrence at séances which did not feature the full materialisation of spirits, both demonstrate the action and agency of the ghost and provide a contrast in their freedom with the sitters' own hands, held and restricted by a linked chain around the table. Ghosts

act, and sitters merely respond. While sitters participate in séances through their own choice, and while spiritualist doctrine required that they be present in order for the ghosts to appear, it is the ghosts that possessed power in the séance itself.

In the literary ghost story, the power shifts between living and dead could be played out on a broader, more dramatic canvas. No longer restricted to being the catalysts or instigators of another's action, these spiritualist-influenced ghosts could become the initiators of that action themselves; no longer limited to a set of motivations compatible with their precarious position between worlds, they could exhibit as wide a variety of desires as their living companions. The ghost's role in the narrative, then, could come to rely not upon conventions of ghostly activity, but on the full range of human behaviour.

Although there were several well-known examples of the literary ghost story in the 1830s and 1840s (most notably 'A Christmas Carol' in 1843), 1850 marks the point at which the genre's popularity entered an explosive period of growth, and the years between 1850 and 1870 saw the publication of the majority of work by Charles Dickens and Joseph Sheridan LeFanu, as well as the introduction of some of the best-known ghost story authors, such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Rhoda Broughton, M. E. Braddon, Mrs. Henry Wood and Dinah Mulock Craik. Popularity of the ghost story reached its height with the mid-period stories of 1870 to 1900, a period which saw the work of Charlotte Riddell, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Vernon

Lee, Grant Allen and F. Marion Crawford, among others. Stories written after 1920 show a decline of interest in the conventions which proliferated in earlier decades, and a corresponding increase in the influence of more macabre writers such as Algernon Blackwood and M. R. James, but the late-period stories of 1900 to 1920 (a period which includes work by Edith Wharton, Violet Hunt, Gertrude Atherton, Richard Middleton, and Oliver Onions) retain enough of the earlier conventions to warrant a profitable comparison. The thematic reasons for the divisions I have drawn will, I hope, become clear as the discussion develops.

This transition was not an instantaneous shift. In early-period ghost stories, those written between 1850 and 1870, the growing influence of spiritualism and its powerful, psychologically complex ghosts coexists with the conventions of earlier narratives. Often the former even overshadow the latter, and many of the resulting stories owe a considerable debt to their Gothic and veridical predecessors. Indeed, a number of these can be classed as 'ghost stories' only in a relatively loose sense of the term: they are short stories which contain ghosts, but not necessarily short stories in which the ghost plays an integral role in the narrative. In a substantial number, however, elements of the genre's past fuse with those of its future, the mechanics of a narrative form in transition. Settings move from the ancient and foreign to the contemporary and domestic, the ghost moves from the periphery to the centre of the story, and the intended effect of the supernatural upon the reader begins to encompass a broader spectrum of emotion than revulsion and fear.

For the ghost itself, the influence of spiritualism is, literally, an empowering one. Early-period ghost stories mark the point at which the ghost's agency becomes a substantial factor within the narrative, and introduce the first examples of Victorian ghosts whose increased power after death is directly related to their supernatural status. While present, though, these latter do not constitute the majority of early-period stories, sharing space within that period (and even, frequently, within the works of an individual author or the pages of one periodical) with far more limited ghosts: those unable to act, to speak, or to interact with the living in any substantial way. What early-period ghost stories demonstrate is not the monopoly of this new convention, but rather its emergence alongside competing ideas of ghostly agency. It would not be until the mid-period stories of the 1870s that the active, powerful ghosts began to outnumber their predecessors.

In a considerable number of early-period stories, ghosts lack any power or agency at all, existing only to repeatedly re-enact significant scenes from the individual's life in what is effectively a metaphysical echo. Such stories rely for their narrative effect upon the significance of the scene re-enacted, rather than the ghost's motivations or interactions with the living. In Joseph Sheridan LeFanu's 'Madam Crowl's Ghost' (1870)[60], for example, the disappearance of a child some

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[60]. 'Madam Crowl's Ghost' was first published in the December 31, 1870 issue of *All the Year Round*, in which several of LeFanu's other late supernatural stories also appeared: *Stories of Lough Guir* was published in *ATYR* in April of the same year, while 'Green Tea', the first and best-known of the Dr. Hesselius stories that would eventually be collected into *In a Glass*

decades earlier is explained when the eponymous ghost re-enacts his murder and the concealment of his body; although suspected of the crime in life, since her own son inherited an estate in the boy's place, it is only her ghost's appearance which confirms the murder and reveals the child's body.

LeFanu's stories are rather unusual in that they tend to link active supernatural agency with evil. The revenant in 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbancees of a House in Aungier Street' is probably the most active of all LeFanu's ghosts, but he is overtly presented as a threatening figure; in LeFanu's other supernatural fiction, the beings possessing the greatest power are those which are not ghosts in the truest sense, but rather demonic or otherwordly entities, such as the eponymous characters in *Carmilla* (1873) or 'The White Cat of Drumgunniol' (1870). One notable early exception is a ghost in 'Ghost Stories of Chapelizod' (1850), whose murderer is 'absolutely powerless' when the ghost 'leered on him with a ghastly mimicry of the defiant stare with which pugilists strive to cow one another before combat' (501). When ghost and living man touch hands, the latter falls senseless to the ground in agony, and spends the rest of his life weakened and fearing a later challenge in the afterlife.

To contrast LeFanu's actively malicious ghosts with the more conventional early- and mid-period spectres, consider Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 'The Haunted and the Haunters: Or, the House and the Brain' (1859), in which two friends spending the night in a haunted house see its history played out before them. While

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Darkly (1873), in the October 23, 1869 issue. LeFanu's first venue for supernatural fiction, of course, was the *Dublin University Magazine*, in which 'The Ghost and the Bonesetter' (January, 1838) and 'Schalken the Painter' (May, 1839) appeared in the late 1830s.

the events of this story are terrifying, the ghosts are not individual, active agents in their own right; a ghost, explains the narrator,

> though in the popular superstition […] is held to be the soul of the departed, must not be confounded with the true soul; it is but the eidolon of the dead form. Hence, like the best-attested stories of ghosts or spirits, the thing that most strikes us is the absence of what we hold to be soul – that is, of superior emancipated intelligence. (236)[61]

The ghosts of this house, he attests, and presumably others like them, are only the projections of another's brain; they are not entities, let alone agents, in their own right.[62]

The connection between agency and individuality is made clearer when narratives such as the above are compared to a similar, yet distinct, variety of early-period stories. In these, bereaved friends, family or lovers see the ghost of a loved one appear at its moment of death (often remaining unaware that there is anything supernatural about the figure); while these ghosts rarely speak, move, or act in anything other than a trivial sense, they are still granted some limited degree of agency due to the personal significance of their appearance. In Lydia M. Child's 'Willie Wharton' (1863), for example, a white child raised by a native tribe sees his natural mother at the moment of her death, and the narrative suggests that 'the

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[61]. A longer version of the story with a different approach to the supernatural also exists under the same title; in the second, the occult and the immortal magician responsible for the supernatural effects are granted a much greater and more detailed focus. The quotation listed here is identical in both versions, although my reference is to the first version of the story as printed in *Blackwood's* in August, 1859.

[62]. For other examples of early-period stories with similar ghosts, see Amelia B. Edwards' 'How the Third Floor Knew the Potteries' (1863) and, arguably, Dickens's 'The Signalman' (1866).

mighty power of love, in that dying mother's heart, [was] a spiritual force, conveying her image to the mind of her child as electricity transmits the telegram' (334). While the supernatural activity in the stories discussed above can exist with only impersonal metaphysical forces, stories such as Child's require the ghost to be an individual in its own right.

Catherine Crowe lists several veridical anecdotes of this type of ghost in *The Night Side of Nature* (1848), adding that her reports of such narratives 'are so numerous, that in this department I have positively an *embarrass de richesses*, and find it difficult to make a selection' (Crowe [1848] 2000, 114).[63] The ghosts she lists, like their counterparts in the fictional narratives which use this convention, have a strong personal connection to their witnesses, and Crowe likewise attributes their appearance to a force of will: '[t]he faculty of prophecy and clear-or-far-seeing frequently disclosed by dying persons,' she explains, 'is fully acknowledged by Dr

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[63]. *The Night Side of Nature: or Ghosts and Ghost-seers* remained in print for the next fifty years, fed by and contributing towards an increasing Victorian interest in the supernatural; it is, for example, widely recognised as the means by which the German term 'poltergeist' entered the English language. William Henry Smith reviewed it in *Blackwood's* alongside Reichenbach's *Researches on Magnetism, Electricity, Etc., in Relation to the Vital Force*, criticising Crowe's credulity in accepting all her anecdotes as fact but maintaining nevertheless that 'as a repertory of marvellous matters, [the book] is at once the best selected and the most varied that we have ever met with' (Smith 1850, 273); as I have already discussed in Chapter One, Charles Dickens's review in *The Spectator* takes a similar approach, praising Crowe for her meticulous and well-intended attention to the subject while disagreeing with the substance of her conclusions. (Dickens would later follow this pattern while reviewing the spiritualist writings of Robert Dale Owen, a man for whom his personal respect greatly exceeded that granted to the greater number of spiritualists he saw as knowingly fraudulent.) Although Crowe's best-known work on the subject, *The Night Side of Nature* was not her sole contribution to that field, being followed in 1850 with *Light and Darkness, or Mysteries of Life* and in 1859 with *Ghost Stories and Family Legends*. For a more detailed discussion of *The Night Side of Nature* in the context of the Victorian supernatural, see Chapter Four.

Abercrombie and other physiologists' (123).[64] The proliferation of such narratives in

contemporary folklore and in the pages of Crowe's book no doubt contributed to

the popularity of the convention in early-period stories, but the possibility of using

that convention to give the supernatural sentimental rather than terrifying effect

was also a significant factor. M. E. Braddon's 'A Wife's Promise' (1869) affirms the

sacred status of the marital bond as a woman appears to her explorer husband at

the moment of her death, despite the distance that separates them; Harriet Prescott

Spofford's 'D'Outre Mort' (1866) likewise gives supernatural emphasis to romantic

love, as a dying man sends his soul to see his lover.[65]

Power to appear, however, does not necessarily imply power to act during

that appearance. The above examples are typical of their sub-genre in that the

agency of the ghost, beyond its capacity to appear to a loved one, is limited to small

(albeit meaningful) gestures: the dying mother in Child's story neither speaks nor

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[64]. John Abercrombie first published *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers* in 1830, listing various examples of supranormal mental powers and arguing that the soul was capable of moving beyond the constraints of the physical body if assisted with 'the cultivation of habits of attention, or of intense application of the mind to whatever is at the time its more immediate object of pursuit' (quoted in Budge 2006, 53). The book was a popular success, and a number of editions followed the first throughout the 1830s. One slightly later edition, curiously, was published in 1849 and thus immediately followed *The Night Side of Nature*.

[13]. I have not included stories about ghosts which seem to be wholly psychological in nature rather than objectively real here, although it is worth noting that pre-1870 supernatural fiction does contain some examples of what is usually considered (by Julia Briggs and Jack Sullivan, among others) to be a late-period convention. (Its best-known precedent, of course, remains Banquo's ghost at Macbeth's table, predating even the early-period narratives by several centuries.) Georgina Clark's 'A Life-Watch' (1868) is one such story, beginning with a relatively innocuous mystery of a female lodger with a large trunk which never leaves her sight; at the story's conclusion, she explains that the trunk contains the body of her husband, whom she murdered years earlier in the mistaken belief that he was conducting an affair. Her own early death is brought upon by her guilt over the murder, and while she is not the only person present when the chest is finally opened, she alone sees her husband's ghost rising to silently confront her.

moves, although her son notes that '[s]he is smiling at me' (334). While these ghosts do interact with the living, then, that interaction is by necessity minimal, limited to a single appearance at a moment they can neither decide upon nor control. In stories where the ghost has the ability to appear at other times, their interactions with the living show a corresponding increase in their agency, and it is these stories which provide the earliest examples of ghosts whose agency is increased in some regard by their deaths.

Mrs Henry Wood's 'Gina Montani' (1851) is one of the most overtly Gothic early-period stories, and its ghost comes as the result of a suitably gruesome murder in which the heroine is walled up alive by her former lover's wife. Lower-class than the aristocratic lover, and Protestant against the background of the story's caricatured Catholic setting, she is a powerless character in life, a helpless figure to whom wrongs are done. Her ghost does not speak, but it is nevertheless death that grants her a voice; she appears twice to the woman who ordered her murder, her continued existence a refusal to allow her death to go unspoken or forgotten. The wife dies soon after Gina's final appearance, torn by guilt and terrified of a future confrontation in the afterlife.

In Anna Hoyt's 'The Ghost of Little Jacques' (1863), a child murdered by his father also gains through death the agency that he was denied in life. Jacques C appears as a ghost twice, establishing the manner of his death and directly

confronting his murderer. The narrator, an assistant in the confectionery shop owned by Jacques' parents, is the first to see him, and at first assumes from the ghost's gestures that it was the child's mother who killed him; several years later, after Madame C__'s disappearance and presumed death, she marries Monsieur C__ herself, discovering only on his wife's reappearance that he was responsible for his child's death. When Monsieur C__ tries to poison her in order to enforce to her silence and permit his own escape, Jacques appears again, and his father drinks the poison himself in a final, belated concession to his guilt.

While Gina Montani's appearance coincides with the death of her murderer, as it did previously with her murderer's infant child, there is no suggestion in the narrative that these are posthumous acts of vengeance; rather, Gina serves as a premonition of the woman's death as well as a reminder of her crime. Likewise, Monsieur C__ sees his son's appearance as the visual sign of a divine judgement, a view echoed by the narrator in her final words: 'He had been arrested by a Higher Power. Monsieur C__ was dead' (226). While subordinate to and dependent upon a higher, divine agency, Jacques' power is still underlined with a repeated emphasis on its capacity to affect others. Most strikingly, his increased agency comes at the literal, physical expense of those around him. When the narrator sees the ghost for the first time, his directed, purposeful movement overrides her ability to act:

> The little phantom had arisen, its slim finger was outstretched, - it beckoned, slowly beckoned; growing indistinct, it receded farther and farther out from the saloon towards the shop.

The fascination of a spell was upon me; I turned and followed the retreating figure (216-7).

The most powerful of the ghosts in early-period stories establish their agency in the same way, either overpowering or controlling the actions of living people. Henry James provided one of the more dramatic examples in 'The Romance of Certain Old Clothes' (1867): a power struggle between two sisters is here depicted in terms of physical force, with the ghost of one eventually strangling the other. Stories such as Dinah Mulock Craik's 'M. Anastasius' (1857) and M. E. Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant' (1862) illustrate equally powerful psychological control on the part of their ghosts, both of which directly bring about the deaths of living characters despite not showing any capacity for physical violence themselves. Moreover, both ghosts exhibit a degree of psychological complexity underestimated by their living rivals, culminating in Braddon's story in the narrator's realisation that a living woman has fallen in love with his ghostly rival, and in Craik's in the protagonist's decision to offer forgiveness to the controlling guardian who continues to exert influence over her life after his death.[66] With agency comes individuality, and with both comes ghosts that belong in the spiritualist tradition of associating death with increased agency.

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[66]. Forgiveness also plays a significant role in at least one other early-period story, Ada Trevanion's 'A Ghost Story' (1857), although it is a more common feature of interactions with mid- and late-period ghosts. Elizabeth Gaskell's 'The Old Nurse's Story' (1852) provides one example of why: when ghosts are no longer active agents in their own right, capable of a continued, developing relationship with the living, then pleas for or offers of forgiveness cannot be made to the ghost. 'What's done in youth,' as Miss Furnivall laments, 'can never be undone in age!' (20).

As the physical representation of that agency, hands play as prominent a role in these stories as in the discourse of spiritualist séances. In James's story, the dead sister's victory over her rival is signified not by the act of violence itself, but by the visual indication of its occurrence: 'on her blanched brow and cheeks there glowed the marks of ten hideous wounds from two vengeful ghostly hands' (220). In Hoyt's, it is Jacques' beckoning finger which guides the narrator to discovering the means of his murder, and that gesture itself which overpowers her own agency. The trope of hands as representative of ghostly agency is not entirely absent from pre-spiritualist supernatural fiction, and Lockwood's encounter with the ghost of the young Catherine Earnshaw at the beginning of *Wuthering Heights* (1848) is striking because of its sudden physicality:

> I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it […] Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist onto the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes: still it wailed, "Let me in!" and maintained its tenacious grip, almost maddening me with fear. (67)

It is, however, only in the early-period stories of the 1850s and 1860s that this becomes a fully developed and recognised convention, linked to an increasing conception of agency as central to the ghost's activity. What ghostly hands symbolise is not merely the possession of agency, but the power of death to confer it.

The transition from powerless to powerful, and its connection to the agency symbolised by the ghost's hands, is illustrated most dramatically in the corpus of

early-period stories by M. E. Braddon's 'The Cold Embrace' (1867). Here, a girl commits suicide to avoid an arranged marriage after her clandestine lover abandons her, then returns after her death to follow, and eventually kill, her former paramour. Gertrude's existence in life is one of exaggerated passivity, marked by inaction and disappointment; she dies on the night before her unwanted marriage, realising that 'her father will hear no entreaties; her rich suitor will not listen to her prayers', and that her artist lover 'does not write - he does not come' (44-5). Her only power to influence any of the people around her comes after her death, when her former lover views several men carrying a corpse out of a river and begs to be allowed to paint it, for '[s]uicides are always handsome' (46). He recognises her face and flees; invisible, she follows him, and the rest of his own life is marked by the sensation of 'cold arms around his neck' which 'will not be flung off, or cast away' (50). Finally, at a masked ball, he welcomes their embrace, dances himself to collapse with his spectral partner, and is found dead the next morning, 'from want of food, exhaustion and the breaking of a blood vessel' (50).

Before her death, Gertrude's agency is almost non-existent. The events that shape her life, wanted or unwanted, form an unremitting sequence of actions done to her by others: her secret betrothal, her arranged marriage, her lover's broken promises to return. Even the most minor acts of mental agency, in response to her increasingly bleak circumstances, are presented as fruitless; when her lover's letters cease, '[h]ow many times she hopes, only to be disappointed!' (44). Her suicide is

the only active decision she makes, and one which is itself framed as an act of despair and capitulation, not only by its nature but by her own previous words during what is ironically the only point in the story at which we hear her voice: 'it is only the suicide – the lost wretch on whom sorrowful angels shut the door of Paradise – whose unholy spirit haunts the footsteps of the living' (44).

It is her suicide, however, which marks the transition from powerless living woman to powerful ghost. As with the disembodied spirit hands that materialised at séances, this ghost's physical touch symbolises her agency. The lover who stayed beyond her reach in life is, literally, held within it after her suicide; her arms are now 'clasped round his neck', 'palpable to the touch', and 'he can no more escape from their icy grasp than he can escape from death' (44, 50). After the passive inertia of her life, her active method of bringing about his death is described in terms of motion and energy, as her arms 'whirl him round' while the other dancers 'one by one drop off' (50). There is no suggestion here that death fundamentally changes her motivations themselves; rather, she is given greater capacity to realise them. Death does not mark the ultimate surrender to another's agency, but the final assumption of her own.

Mid-period stories, too, are spread across a wide spectrum of approaches to ghostly agency, but by this point, the distribution of stories on that spectrum had shifted. In these decades, powerful ghosts began to outnumber their more limited

counterparts, and examples of the echo-like ghosts seem in stories such as Bulwer-Lytton's became rare.[67] With the ghost's increased power came a greater sense of psychological depth, and these mid-period stories show the establishment of a convention which would come to be recognised as typically Victorian: ghosts with concretely human personalities and motivations, whose ability to influence the living is emotional and psychological in nature.

Charlotte Riddell's work provides some of the most evident, and most influential, examples of mid-period ghosts whose power exists in psychological as well as physical terms.[68] Her earliest ghost story, 'Banshee's Warning' (1867), combines the much earlier convention of a ghost as a death-omen with a degree of psychological depth typical of later supernatural fiction. The banshee's scream is

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[67]. Some exceptions to this do exist, many of which date from the early 1870s. Frequently, such stories use other pre-1850 conventions of supernatural fiction in addition to their limited ghosts; the spectral hunting scene in M. E. Braddon's 'Chrighton Abbey' (1871), for example, which portends death to members of one particular family, has its origins in much earlier folklore narratives of death-omens. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Giant Wistaria' (1891) not only contrasts past and future through splitting the narrative into two halves set a hundred years apart, but also uses the ancient convention of a ghost haunting a location due to an inadequately ritualised burial, a device which can be dated to at least the first century AD in the letters of Pliny the Younger (LXXXIII, 'To Sura'). Two of Charlotte Riddell's ghost stories, 'A Strange Christmas Game' (1868) and *The Disappearance of Mr. Jeremiah Redworth* (1860), also use this convention of the improperly buried ghost unable to rest, although only the first involves an echo-like re-enactment of the individual's death; the ghost in the second story has more agency in the second story, guiding witnesses to its corpse.

[68]. While the bulk of her work has since faded into obscurity, Charlotte Riddell was an influential figure in the 1860s and 70s, earning a reputation for fiction that dealt with the practicalities of the business world as its main subject matter. *George Geith of Fen Court* (1864), the novel that cemented her reputation in this regard, featured a noble heir who took up accounting for the pleasure of the work. Her supernatural fiction also tends to feature narrators initially more preoccupied with the necessities of earning a living than with the mechanics of the supernatural, and several of her protagonists are young clerks. 'Banshee's Warning' (later reproduced as 'Hertford O'Donnell's Warning') was her earliest ghost story, appearing in the Christmas annual of *London Society* in 1867. Her supernatural novellas, *Fairy Water* (later reproduced as *The Haunted House at Latchford*) and *The Uninhabited House* comprised the *Routledge's Christmas Annual* in 1873 and 1875 respectively.

one of unabated grief, and its influence on living characters occurs on this emotional level: 'such a wail of pain, and agony, and distress, as caused the [protagonist's] blood to curdle' (144). In 'Old Mrs Jones' (1882), an atypically threatening ghost haunts the house where locals believe her body was buried, but the story's conclusion proves their speculation wrong: her connection to the house is emotional rather than circumstantial, and she reveals the location of her corpse herself, despite her neighbours' certainty that 'she's in the house somewhere, right enough, and if she could speak she would say so' (187). The discovery comes via the ghost's almost hypnotic possession of a servant, who later describes her experience as literally overwhelming:

> Doctor Jones's wife came to her bedside and bade her get up and dress, and opened the front doors and made her walk till she was fit to drop […] till they came to the garden gate of St Julian's; she passed through that and kept beckoning her to follow. (213)

As with Anna Hoyt's 'The Ghost of Little Jacques', the ghost's beckoning hand symbolises its ability to influence and control, but there is no sense here of a ghost acting as a divine intermediary. Old Mrs. Jones carries out her own wishes from her own motivations, acting not as a generic ghost but as an individual.

Fairy Water (1873), the earliest of Riddell's supernatural novellas, provides an example of a related mid-period convention. This ghost shows not only emotional depth in her ability to physically and mentally influence the living, but also a strong connection to a living individual. The narrative weaves together the stories of two

women, one living, one dead, and both imprisoned or restricted in some way due to their societal status. The ghost was in life the French Catholic wife of an eldest son due to inherit his family estate, and murdered in unclear circumstances when her husband's brother brings her to England in order to convince his father to transfer the inheritance to him, on the grounds that the elder son's wife was 'two things the old squire couldn't abear – a foreigner and a Papist' (171).

Several generations later, her indebted great-grandson, Valentine, falls in love with a young widow whose tyrannical husband's will forbids her from remarrying or leaving the family home. He does not see the ghost, but she appears to other members of his family, eventually guiding them to her skeleton hidden, along with her jewellery, on another family estate. Valentine's subsequent inheritance of that property coincides with the discovery of the widow's husband's second will, which frees her from her previous restrictions; the two subsequently marry, a match made possible by Valentine's new-found wealth. At the story's conclusion, the widow wears a wedding ring found on the ghost's skeleton, providing a final, irrevocable link between the two.

This ghost's motives are, presumably, personal rather than circumstantial; while her body was given an improper burial, the importance of her jewellery in the narrative combined with her selective, and apparently deliberate, distribution of specific pieces of jewellery around the grounds of her house suggests that her

primary aim was the rightful transfer of property to her descendants. While her overall purpose in the story is benign, and its results on the widow beneficial, her direct interactions with other characters are more threatening. She drives Valentine's father to feverish illness with her constant appearances; regardless, he explains, '[s]he beckoned me to follow her, and I could not choose but do so' (184). Her effect on the story's other significant female character, Lady Mary, is almost fatally debilitating, causing her to leave the house 'very ill, and in a state of utter exhaustion' (218). It is Lady Mary who first wears the ghost's ring, found in the grounds of the house, and who subsequently sees the ghost herself; the implication is that all these factors are directly connected, and the ghost's power to both appear and influence the living comes at the expense of another's health. Ghostly agency, in this context, is the result of a direct and personal shifting power relationship between dead and living individuals.

The conception of ghosts, and their agency, being connected to the living in this way had already been established in spiritualist discourse by the late 1800s. With the growing popularity of full-form materialisations came an increasingly close connection between medium and spirit, in which the latter's power and agency were directly correlated to the former's. A precedent for this had, of course, already been set by spoken séance communication, where the living medium needed to be in a trance for the ghost's voice to speak through them, and trance mediumship was also the predominant method of full-form materialisations. For these visual

manifestations, however, the medium's presence was further reduced even as the ghost's increased. At séances where communication was spoken and the ghost itself was not visible, the entranced medium still remained seated at the table, physically present while mentally and spiritually absent; at séances where the ghost did appear in visible form, the medium was outside the immediate proceedings entirely, usually staying inside a curtained booth from which the spirit appeared.

The debate over the dynamics of power at work here is tangled inextricably with the debate over the legitimacy of spiritualist claims, for while spiritualists saw the medium and spirit as essentially separate entities, their critics pointed to the various indications otherwise and argued that medium and 'ghost' were one and the same. Within the framework of this dispute, the power balance between ghost and medium became even further polarised, as frequent accusations of fraud led to mediums being literally immobilised in their cabinets in order to prevent them from appearing in the guise of spirits.

Allegations of spiritualist fraud are as old as the movement itself, and the Hydesville rappings were far from widely accepted in good faith by the public. By 1851, a lecture given by John Bovee Dods, an author who had previously written on the mesmeric possibilities of electricity and who believed spiritualist phenomena could be explained by similar means, pre-emptively addressed the crowds of less generous sceptics whose influence was by now considerable: '[t]hey have never

paused to reflect that mediums might, after all, be in reality sincere and honest, and yet not understand how these communications are made by them' (Dods 1854, 18).

As spiritualist influence grew, so too did the possibility for profitable fraud by its most public figures. Mediums exposed in such fraud, such as Eusapia Palladino and Jennie and Nelson Homes, caused further damage to the credibility of the spiritualist movement; the latter caused a particularly notable scandal of the mid-1870s, when the woman used by the Holmses to impersonate a spirit sold her story to the press just before the *Atlantic Monthly* published an article by Robert Dale Owen praising one of their séances ('Touching Visitants from a Higher Life', Jan. 1875). Owen, who heard the news too late to stop his article going to press, subsequently retracted his support, and Arthur Conan Doyle, recounting the events in the first volume of his *History of Spiritualism*, described the fraud and its aftermath as uniquely damaging to public perceptions of spiritualism even alongside the period's other exposures of fraud. There were certainly a considerable number of these, some of them overtly financial in nature, and mediums such as Daniel Dunglas Home amassed a fortune to the loud disapproval of sceptics.

Home, in particular, brought added disrepute to the movement's reputation with a court case involving a five-figure sum that he had convinced a man's widow to transfer to him on her husband's orders (discussed in footnote 34 of Chapter One), and was the subject of some of Dickens's most vitriolic attacks on spiritualism as a result of related activities. Robert Browning's 'Mr Sludge, The Medium', written after Elizabeth Barrett Browning's encounters with Home,

showcased a particularly vehement disapproval both of Home's fraudulent activity

and the manipulative sentimentalism that accompanied it:

> Now, don't, sir! Don't expose me! Just this once!
> This was the first and only time, I'll swear,
> Look at me, – see, I kneel, – the only time
> I swear I ever cheated, – yes, by the soul
> Of Her who hears – (your sainted mother, sir!). (100)[69]

The exact mechanics behind the power balance in the séance room will, of

course, differ depending on whether a natural or a supernatural theory is used to

explain them, but the significance of these dynamics remains no matter which

theory is chosen. If medium and ghost are the same individual, then the medium

requires the fiction of a ghostly identity to be an active agent in the séance

environment; if the ghost is supernatural in origin, then its presence (and thus its

agency) relies upon the existence and passivity of the medium.

In recent literature on spiritualism, critics have theorised the séance-room as

an arena for the suspension of social norms and assumption of power by those who

would otherwise be without it. 'Spiritualism made social violations of all kinds

possible because it blurred the boundaries between the spiritual and material,'

Marlene Tromp argues; during séances, young female 'ghosts' appeared in robes

which left arms, legs and necks bare, kissed and caressed sitters both male and

female, and invited those sitters to establish the reality of their materialised form by

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[69]. For more on the significance of fraud within spiritualism, see the comprehensive history given in Ruth Brandon's *The Spiritualists*, and the discussion of the early activities of the Society for Psychical Research in Janet Oppenheim's *The Other World* (1985).

laying their hands upon it (Tromp 2003, 68). Tromp's argument applies particularly to the examples she gives of mediums themselves being unsure of the boundary between their own actions and those of the ghost they materialise, experiences which exist at what she calls 'th[e] site of fluid boundaries and metamorphosing identities' between flesh and spirit (69), but provides insight also to the wider sphere of the séance-room as a whole. It is not necessary, after all, for the medium herself to be aware of the blurred identities and shifting power dynamics at work during a séance in order for the effect of these things to reach beyond the individual.

Alex Owen extends the sphere of the medium's power to a more abstract level, one also operative outside the specific environment of the séance-room. She argues that spiritualism provided a means for mediums, predominantly young and female, to assume a powerful role by, ironically, epitomizing Victorian ideals of passive femininity; the more passive the medium, she observes, the more successful her mediumship, due to the spiritualist philosophy that 'innate femininity, in particular, female passivity […] facilitated this renunciation of self and cultivation of mediumistic powers' (Owen 2004, 10). Having the ability of mediumship, then, conferred power to the medium's role as well as her actions, and this power was thus applicable even outside the trance. Ann Braude states further that '[m]ediumship allowed women to discard limitations on women's role without questioning accepted ideas about women's nature' (Braude 1989, 83), and connects

this to spiritualism's position in advancing the feminist movement in the mid-nineteenth century.

Both Braude and Owen cite various fields in which mediums put the influence of their role to use: advocating socially radical views (feminism, socialism, pacifism, marriage reform, vegetarianism and free love) in pamphlets and lectures; dispensing medical advice and healing;[70] and acting as religious leaders both within and outside the movement, often by trading on the overlap between spiritualism and Christianity. Eliza Richards draws on the example of Edgar Allen Poe's lover Sarah Helen Whitman, a well-known spiritualist and poet in her own right who nevertheless published poems allegedly transmitted by Poe's spirit after his death, to argue a wider case about spiritualist poets: '[t]hey promoted the myth of original genius in order to showcase collective modes of poetic generation' (Richards 1999, 271), she states. While ghosts may have been absent from these wider proceedings, their implied existence remained necessary; mediums, after all, could not exist as such without them.

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[70]. Spiritualist approaches to medicine comprise a topic too wide-ranging and complex to be given justice within the constraints of this thesis. Ann Braude addresses the matter in depth in chapter 6 of *Radical Spirits*: spiritualist interest in medicine, she argues, arises from spiritualists' wider social concerns: '[t]hey found the source of women's debility in social conventions that dictated loveless marriages and repeated unwanted pregnancies as well as restrictive clothing, an unhealthful diet, and a lack of exercise' (143). The methods of spiritualist medicine she describes vary, encompassing diagnosis by entranced mediums, homeopathic and electromagnetic remedies, and the sale of 'formulas' to cure all forms of disease; one Boston midwife even engaged a trance medium to assist her, Braude states, although the medium's exact role is unspecified.

As one of the few ghost stories to deal directly with spiritualism,[71] Henry James's story 'Maud-Evelyn' (1899) views the power relationship psychologically, leaving the existence of the ghost an open question while using a bereaved couple's obsession with spiritualism to illustrate the destructive quality of unprocessed grief.[72] Here, again, the selfhood and agency of living characters is reduced by the ghost's existence, although the process is strengthened through a particularly obliging protagonist. Marmaduke, the almost pathologically passive character selected by the bereaved couple for a 'spiritual' wedding with their daughter, chooses the dead Maud-Evelyn over the living Lavinia, who nevertheless supports and encourages him. Assisting not only his belief in Maud-Evelyn's presence but the practicalities of his marriage to the spirit of a girl long dead, Lavinia's

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[71]. One notable late-period exception is Agatha Christie's 'The Last Séance' (1933), in which the unbalanced connection between medium and ghost provided ample material for a suitably unnerving narrative. In Christie's story, for example, a medium physically materialises the spirit of a dead child for his grieving mother; dissatisfied with the limited opportunities for reunion provided by the confines of the séance-room, the woman grabs the child and runs, leaving the medium's body a shrivelled, desiccated thing half its original size. One is reminded of the spiritualist fascination with the exact mechanics of materialisation, and of the medium's physical role in the process, illustrated in descriptions such as the following from Arthur Conan Doyle:

> If the ectoplasmic figure weighed only 77 lb. and the medium 121 lb., then it is clear that only 44 lb. of her were left when the phantom was out. If 44 lb. were not enough to continue the processes of life, may not her guardians have used their subtle occult chemistry in order to dematerialise her and so save her from all danger until the return of the phantom would enable her to reassemble? (Conan Doyle 1926(a), 110)

J. Arthur Findlay notes a similar description from a spiritualist correspondent, who explains that spirit-matter is taken from all the participants in a séance: '[i]f we each sat on a weighing machine we would find our weight during the séance gradually decreasing, and as the séance neared an end, as the ectoplasm was returned, so would our weight return to normal' (Findlay 1931, 90).

[72]. The story reflects James's own views on spiritualism, as stated in his *Atlantic Monthly* review of Robert Dale Owen's *The Debatable Land Between This World and the Next* (printed in the March, 1872 issue). '[I]t is extremely prejudicial to the Christian dogma to represent the life and immortality it brings to light as the mere extension of our personal consciousness between the grave', he argues (359); spiritualism ignores the transcendent nature of Christian views of the soul by assuming that relationships, wishes and individual natures continue exactly as they are after death.

mediumship is psychological in nature, although its effects are very much physical: by the end of the story, the formerly beautiful girl is left with a 'fine wasted face' (626). Still, she accepts her position as secondary to the ghost, content until Marmaduke's death to 'mov[e] about him like a sister of charity – at all events like a sister' (629). The story's narrator speaks in tones of exasperation as she relates Lavinia's apparent happiness with her situation, but fails to connect this with her own description of Lavinia's earlier personality, defined by its 'extreme timidity' (601). Imperfect as Marmaduke's future wife, she nevertheless serves as a perfect medium for his relationship with Maud-Evelyn, and seems satisfied with the arrangement: 'he wants me', she explains with perfect simplicity (628).

Leon Edel describes Marmaduke as 'a living ghost mated to a ghost' (*ibid.*, 599), and his assessment of the former's character is difficult to dispute. From the narrator's first description of his 'handsome, empty young face' (602), Marmaduke epitomises passivity, choosing a subsidiary role in Maud-Evelyn's parents' life over a central position in his own, and rejecting even the timid Lavinia as too alive, too present, for his comfort. While Marmaduke's own life becomes almost incidental to Maud-Evelyn's parents' determination to give her the earthly life she lost, the narrative continually presents his passivity as his own choice, and his absence of action as a decision in its own right. Even as he grows increasingly weaker, 'wast[ing] away in an excellent manner' (629), he neither questions nor objects to

his situation. Ultimately, he is the victim not of another's agency but of the willing surrender of his own.

In other stories, the role of an intermediary is less essential to the shifting power relationship between medium and ghost. James's 'The Friends of the Friends' (1896) likewise features a triangle of two women competing for the affections of one man, although here, the narrative suggests, it is fate rather than the active will of another against which the central (and narrating) character is ultimately ineffective. The story's central plot is relatively simple: the narrator (nameless, as are all the story's characters) continually fails to introduce two of her friends to each other despite the conviction that they would be 'birds of a feather' (397), initially because of a series of inconvenient accidents and mistimings and subsequently because, after becoming engaged to the man, she fears the strength of his potential connection to the woman. After a final incident in which the narrator directly lies in order to prevent their meeting, the woman dies; the man claims to have met her elsewhere on the evening of her death elsewhere, recognizing her from his fiancée's description. As time passes, the narrator becomes increasingly convinced that he has seen the dead woman continually ever since her death and has fallen in love with her; she confronts him, and refuses to accept his ambiguous denial. When he dies, six years after the end of their engagement, she sees in his death the ultimate confirmation of her theory: 'the result of a long necessity, of an unquenchable desire […] it was a response to an irresistible call' (424).

'The Friends of the Friends' echoes the bulk of James's other supernatural fiction in presenting its ghostly element as the subjective experience of an individual, whose testimony we as readers will always view sceptically. Unlike the narrator in *The Turn of the Screw*, however, the narrator of 'The Friends of the Friends' does not claim to directly experience the supernatural herself; rather, the ability to see ghosts is something shared by the other two characters in the past, and is itself a reason, she suggests, for their connection. The narrative also leaves open the possibility that nothing supernatural took place, and that, as the man suggests, the narrator was simply mistaken about the time of her friend's death. Adding fuel to this, the narrator's reliability seems to decrease as the story progresses, and despite her protests that she 'was able, with God's help, to speak without blind passion or vulgar violence' (422), her subsequent confrontation with the man illustrates the fallibility of her own subjective convictions rather than the secrets he may be keeping.

> "She missed you for five years," I said, "but she never misses you now! You're making it up!"
>
> "Making it up?" He had begun to turn from white to red.
>
> "You see her – you see her: you see her every night!" He gave a loud sound of derision, but I felt it ring false. "She comes to you as she came that evening," I declared; "having tried it she found that she liked it!" (422)

As with the public mediums who used their status to support and advance socially radical views, the actual ghost in this narrative is less significant than the

possibility it represents. Although the dead woman was in life a vivacious, dynamic character, '[d]ecidedly proud and rather whimsical' (400), her agency was ultimately limited by her situation, both as the wife of an estranged and abusive husband and as the victim of the circumstances which prevented her from meeting the narrator's male friend. There are arguably hints in the narrative that this prevention was always a deliberate (although subconscious) one on the narrator's part, but largely it is framed as circumstantial, the cumulative result of innumerable preventions, restrictions, and limitations. "The very elements conspired and the constitution of man reinforced them," the narrator explains; "[a] cold, a headache, a bereavement, a storm, a fog, an earthquake, a cataclysm, infallibly intervened" (403). If she does return as a ghost, these obstacles are surpassed, and the narrator's direct involvement to prevent the meeting becomes futile. Here, then, the ambiguity of the supernatural strengthens the story's psychological depth as the narrator's fears are transferred onto a template in which she can understand and confront them. The other woman's increased agency, and her own subsequent loss of control, are thus both seen as the inevitable consequences of the former's transition from living woman to ghost.

Placing narrative emphasis upon the emotional reaction of living witnesses rather than the ghost itself is a technique that inevitably lends itself well to psychological ghost stories, in which the existence of the supernatural as a real external force is cast into doubt. Ironically, the increased agency of the ghost

throughout early- and mid-period stories may therefore have led directly to the proliferation of late-period stories in which its role is minimal. Julia Briggs dates the height of the psychological ghost story to the first years of the twentieth century, noting that its decline coincides with the wide dissemination of Freud's ideas in the 1920s. Certainly, the popularity of the ghost story as a whole decreases rapidly after the 1920s, with many remaining works cast in the M. R. James model of a return to the macabre, but this is not to say that the turn of the century marks the end of powerful, individual ghosts playing an influential role in ghost stories. Other late-period stories juggle the increased psychological complexity of the ghost figure with that already granted to the living characters, producing narratives in which living and dead are placed in a constant struggle for power, for control of the narrative, or merely for the ability to tell their own story.

Edith Wharton's 'The Lady's Maid's Bell' (1902) provides one of the most striking late-period attempts to give equal narrative emphasis to living and dead as individuals in their own right. The result, a lengthy and often confusing story about an ill-treated wife and the continued influence of her dead maid, lacks the psychological impact of James's *The Turn of the Screw*, but still provides an influential model for ghost stories with unreliable narrators and unclear resolutions. It is the dead maid's replacement, Alice Hartley (referred to throughout by her last name), who narrates the story, and she who pieces together the existing fragments of her predecessor's story as best she can. Her position is itself an ambiguous one, since

the position formerly held by Emma Saxon is never fully ceded to her; Emma's room remains unoccupied despite Hartley's arrival, and the lady's maid's bell of the title is only ever rung for Emma, Hartley being summoned instead via another servant. Hartley hears Emma's footsteps running down the corridor at night in response to the bell, and later sees Emma in Mrs. Brympton's room, seemingly intervening between her mistress and her aggressive, drunken husband, but Emma never speaks and the living characters rarely even mention her. At the story's conclusion, Emma leads Hartley across the winter grounds to seek help for her mistress; the neighbour she chooses is Mr. Ranford, whose friendship with Mrs. Brympton, the narrative suggests, may be disguising an adulterous relationship. Of the truth of the situation, and of Emma's intentions in summoning Hartley to follow her, Hartley remains barely any wiser at the story's end; she returns to the house too late, and Mrs Brympton dies, finally fixing her husband with a glare that mirrors that of Emma's spectral form.

Where Hartley is left confused and uncertain, then, Emma retains the knowledge and certainty of her previous position. Hartley does not act, because she is given neither the information nor the opportunity necessary to do so; Emma, by contrast, is very much an active figure in the story's proceedings, both more aware of her own place in the relationships and situations that surround her and more able to act on that knowledge. The power of the latter is contrasted with the limitations placed on the former, overtly as well as implicitly. The first time the bell rings and

Emma's presence is confirmed by the sound of footsteps subsequently heading towards Mrs Brympton's, Hartley stands 'stock still' in her own, telling herself that 'someone left that room just now and *ran* down the passage ahead of you' (24, italics mine).

As Emma's continued presence becomes increasingly difficult for Hartley to avoid, her role as Mrs Brympton's protector becomes more evident. When Hartley follows the sound of Emma's footsteps towards her mistress's room, the door is answered by Mr Brympton, 'his face […] red and savage', who greets her with *"How many of you are there, in God's name?"* (24). Again, Emma's power seems to affect that of others; on the night of Mrs Brympton's death, both Hartley and Mr Brympton see her standing in the doorway of Mrs Brympton's bedroom, and Mr Brympton 'st[ands] motionless, as if all the strength had run out of him'. His wife, by contrast, although weakened and near death, seems to be granted strength of her own merely by Emma's presence, as she 'suddenly raised herself, and opening her eyes fixed a look on him' (35). It is only when Emma leads Hartley across the fields to Mr Ranford's house that she seems anything other than powerful, her silence now a limitation; 'her face was just one dumb prayer to me', Hartley explains, 'but how in the world was I to help her?' (30). She remains the more powerful of the two, however, 'drawing [Hartley] after her' across the fields, and Hartley finds her own agency once again superseded by Emma's. This time, it is mobility rather than

immobility thus caused: 'she turned and looked at me, and it was as if she had dragged me with ropes. After that I followed like a dog' (31).

The connection between Hartley and Emma is echoed in their similarity, both in their role and in their appearance. This, subsequently, has led several critics to view Emma as in some sense Hartley's double. Jenni Dyman, for example, notes that the two seem to share two halves of one name (the first maid being referred to by her first name throughout, and the next by her last), viewing each as completing the other. An exact reading of the story from this perspective is, again, complicated by the unclear dynamic between the story's living characters; it is difficult to deduce precisely what Emma knows that Hartley does not, or what Emma's role as Hartley's double can tell us about either Hartley as an individual or her social position as a servant.[73] Regardless, the strong connection between the two remains evident. Emma is Hartley's contemporary as well as her predecessor, her guide to the puzzling situation of the household as well as a puzzle to be solved in her own right. This is not so much a doubling as an overlap, and it seems that in order to fully understand Emma, Hartley must herself learn where the boundaries between them lie and where their agency shares a common ground. The story's ambiguous ending suggests not only Hartley's inability to do this, but also the reader's own.

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[73]. Other critical views on the story read its ghosts as the manifestations of socially silenced voices. Sherrie A. Inness sees the story's true depth in its reflection of the uncertain, unstated ground occupied by servants in wealthy households, while Kathy A. Fedorko compares the story's emphasis upon silence and female subjectivity to *The House of Mirth*, and reads the unspoken knowledge that Emma attempts to transfer to Hartley as 'the weighty secret of female sexuality' (Fedorko 1991, 91).

Margaret McDowell, in her influential 1970 article on Wharton's supernatural fiction, criticises 'The Lady's Maid's Bell' for its unclear resolution and subsequently diluted emotional effect upon the reader. Classifying it as one of Wharton's 'lesser tales', she explains the failure of it and the other stories in that category terms of their direct effect upon the reader rather than their concrete content, explaining that while 'the reader no doubt experiences the 'cold shiver' that Edith Wharton wished him to […] [the stories] exert less imaginative pressure on him than others' (McDowell 1970, 144, 143). While a diversion from the more content-oriented feminist criticism of the 1990s, such as that of Sherrie A. Inness or Kathy Fedorko, this would certainly comply with Wharton's own evaluative criteria, as stated in her preface to the 1937 collection *Ghosts*:

> But when I first began to read, and then to write, ghost stories, I was conscious of a common medium between myself and my readers, of their meeting me halfway among the primeval shadows, and filling in the gaps in my narrative with sensations and divinations akin to my own (Wharton [1937] 1973, 8).

The common medium here is not merely the spectrum of human emotion, but also the language of the genre itself. Other critics connect this, and thus the form's success, directly to its recognisable conventions. L. P. Hartley, for example, argued in the mid-twentieth century that:

> Even ghosts must have rules and obey them. In the past they had certain traditional activities; they could squeak and gibber, for instance, they could clank chains. Now their liberties have been greatly extended […] But if the ghost can be so like an ordinary human being that we can scarcely tell the difference, what is that difference to be? […] It will depend on the writer's imagination whether […] he can draw up a code of

rules for ghosts which we – and they – will recognize (Hartley 1955, viii-x).

L. P. Hartley's tone may seem more sensational than evaluative here, creating a façade of propriety in order to praise the range of possibilities granted to the ghosts of late nineteenth and twentieth century narratives. Nevertheless, his argument speaks to a genuine concern about the form's future as its conventions develop; if ghosts have no recognisable conventions of appearance, ability or behaviour, then ghost stories will lack the internal logic required to, in Wharton's phrasing, meet the reader halfway among the primeval shadows. Late-period stories, however, demonstrate that conventions need not be ancient to be effective. Wharton's 'Pomegranate Seed' (1931), in which an active, malevolent ghost shapes rather than merely participates in its situation, demonstrates how later conventions of powerful ghosts and ghostly agency can achieve the desired effect without appearing intrusively modern. Indeed, McDowell praises this story precisely for its ability to balance ghostly power with psychological complexity, resulting in a narrative in which '[o]utward suspense and inner psychic tension parallel each other' (139); that this is the desired aim of a ghost story is an assertion she does not feel it necessary to defend.

The story's plot is uncomplicated, relying upon the single revelation of supernatural activity that comes gradually to both reader and protagonist. Charlotte, the second wife of Kenneth Ashby, finds the idyll of her new marriage interrupted by a series of letters addressed to her new husband. Although he reads them in

private, and refuses to tell her anything about their content or author, their effect on him is unmistakable: he grows distant and withdrawn and appears increasingly weakened, 'empty of life and courage' (222). After he disappears, Charlotte connects the letters to his previous wife, Elsie, a 'distant, self-centred woman' who 'absolutely dominated him', and opens the remaining letter to read a message too faint to decipher except for the words 'mine' and 'come' (220, 222, 251). Elsie, it seems, has reached back into the world of the living to summon him; the story ends with a defeated Charlotte lifting the telephone receiver to call the police, '[e]xactly as if we thought it could do any good to do anything' (253).

McDowell frames the relationship between Charlotte and Elsie in terms of an unabashed power struggle, with Elsie a 'sinister', 'demonic' figure 'crav[ing] [...] continued power over one whom she supposedly cherished in the past for his own sake,' and Charlotte a weak opponent 'lacking the force, vitality and persuasive presence of the goddess' (139, 140). While agreeing that the dynamics of the story centre upon the issue of power, I would nevertheless dispute her suggestion that Elsie's motivations in death are implied to be anything other than they were in life, or indeed that Elsie must be regarded as a malevolent figure. It seems, rather, that Elsie's ability to act even after her death presents a threat to Charlotte's marriage which differs in degree, not in kind, from that which would be presented by a living former lover.

Charlotte herself initially assumes a natural source for the letters, and her resigned defeat at the story's end comes from a realisation not just of Elsie's presence, but of the strength of her pre-existing connection to Kenneth:

> If even you can see [Elsie's] face on that blank wall [from which her portrait has been removed], why shouldn't he read her writing on this blank paper? Don't you see that she's everywhere in this house, and the closer to him because to everyone else she's become invisible? (253)

Recounting events from Charlotte's perspective, the story suggests ultimately that her assumption of malice comes from her simplified perspective on the full complexity of the relationship she finds herself confronting. When she opens the final letter to decipher only the words 'mine' and 'come' from writing otherwise too faint to read, her reaction to the possessive order comes with the qualification that to Kenneth, the entire letter, and by implication its more detailed and nuanced communication, would have been understandable. 'I remember his saying to me once,' she explains, 'that if you were used to a handwriting the faintest stroke of it became legible' (252). When Kenneth finally disappears in answer to Elsie's summons, the victory is not one of the supernatural over the natural, but of Elsie over Charlotte: an individual conflict, with an individual victor.

McDowell views Charlotte as an intrinsically weak figure, whose 'loses [Kenneth] forever as much by her moral flaccidity as by her rival's malevolence' (139); Jenni Dyman reads her more generously, as a 'transitional woman' caught both between her narrative roles as usurped and usurper and her societal roles as

traditional wife and New Woman (Dyman 1996, 142). The disputed ground here between the weakness inherent in Charlotte's character and the powerlessness inherent in her situation reflects the shifting landscape of power within the story, bring especially to mind the ambiguous dynamic of Kenneth and Elsie's relationship, where Elsie's power seems to be an aggressive force that creates Kenneth's weakness. Charlotte sees him as 'years older, […] emptied of life and courage, and hardly conscious of her presence' (222) after reading one of Elsie's letters, and struck by inaction after receiving another: 'He did not open it immediately, but stood motionless, the color slowly ebbing from his face' (227).

Elsie's commands override not only Charlotte's wishes, but also Kenneth's own, as he answers Charlotte's suggestion of a visit to the country with conflicted helplessness: 'I want – anything you want […] Don't ask me. I can't leave – I can't!' (239). Charlotte thus sees him as a victim, seeing 'a desire for help […] instantly restrained and suppressed' in his eyes and 'the clutch of a man who felt himself slipping over the hold of a precipice' in the grasp of his hand (235, 239) as she reflects on the probable source of the letters, deciding initially that Kenneth must be the victim of a particularly demanding legal client. While she considers him a man 'completely in bondage' (243) and 'under an evil spell' (240), however, the story suggests that his subservience to Elsie's wishes predates her death; Charlotte's friends warn her that he spent his first marriage 'more like an unhappy lover than a contented husband […] and whatever you venture to do, he'll mentally compare

with what Elsie would have done in your place' (223). Kenneth is not denied his own agency by supernatural force; instead, as Charlotte gradually learns, he has willingly surrendered it.

In viewing the situation as a struggle in which 'she must use up her last atom of strength […] for his freedom, and for hers' (239), Charlotte miscalculates not only the capacity of her strength, but also her husband's willingness to act upon his own. While Charlotte may be less effective than Elsie in her ability to influence the situation, Kenneth is the ultimately powerless figure in their triangular dynamic, embracing inaction and the conscious denial of his agency. He is reduced to a conduit for Elsie's continued influence, his own interactions with his current wife replaced by a 'nervous tentative faultfinding […] which always seemed to be uttered against his will' concerning the children's clothes or the household's domestic arrangements (222). His grief, something Charlotte notes as curiously absent from his life since his second marriage, takes the form of an active relationship with his past at the expense of his present, and Charlotte notes his distant expression after reading each letter: 'the look of a man who had been so far away from ordinary events that when he returns to familiar things they seem strange' (222). Despite Charlotte's answer to the friends who describe Elsie's power over him in life, a joking remark that '[h]e may be glad of a little liberty for a change' (222), she discovers to her cost that she cannot grant liberty to an individual who does not

desire it. In death as well as in life, the power balance between Elsie and Kenneth is unchangeable.

In claiming that Elsie's status as a ghost does not fundamentally change her actions and motivations, I do not wish to suggest that the story's supernatural elements are irrelevant either to its effect or to its central dynamic. It is Elsie's continued presence that changes Kenneth's nostalgic grief from a passive to an active force, after all, and her ability to remain an active figure beyond what should have been a final limitation to her agency that gives the story its power. Death casts Elsie's ante-mortem actions and motivations in a disquieting light, reducing the bonds of marital fidelity to a possessive demand and presenting parental concern as an arena for negotiating power with her successor. While it does not alter her motivations, nor reduce her agency, it does frame her power struggle with Charlotte as one in which the latter will forever be at a disadvantage; Elsie can act in both past and present, life and death, but Charlotte's agency and understanding must remain restricted. Elsie herself may not be demonic, but her ability to act marks her as something beyond human at the same time as her personhood remains unaffected.

Sabine Baring-Gould's 'Pomps and Vanities' (1904) provides an even more explicit treatment of agency, balancing a narrative between living and ghostly characters to illustrate the transformation from powerless to powerful. Two sisters,

Letice and Betty, are brought up in very different ways by different aunts: while Betty's guardian is 'a kindly, intellectual and broad-minded old lady', Letice's is dour and puritanical, 'rigid in all her ideas, narrow in all her sympathies' (15). Letice dies young after an angry and resentful life, crying out on her deathbed for the 'pomps and vanities' she was denied; the remainder of the narrative describes Betty's progress as a young woman in society, attending operas and concerts and accepting an offer of marriage from a high-ranking military officer, before the ghost of Letice appears to her.

Before seeing the ghost of her sister, Betty finds herself becoming literally detached from the occasions that should shape her future, falling asleep before each significant social event and waking up with no memory of anything that took place, except for that related by the companions who assure her that she was there. Letice, we learn, has taken her place on all these occasions, living vicariously through her sister's life. On the day of her wedding, Betty wakes to find Letice, dressed in her wedding gown and veil, sitting next to her. Letice explains that by getting married in Betty's place, she has now fulfilled all the ambitions missed in her own life, and will no longer appear in Betty's. Before leaving, she explains the circumstances of her appearance: arriving at the gates of heaven, she was sent back to earth by their guardian angel, who ordered that 'you shall not pass beyond these gates till you have returned to earth and partaken of and had your fill of its pomps and vanities' (42).

Baring-Gould was himself a clergyman, and the bulk of the narrative's description of Letice's life is taken up with some lengthy sermonising on the theological inadequacies of her guardian's views. These he considers particularly damaging to the young, 'distorting young minds, maiming their wills, damping down all youthful buoyancy' (16). Letice's life is defined by a 'system of repression', and the language used emphasises her helplessness in the face of a multitude of restrictions on thought and action:

> Such was the system to which the high-spirited, strong-willed Letice was subjected, and from which there was no escape. The consequence was that Letice tossed and bit at her chains, and that there issued frequent outbreaks of resentment against her aunt. (16)

Death provides her with freedom in the form of her sister's life, the two being similar enough for each to be easily mistaken for the other. While the relationship between the sisters is not an antagonistic or threatening one, however, Letice's power comes at the cost of Betty's own; Betty loses consciousness at the moments Letice appears, the victim of a 'numbing, overpowering lethargy' that restricts her as much as Letice's metaphorical chains. Betty may be an unwitting medium, but she is a medium nonetheless, her own agency and motivations necessarily subordinated to those of the ghost.

The collection of supernatural stories in which 'Pomps and Vanities' first appears, Baring-Gould's *A Book of Ghosts* (1904), illustrates the story with an image of its conclusion: Betty lies immobilised by fear as Letice appears, dressed in her

wedding gown (see Appendix, Fig.6). The contrast between the two sisters is here one of movement, with Betty lying still as '[a]n indescribable terror held her fast. She could not cry out. She could not stir' (40). She is in recline, supported by pillows, one hand pressed to her heart and only her eyes turned towards the figure of her sister. The sweeps and folds of Letice's dress frame her in contrast as a dynamic figure, and she is caught mid-movement, arms lifted, as she raises her veil. She is positioned in front of Betty, her translucent figure still blocking Betty's legs below the knee. While the story's preceding context makes it clear that Letice's life lacked what Betty's contained, the situation is obviously and deliberately reversed here, with Letice possessing the wedding gown, the movement, and ultimately the agency, that her sister now lacks.

Comparing Baring-Gould's illustration with Blake's depiction of Shakespeare's Richard III demonstrates a power shift in portrayals of the ghost, with the symbols of movement and agency transferred from the living figure to the ghost itself. Where Richard's ghosts draw back from him, Letice leans in towards Betty, who in turn is pressed back against her cushions; where Richard's ghosts point inwards towards themselves or towards the sword that Richard is holding out, Betty presses her hand over her own chest, echoing the gesture of Henry VI's ghost standing next to Richard; where Richard stands on the feet of the child ghosts to symbolise his role in their restriction, Letice sits blocking Betty's feet, illustrating the reversed dynamic now at work (see Appendix, fig.7). Ghosts that once

demonstrated a terrifying absence and negation, serving as a *memento mori* through their visible reminder that death lessens, now demonstrate death's power. They are freed from human limitations without losing anything of their human motives and desires.

The ghosts that moan and wail through the streets of London in *A Christmas Carol* are spirits of their time, the visual chorus of a theatrical social conscience staged around workhouses and the still-recent Poor Law. With a few alterations, however, it is easy to imagine the scenario moved to previous centuries: Marley's secular Purgatory could become a religious one, the background of urban poverty could change from 1840s London to a seventeenth-century town. The historical features essential to the narrative are the conventions of the ghostly, and it is these that halt the story in the first half of the nineteenth century, preventing any future transformations other than the nostalgic. Dickens uses his ghosts' lack of agency to illustrate Scrooge's moral imperative to act, contrasting his ability to change the situation around with him with the limited influence held by the powerless among the living as well as the dead. More alive than Jacob Marley, and more socially influential than Bob Cratchit, Scrooge cannot waive the responsibility of his position by maintaining his insularity.

In the later nineteenth century, after ghosts had assumed their own agency and individuality, the narrative framework of 'A Christmas Carol' could never have

provided a structure strong enough to present a forceful morality tale. Where death represents increased power, the dead cannot illustrate the narrowing window of opportunity for the living to change their ways; where the dead lose none of their individual humanity, a later Jacob Marley could never voice an impersonal conscience so well, nor connect his own regret to Scrooge's apathy as if death itself provided all the moral transformation required. As ghosts drew physically closer to humanity, both in the literary and spiritualist discourses of the supernatural, so too did they begin to resemble the living in their actions, their motivations, and their behaviour. The literary ghost story, then, provided supernatural fiction with something more than a transformation in ghosts: rather, the generic figure of 'the ghost' disappeared, to be replaced with a panoply of individual figures for whom death signified a freedom from physical, societal and even narrative restrictions.

Chapter Three. Ghouls and angels: transformations in ghostly appearance.

And then the figure, turning slowly round, discovered to Frederic the fleshless jaws and empty sockets of a skeleton, wrapt in a hermit's cowl. (*The Castle of Otranto*, 84)

The spiritual body is particled, and accordingly subject to waste and supply. Aflame with life and action, it continually casts off a coarser [sic.] and takes to itself and appropriates that which is more ethereal and beautiful. (Peebles 1880, 50)

Stealthily the dead man comes on, feeling at the beams as he comes […] A fearful sight; the tall figure distended with the corruption of the grave, the nose fallen off, the wandering, vacant eyes, with the glaze of death on them, the sallow flesh patched with green masses of decay; the wolf-grey hair and beard have grown in the tomb, and hang matted about the shoulders and breast; the nails, too, have grown. It is a sickening sight - a thing to shudder at, not to see. (Baring-Gould, 'Glámr', 172)

The 'dead man' described here, the eponymous revenant of Sabine Baring-Gould's short story 'Glámr', differs dramatically from the other ghosts in the 1904 collection in which it appears. Its hideous physicality, the repeated emphasis placed upon its decay and corruption as a cause of this, and the narratorial insistence of its status as less than human – not merely 'wolf-grey', but 'it' – mark a clear separation from the more typically Victorian spectres of Baring-Gould's other stories. Indistinguishable from living humans in their least supernatural manifestations, glowing and ethereal in their most, these ghosts of stories such as 'Pomps and Vanities' are half a century and a massive shift in conceptions of the spectral from

the ghost in this story. Surrounded by such examples of nineteenth-century supernaturalia, 'Glámr' seems somehow out of place; the shambling revenant's intrusion into the world of the living echoes the placement of the story itself, a quasi-medieval narrative blundering into a collection of late-period stories.

The explanation for this contrast lies in the story's publication date. As with most single-author collections of supernatural fiction, Baring-Gould's *A Book of Ghosts* featured few stories that had not previously appeared elsewhere; 'Glámr' was first published in Baring-Gould's travelogue *Iceland: Its Scenes And Sagas* in 1863, making it one of the earliest stories in the volume. As the title of its first home implies, however, 'Glámr''s origins are older still. *Iceland* reflects Baring-Gould's own fascination for folk-tales and mythology, and 'Glámr' is a part-translation, part-retelling of a tale from the thirteenth-century *Grettis Saga*, a dramatic recounting of the life of the warrior/outlaw Grettir Ásmundarson.[74] While the description of the revenant in the 1863 story is Baring-Gould's own (the saga itself gives little in the way of physical description), it is consistent with other macabre medieval ghosts of literature and folklore, spanning a wider geographical and cultural range than thirteenth-century Iceland. It is this trope, then, that 'Glámr''s hideous revenant brings into a period by which ghosts, and their associated conventions, had dramatically changed.

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1. Baring-Gould also wrote a novel based on the saga: *Grettir The Outlaw: A Story of Iceland* (1890).

As the influence of spiritualism was changing literary ghosts into more psychologically complex and individual figures, so too was it affecting the appearance of the ghosts depicted in these stories. Ghosts like the reanimated corpse in 'Glámr' place themselves in an older tradition before any interactions with the living; these ghosts clearly represent a disruption in the natural order, with the readers' visceral horror presented as the appropriate response. While these ghosts might be powerful in some sense, even the animalistic strength of Glámr is of a fundamentally different type to the agency of the spiritualist-influenced ghosts discussed in Chapter Two. Where the ghost is visually represented as decreased and limited by death, spectrality must be associated with this same transformation. As ghosts became more human and less other in their actions and behaviour, their appearance changed to emphasise this new concept of spectrality, and the image of the reanimated corpse almost disappeared from the ghost story, to re-emerge with late-period writers like M. R. James.

The image of the ghost as animated corpse is neither exclusive to, nor exclusive in, the medieval period. Medieval ghosts ranged in appearance from the rotting flesh of 'Glámr' to figures in diaphanous shrouds, and even to entirely non-human shapes; Jean-Claude Schmitt, in his *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, lists dogs, birds, horses, reptiles, and material objects, including a haystack. The British ghosts whose appearance and threatening behaviour most resemble Glámr's, those recorded in two separate collections of narratives from medieval Yorkshire,[75] have even been

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2. According to Jean-Claude Schmitt (1999), these are the twelfth-century narratives

marked out as unusual by several scholars in both their actions and the incongruity of folklore and theology in their narratives.[76] In appearance, however, medieval ghosts were overwhelmingly described as somehow corpselike. Describing various illustrations of such ghosts ('a living dead person […] whose eyes are reduced to simple holes', or 'an emaciated body […] [which] does not have the appearance of a skeleton but rather of a living cadaver'), Schmitt suggests that the aesthetic which produced them even halted the growth of less visually horrific forms, such as the diaphanous-clad ghost he refers to as a phantom: 'its diffusion was halted by the emergence of the macabre, which emphasised the corporeal, tactile, and horrible presence of the cadaver' (Schmitt 1994, 215, 213).

If the medieval fascination with the macabre shaped the image of the ghost as corpselike, the Gothic fetishisation of the horrific in medieval garb ensured that image's survival. In one of the best-known eighteenth-century examples, Matthew Lewis's description of the 'Bleeding Nun' in *The Monk* dwells with characteristic excess upon just such an image:

> What a sight presented itself to my startled eyes! I beheld before me an animated Corse [sic.]. Her countenance was long and haggard; Her cheeks and lips were bloodless; The paleness of death was spread over her features, and her eyeballs fixed stedfastly upon me were lustreless and hollow. (Lewis [1796] 1980, 160)

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recorded by William of Newburgh, in *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, and the fourteenth-century narratives recorded by an anonymous monk of Byland Abbey. M. R. James published the latter in their original Latin in the *English Historical Review* in 1922.
3. See Jean-Claude Schmitt's *Ghosts In The Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, R. C. Finucane's *Ghosts*, and Jacqueline Simpson's 'Repentant soul or walking corpse? Debatable apparitions of the dead in medieval England' (2003).

Speaking in a 'low, sepulchral voice', this ghost hardly needs to confirm her identity as a revenant. Other writers of the period - influenced by Lewis and the genre he helped to create, no doubt, but also provided with the neat framework of the convention of ghost as 'animated Corse' that Lewis himself used - described their ghosts in the same way, horror arising from decay and corruption. Take, for example, the description of the dead lover in Joanna Baillie's 'Night Scenes of Other Times' (c.1790):

> The form approach'd, but sad and slow
> Nor with a lover's tread;
> And from his cheek the youthful glow
> And greeting smile was fled.
>
> Dim sadness hung upon his brow
> Fix'd was his beamless eye:
> His face was like the moon-light bow
> Upon a wint'ry sky.
>
> And fix'd and ghastly to the sight,
> His strengthen'd features rose;
> And bended was his graceful height,
> And bloody were his clothes.

While the poem does not describe how this man appeared in life, his description after death unequivocally presents death itself as a fundamental loss and the ghost as demonstrative of this. (Death as loss rather than gain may seem a similarly self-evident truth to a modern reader; however, and as I shall discuss later in this chapter, Victorian ghosts frequently illustrated the opposite.) 'Sad and slow', stooped and pale, this ghost represents death's hideous negativity, and in doing so falls into a tradition of the supernatural that was as prevalent in this period as in medieval Europe.

The tradition continued into the early- and mid-nineteenth century, although the narratives themselves focused less on the visual horror of the ghost and, indeed, of its setting. Peter Penzoldt links this change in aesthetic to the growth of the ghost-centred short story, arguing that in both Gothic and Renaissance narratives, the supernatural is 'one more device for intensifying the strong atmosphere [...] merely another item in [the genre's] astonishingly rich reportoire of melodramatic effects' (Penzoldt 1952, 4). However, while the first half of the nineteenth century might indeed demonstrate this movement of the ghost from the macabre scenery of the periphery to the more sedate centre stage, the ghost itself remained little more than the animated corpse of previous eras. In W. H. Ainsworth's 'The Spectre Bride' (1822), a ghost has 'livid eyes and skeleton shape' (325); Charlotte Bronte's youthful 'Napoleon and the Spectre', written in 1833, describes a ghost whose 'countenance was livid; the tongue protruded from between the teeth, and the eyes all glazed and bloodshot started with frightful prominence from their sockets' (2); in Sir Walter Scott's 'The Tapestried Chamber' (1831), the ghost's face 'wore the fixed features of a corpse' (21), and in J. S. LeFanu's 'Schalken The Painter' (1837), the unblinking, unbreathing ghost has bluish skin and blackened lips, and moves 'as if the limbs were guided and directed by a spirit unused to the management of bodily machinery' (585).

While the shift in ghostly appearance had become well established by the time the literary ghost story reached the height of its popularity, there was an

overlap of some decades between the start of this genre proper and the end of the macabre aesthetic's influence on the ghost. The period spanning from the 1830s to the early 1850s saw a number of popular short stories that were instrumental in the genre's development: Scott's 'The Tapestried Chamber' (1831) and 'Wandering Willie's Tale' (1832), Dickens's 'A Christmas Carol' (1843), Gaskell's 'The Old Nurse's Story' (1852), and LeFanu's 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street' (1853), among others. As was the case with the idea of agency in Chapter Two, these reflect a gradual, but limited, movement away from the Gothic and pre-Gothic ghost in their appearance; although the macabre excess of the animated corpse is absent from the later stories, ghosts still carry visual, physical signs indicating that they are not one of the living. Jacob Marley's chains belong to their own tradition of ghostly array,[77] and the apparition in Le Fanu's story wears 'a rope around its neck, and the other end, coiled up, [...] held stiffly in its hand' (82).

In these early ghost stories, the ghost's description usually serves not merely to horrify but to emphasise its identification as one of the dead. 'Wandering Willie's Tale' is an exception in that the most noteworthy feature of the ghost itself, a horseshoe-shaped mark on its forehead, identifies it as an individual (who bore the mark in life); for the majority of these ghosts, the descriptions echo established convention, marking them out as one of the dead rather than as individuals. Collectively, the dead exist here as something separate from and other than human (as affirmed again by the frequency of the depersonifying 'it' in their descriptions),

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4. See footnote 5 of Chapter One for a description of a story by Pliny the Younger featuring a ghost draped in heavy chains.

and their appearance serves as narrative shorthand to establish this. Ghosts that lack sufficient signifiers in their apparel may exhibit their equivalent in behaviour, as with the ghosts in 'The Old Nurse's Story', appearing as a living re-enactment of a scene from the past. As with the paintings discussed in Chapter Two, the limited agency of the pre-spiritualist ghost is depicted through its visual appearance, in the shape of injuries, restrictions to movement or other outward indicators of death.

The most famous examples of these require little elaboration. Marley's chains explicitly symbolise the sins holding him to the earth, governing not only his appearance to Scrooge but Scrooge's subsequent transformation in their light; the tableau of 'terrible phantoms' in 'The Old Nurse's Story' re-enacts the events of a night decades before, an unchangeable repetition that underlies and affirms Miss Furnivall's final declaration that 'what's done in youth can never be undone in age!' (20); the hideous appearance of the judge's ghost in Le Fanu's 'An Account', whose 'awful countenance […] disclosed what he was' (78), illustrates his malicious evil, with the rope around his neck serving to identify the judge himself with the excessive cruelty of his favoured punishment in life. When the appearance of ghosts began to change, so too did this tradition; the later ghosts of the mid-nineteenth century and after might still symbolise or underline the story's message (for later Victorian ghost stories were certainly no less moralistic than earlier counterparts), they no longer did so through conventions of their appearance. In short, ghosts became individuals.

Critics and commentators on the ghost story have made much of the variety in ghostly appearance that marks the start of the Victorian ghost story proper, usually describing this in terms of a belated freedom from the constricting conventions of earlier genres. L. P. Hartley, in his introduction to the 1955 anthology *The Third Ghost Book*, writes that 'their liberties have been greatly extended; they can go anywhere, they can manifest themselves in scores of ways [...] they have emancipated themselves from their disabilities' (viii), and Penzoldt implies a similar development in his claim that '[t]he traditional phosphorescent bones, shrouds, coffins and clanking chains have been replaced by an enormous variety of forms' (Penzoldt 1952, 34). To think of this as purely an expansion of possibilities, however, would be a mistake; the new range of alternatives replaced, rather than enhanced, these older conventions. After 1860, few literary ghosts were cast in the mould of their macabre predecessors.

Ghosts not only changed, but changed rapidly, losing in a matter of years almost all traces of the physical horror that once defined them. By the 1860s, they were rarely distinguishable from the living, lacking even the minor wounds or other physical indications of their deaths that served as narrative shorthand in some earlier stories. In Sabine Baring-Gould's 'The Red-Haired Girl', published in the same volume as 'Glámr', the eponymous ghost is determinedly ordinary in appearance, 'a short, set girl in a shabby cotton gown, not over clean, and slipshod', with 'fiery red hair, very untidy' (101). It is only the burn scar covering half of her face which reveals her identity, and yet this wound, despite its importance, is never

described; the ghost keeps her hand covering her face at all times, hiding this last trace of the macabre from the reader as much as from the narrator.

The general movement away from the macabre leads to the possibility of a structural problem in the literary ghost story. By necessity, a ghost appearing in such a narrative must at some point in the story be revealed *as* a ghost, and therefore something in the mode or manner of their appearance must allow this deduction to be made. Overwhelmingly, however, the physical appearance of these ghosts does not distinguish them from the living, and thus the narrative requirement of their identity coexists with a conception of the ghost as appearing in a form effectively identical to that it bore while alive.

The circumstances of the individual's death can provide a route around the issue. Take, for example, the drowned soldier in Rhoda Broughton's 'Poor Pretty Bobby' (1872): at first, the narrator is overjoyed to see 'my Bobby himself – my beautiful boy-lover!', only suspecting something is amiss when she notices that '[t]hough the night is dry, equally free from rain and dew, […] he is dripping wet; the water is running down from his clothes, from his drenched hair, and even from his eyelashes, on to the dry ground at his feet' (Broughton 1873, 173). The scenario here is similar to that in Joanna Baillie's 'Night Scenes of Other Times', but the figure of the ghost itself has substantially shifted. While Baillie's focus on the ghost's macabre appearance affirms that it is a ghost first and an individual second, Broughton emphasises instead the ghost's apparent normality, using the one

incongruous feature of its appearance as a counterpoint to its otherwise unremarkable form.

While most literary ghost stories do not use the same device as Broughton's story in terms of indicating the manner of the ghost's death through its description, the concept of individuality which is brought to the fore here is a recurring element of these later, more human ghosts. Ghosts recognized through their bodies, clothing or faces by people who knew them in life are identifiable as one of the dead, but only through the personal connection they had with those individuals in life; not only is there nothing to denote death in their appearance itself, but with their identification as a ghost comes an affirmation of their status as an individual. This, then, is the image of the ghost that emerges in the 1850s and comes to predominance in the later nineteenth century: a figure supernatural in origin, but typically human in its appearance.

Spiritualist ghosts and ghostly appearance

Just as the human-like ghosts of the later Victorian and Edwardian period contrast sharply with their predecessors when placed in the framework of the literary ghost story, they can seem equally out of place in the context of the spiritualist narratives in which their image developed. Proponents of spiritualism, after all, presented the movement as a new religion with the capacity to transform humanity, and the spirits of the dead as this religion's prophets, messengers and sages. In a context where the dead are described as 'angels' and their every message

as of world-shaking importance, the most striking feature of spiritualist narratives is often the relatively mundane nature of these ghosts themselves. Here, for example, is Robert Dale Owen's description of a ghost appearing at one séance held with Leah Underhill (formerly Leah Fox, one of the sisters at the centre of the Hydesville phenomena in 1848) and her family:

> [I saw] the general form of the face and figure, but both appeared covered with a half-transparent veil, and I could distinguish no features; nor were the outlines of the body, nor of the limbs, sharply defined [...] The allegations, by the raps, were that the spirit presented was that of a daughter of Mrs Fox [Catherine Fox, Leah's mother] who had died young [...] Emily - that was the girl's name - had been Mrs Underhill's favourite sister, long mourned over, and had lain, during the last hour of her life and at the moment of death, in Mrs Underhill's arms. Mr Underhill stated to me that he had seen the same spirit as distinctly several times before; and that he had been able to distinguish the features. (Owen 1871, 368-371)[78]

Other than the confirmation of its identity, the ghost communicates little, and even its actions seem trivial: it touches the sitters' hands and arms, brings a lump of sugar from the pantry, and after rattling the crockery in a cupboard (to which 'Mrs Underhill expressed her apprehensions as to some favourite china, but Mr Underhill replied: 'I will trust the spirits'' [369]), brings Owen a cut-glass goblet. Just as this ghosts acts in a personal and domestic sphere, so does its significance rest largely within the same, rather than its every action being of universal import. While

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[78]. *The Debateable Land between This World and the Next* was published eleven years after *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*, and was more overtly spiritualist than its predecessor. Although he lived for a short time with the Fox sisters while writing *The Debateable Land*, his dedication to honest investigation and appropriate applications of scepticism continued throughout, as his response to Cornelius C. Felton (the then-President of Harvard) demonstrated when the latter asked him to justify his research:

> If, as you allege, "all phenomena are due to … delusion or imposture," then those should be detected… If, as I believe, there is a foundation of truth underlying them, still there is an imperative demand for the exercise of prudence … Time the great teacher will decide between us. (Quoted in Leopold 1950, 339)

not all spiritualist ghosts are cast in this mould, a considerable number of those appearing in séance narratives (as opposed to those who, for example, dictate large portions of the text) do, and these present a far more puzzling challenge than their more evidently supernatural counterparts. In essence, the ghosts of spiritualism seem to be providing a counterpoint to the transcendent nature of the movement itself.

What seems a contradiction to a 21st-century audience may not, however, seem the same to a nineteenth-century spiritualist fully embedded in the logic and language of spiritualism, and indeed it seems that spiritualists did not see this incongruity as a contradiction at all. The previous account, contained in Owen's lengthy work *The Debateable Land Between This World and the Next*, is preceded by several hundred pages of reflection on the significance and nature of spiritualism, 'written religiously under the dictate of candor and conscience, as if every word were to be laid at the foot of the Almighty's throne' (1). Many spiritualist works follow the same pattern, giving a brief history of the movement and its doctrines along with personal and recounted testimony from séances; as much of this literature was written for the dual audiences of the as-yet unconvinced and the already converted, it seems that spiritualist writers saw these personal interactions with human-like ghosts as compatible with, if not supportive of, spiritualism's greater goals. The central point of spiritualist doctrine - that the dead could communicate with the living - could be easily established within an overview of spiritualism and its history, and thus any further ghosts recounted later had no need

to repeat this. Instead, they establish spiritualism's message by acting as examples: they appear, they communicate, and they are recognisably the spirits of the dead.

To fulfil their role in spiritualist narratives, then, ghosts must conform to a twofold constraint on their appearance. They must be identifiable as human in a way that will provide a personally meaningful interaction with bereaved friends and relatives, and they must be identifiable as one of the dead in a way that affirms the spiritualist conception of death as ascension. The balance between the two is a delicate one, and maintaining it seems to have led directly to that juxtaposition of the metaphysical and the mundane which drew most ridicule from spiritualism's detractors.[79] Spiritualists, however, remained unswayed. Arthur Conan Doyle, himself a late convert to the movement,[80] defended the spiritualist conception of

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[6.] Such criticisms of spiritualism's tendency towards the undramatic span the full range of anti-spiritualist approaches, from the rational to the religious to the mocking. Henry J. Raymond's 1853 *Harper's* editorial, cited in Chapter One, describes spiritualism as exceeding any superstition in 'the awful blasphemy of materializing spirit' (700); theological writer Jane T. Stoddart writes with slightly less vitriol but no less derision when she quotes one spirit message purportedly from F. W. H. Myers featuring a 'peck of pickled peppers', countering the spiritualist explanation of a reference to the medium Mrs Piper with plaintive disapproval: 'Is there not something pitiable in the thought that the great writer who gave us "St. Paul" and the "Classical" and "Modern" Essays should be occupied in the unseen life in trying to transmit to earth punning references to the name of a medium?' (Stoddart 1919, 139).

[7.] Although actively interested in the subject from the 1880s (he joined the Society for Psychical Research in 1891), Conan Doyle remained largely sceptical of spiritualism and its claims until the First World War, which:

> brought earnestness into all our souls and made us look more closely at our own beliefs and reassess their values […] I seemed suddenly to see that this subject with which I had so long dallied was not merely a study of a force outside the rules of science, but that it was really something tremendous, a breaking down of the walls between two worlds, a direct undeniable message from beyond (Conan Doyle 1918, 48-9).

He wrote several works on spiritualism, including the two-volume *History of Spiritualism* (1926) and his 1921 account of a lecture tour of Australia to promote the movement, *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist*. Of his motivations for the latter, he explains that he 'had found that the wonderful literature of spiritualism did not reach the people, and that the press was so full of would-be jocosities and shallow difficulties that the public was utterly misled'

the afterlife against criticisms of its mundane materialism by appealing to the need for recognisable, individual, *human* spirits:

> Are we to be mere wisps of gaseous happiness floating about in the air? […] [I]f there is no body like our own, and if there is no character like our own, then say what you will, *we* have become extinct. What is it to a mother if some impersonal glorified entity is shown to her? She will say, "that is not the son I lost – I want his yellow hair, his quick smile, his little moods that I know so well." That is what she wants; that, I believe, is what she will have; but she will not have them by any system which cuts us away from all that reminds us of matter and takes us to a vague region of floating emotions. (Conan Doyle 1918, 105).

As for Robert Dale Owen, who preceded him with the suggestion that '[t]here seems good reason why we should think of our deceased friends not as impalpable shades, but as real, individual personages' (Owen 1891, 403), the most significant point in the doctrine which Doyle would later support is the close relationship between ghost and witness. This hypothetical son would hardly need his appearance to provide external indications of his death; appearing to a bereaved mother at a séance, his narrative context already establishes the fact.

Shaping ghostly figures in the Victorian ghost story

Over the second half of the nineteenth century, the literary ghost story developed the same conventions. As visual indicators of ghostly status became less macabre, so did the ghosts become more individual, and their identification as such established by recognition from others and narrative context. In the earliest examples of post-1850 narratives, including those already discussed in Chapter One,

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(Conan Doyle 1921, 17); evidently, spiritualism no longer received the widespread popularity or even-handed press coverage that it had received in the late 19th century.

ghosts still have more in common with those of their history in a tradition of macabre spirits that with those that would come after them. In the anonymous 'Fisher's Ghost', the ghost has 'a cruel gash on his forehead, and the blood was all fresh like' (778); one ghost in LeFanu's 'Ghost Stories of Chapelizod' has a 'gaping aperture, black and shattered' in its skull (504); in Henry Morley's 'Robertson, Artists in Ghosts', published in Household Words in 1855, an entertainer attempting to show 'how easily superstition could be worked upon […] how groundless, in fact, was the common dread of apparitions', 'took pains, however, to make his own ghosts dreadful', complete with skulls and bones, animated skeletons, and caverns that 'seem[ed] to yawn and render up their dead' (557).

Even at this early stage of the literary ghost story's development, however, the convention of the macabre is beginning to lose its grasp. Consider, for example, Lynn Linton's contribution to the Christmas, 1854 number of Household Words, a story titled 'The Sixth Poor Traveller'. In terms of agency, the ghost here belongs within a pre-spiritualist framework: she appears to reveal its own murder, and disappears for good once the living witness has received the message. 'The mission had been fulfilled,' the dead woman's brother states; 'the warning had been given; and then my sister passed away, – for her work on earth was done' (33). In her appearance, too, she tends towards this older model, showing him wounds upon her throat and a 'broad stain of blood' over her heart (33). With this, however, comes elements of a move away from the macabre and towards the pseudo-angelic, using death to convey beauty and grace. The ghost seems so 'natural', her brother

says, that 'for the moment I forgot that she was dead', and she moves 'glidingly'

towards him (33). Further, both narrative and narrator are careful to distinguish

between the ghost and the corpse, to the point of revealing that the two cannot co-

exist in one individual's vision:

> I looked again and again at her lying there: a marble corpse, ice-cold with the lips set and rigid, and the death band beneath her chin. There she was, stiff in her white shroud, the snowy linen pressing so lightly on her; no life within, no warmth about her, and all my fancies were vain dreams. […] And when I turned away my eyes from her, the presence came again.. So long as I watched her, it was not there; I saw the corpse only; but when I shut this out from me, then it seemed as if a barrier had been removed, and that my sister floated near me again. (33)

In order to see the ghost, the witness must 'shut […] out from me' the image of

death's physicality. The transformation of the ghostly body is already becoming

evident; this ghost is not only separate from the corpse, but opposed to it.

Here, spiritualist conceptions of death are woven into a complex

interrelation with wider Victorian ideas of death in general. Unlike the macabre

savagery of its embodiment in 'Glámr', anthropomorphised into a hideous and

uncompromisingly destructive monster, death for spiritualists must be shown as

glorious; the uncertainty of Victorian debates over souls and afterlives is drowned

out by empirically-verifiable transcendence, as the dead can themselves appear in

glorified form in order to reiterate the truth of their chosen doctrines to their loved

ones. The mother mourning her yellow-haired son in Arthur Conan Doyle's

example must recognise not only him, but also the spiritualist idea of his death as a process bringing him closer to perfection.

Despite the numerous criticisms of its afterlife as being far too similar to earth to carry any religious significance, spiritualism emphasised the distinction between this life and the next, seeing death as a transition from the physical to the spiritual. The lack of earthly lives and bodies was consequently seen as a freedom granted by death rather than a limitation it imposed, and those bodies themselves were seen, at best, as an encumbrance. Spiritualist literature frequently describes the flesh and blood of the corporeal body as a kind of metaphysical clothing, something external to the true self which could be removed and set aside without any reduction to that which it covers. Robert Dale Owen referred to 'the earth-mask' and 'the perishable envelope' (Owen 1861, 371), and later philosophies influenced by spiritualism echo its language on this: the theosophist C. W. Leadbeater, for example, addresses the bereaved in his 1910 pamphlet 'To Those Who Mourn' with the assurance that '[w]hat you call death is the laying aside of a worn-out garment, and it is no more the end of the man than it is the end of *you* when you remove your overcoat' (Leadbeater 1910, 6).

While the idea of souls and bodies as intrinsically separate is hardly unique to spiritualism, the primacy given to disembodied souls - active, visible and existing alongside the living - allows for a particularly spiritualist focus on the dead. Consequently, physical bodies are seen not only as unnecessary but also as

encumbrances, prisons for the non-physical spiritual self. The spiritualist A. E. Newton, writing in the mainstream periodical *The North American Review*, described death as a moment when the individual is 'born out of the cumbrous flesh' (Newton 1888, 666);[81] Joseph Osgood Barrett, in his own work on spiritualism, as 'when the angel broke the casket and let the prisoner free'.[82] In Allen Kardec's *The Mediums' Book*, the author's 1861 successor to *The Spirits' Book*, the dead themselves refer to being freed from our gross bodily envelope, the instrument of all our sufferings' (Kardec [1861] 1977, 162). This hostility towards the corporeal echoes throughout spiritualist literature, extended even to the youngest members of the movement; Alfred Kitson, in his 'Outlines of Spiritualism for the Young', describes the 'wonderful and marvelous change our friends make when they leave their physical bodies, no more to endure their aches and pains and be confined to beds of sickness' (Kitson 1888, 2).[83] During spiritualist séances, moreover, the link between flesh and spirit was at its most fragile, with living mediums vacating their bodies in order for a spirit to temporarily possess them. It is at such moments when

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[8] Writer and editor A[lonzo] E[liot] Newton became a spiritualist in the 1850s, writing his first literature on the subject in the form of a pamphlet addressed to the church from which he and his wife Sarah had consequently been asked to leave; 'The Ministry of Angels Realized: A Letter to the Edwards Congregational Church, Boston' was published in 1853 by Bela Marsh, the major North American publisher of spiritualist tracts and pamphlets in the mid-19th century, and was reprinted several times in subsequent years. Newton later edited the regional spiritualist periodicals *The New Era, The Spiritual Age* and *The New England Spiritualist*, as well as publishing tracts such as the undated 'Spiritualism Defined' and 'What Does Spiritualism Teach?'. For more on the periodicals listed, see Braude, 1989b.

[9] Reverend Joseph Osgood Barrett, a Universalist clergyman, was highly active in the American spiritualist movement in the 1860s and 70s. He served as the secretary of the Wisconsin State Association of Spiritualists, was a member of and delegate to the American Association of Spiritualists, and frequently spoke at spiritualist lectures and conventions alongside figures such as Andrew Jackson Davis. As well as his 1871 book on spiritualism, *Looking Beyond: A Souvenir of Love to the Bereft of Every Home*, he published *Spiritual Pilgrim* in 1872, a biography of the spiritualist writer and speaker J. M. Peebles.

[10] Alfred Kitson was the father of the lyceum movement in Britain, setting up spiritualist alternatives to children's Sunday schools in the model established by A. J. Davis in 1860s New York. For more on the British lyceum movement, see Logie Barrow's *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910*.

spiritualism's antagonistic attitude towards the flesh becomes most evident, as with this description by Hudson Tuttle of separating from and then returning to his earthly body:[84]

> I came to my body. I saw it cold and motionless, rigid in every muscle and fibre. I endeavoured to regain possession of it several times […] When at last I did recover my mortal garb, the anguish, the pain, the agony of that moment was indescribable. It was like that which is used to describe death. (Quoted in Barrett 1871, 41)

With departure from the body viewed as a birth, and returning to it as a death, the spiritualist attitude towards bodily life needs little further elaboration. Indeed, the hostility displayed towards the corporeal leads directly to the model in which the appearance of many spiritualist ghosts would be cast; as Arthur Conan Doyle explains, '[t]he word 'angel' may seem an exaggeration, but when an other-world spirit submits herself to the discomforts of temporary and artificial existence in order to convey the lesson of survival to a material and worldly generation, there is no more fitting term' (Conan Doyle 1926(a), 93).

Spiritualist ghosts, then, face a problem which mirrors that encountered by ghost narratives once the convention of the macabre had largely been abandoned. These ghosts must demonstrate spiritualist doctrine: freed from the restrictive encumbrance of flesh, their disembodied spirit forms must be more glorious than

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[84.] Author of many works on spiritualism in the 1870s and 1880s, Hudson Tuttle was a noted spiritualist lecturer and medium. He was one of the most vocal of those among the American Association of Spiritualists who opposed the election of Victoria Claflin Woodhull to the society's presidency in 1871, objecting primarily to her advocacy of 'free love' as a spiritualist doctrine. For more on this, see Molly McGarry's 'Spirited Sexualities: Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism, moral panics, and the making of U.S. obscenity law' (2000).

the living, exceeding rather than palely mimicking their appearance in life. Simultaneously, they must be recognisable both as human and as individual; Conan Doyle's bereaved woman must be shown her son's yellow hair, his quick smile, his 'little moods'. Evidently, these are goals which will not always be compatible. To fulfill the dual requirements of ghostly appearance, and to distinguish that appearance as much as possible from the pre-Victorian macabre model of ghosts, spiritualism rapidly developed an aesthetically satisfying compromise.

Spiritualist ghosts never changed shape like some of their medieval predecessors, nor appeared as blood-drenched testimonies to murder like the Renaissance revenants of revenge tragedies, nor served as a macabre *memento mori* like the Gothic spectres. The difference between various spiritualist ghosts is, rather, one of degree. Where the narrative emphasises the otherworldliness of its ghosts above their recognisable individuality – when, for example, their primary role is to dictate doctrine, as with the spirits of Augustine, Plato and St John the Evangelist in Allen Kardec's 1857 work *The Spirits' Book* – they embody the ideal of a glorified afterlife, described in terms of light and air. When their narrative context requires them to be recognisable, as to a bereaved relative at a séance, these outward indications of their supernatural provenance are de-emphasised in favour of a focus on the human and the individual. The variety thus resulting is a continuum rather than a dichotomy, with the majority of spiritualist ghosts requiring, to different degrees, the advantages of each extreme.

For spiritualists, the continuum of ghostly appearance was an ideological as well as a practical one. Spirits portrayed as indistinguishable from angels, such as those on the cover illustration of the *Medium and Daybreak* discussed in the introduction to this thesis, were also associated with holiness and purity to a greater degree than the individual spirits appearing to bereaved relatives (or curious onlookers) at séances. Even here, the emphasis upon an angelic appearance is directly correlated to the degree to which the spirit is treated as a spectacle to be viewed, rather than an individual to be conversed with. The well-known (and well-photographed) spirit 'Katie King', probably the most famous spirit to appear at séances both in America and Britain, is always pictured dressed in angelic white; Robert Dale Owen even describes making her a gift of a mother-of-pearl cross, 'because, though it be simple, it is white and pure and beautiful as you are' (Owen 1871, 60).[85] In literature which expands upon spiritualist philosophy in greater detail, this connection between 'purity' and ghostly appearance is usually tied to a conception of ascending hierarchies in the afterlife. In Allen Kardec's *The Spirits' Book* (1857), an early primer to spiritualist philosophy in which the spirits of

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[12] Katie King first appeared at séances in London in the early 1870s, the 'spirit guide' of the teenage medium Florence Cook. She, Cook and Sir William Crookes, who served as their agent, publicist and photographer, were at the centre of a spiritualist near-scandal in subsequent years, after Crookes – himself a respected scientist and Fellow of the Royal Society – published 'Notes of an Enquiry into the Phenomena called Spiritual' in the *Quarterly Journal of Science* (Jan. 1874), and followed it with a book titled *Researches into the Phenomena of Modern Spiritualism*. Crookes' wholehearted support of Florence Cook and the claims she made earned him scorn from his fellow scientists, and his relationship with Cook was also attacked; Katie King's fame, however (or perhaps consequently), was undamaged. Both Robert Dale Owen and Arthur Conan Doyle witnessed Cook's séances and wrote about her, and in 1875, an American medium named Jennie Holmes also featured Katie King at her séances. This latter proved more detrimental to spiritualism's reputation than anything Crookes had (or was rumoured to have) done; the girl acting as Katie in Holmes's séances revealed the fraud at the same time Owen's article on Jennie Holmes and Katie King appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*. For more on the subsequent fallout, see Vol. 1 of Conan Doyle's *Introduction to Spiritualism* (1926), Ruth Brandon's *The Spiritualists* (1983), and Richard William Leopold's biography of Robert Dale Owen (1950).

Augustine, Plato and Swedenborg (among others) provide answers to questions listed by category, 'angels' are described as having reached the highest levels of enlightenment: 'they are spirits who have purified themselves from all imperfection, have reached the highest degree of the scale of progress, and united in themselves all species of perfection' (Kardec [1861] 1977, 51). Less-detailed references to these ghosts also frequently invoke the concept of a hierarchy: in an 1878 pamphlet entitled 'Why I Am A Spiritualist', a 'Mrs. M. G. Parker' references the Bible in describing 'these white garments of pure spirits' as 'blissful evidence of ultimate angelic glorification' (Parker 1878, 16).[86] In this, curiously, spiritualist thought echoes that seen in some medieval ghost-depictions, where the dead appear in increasingly pale garments to signal that the prayers of the living are carrying them out of purgatory (Schmitt 1994, 204).

The séance narratives that appeared in spiritualist periodicals, serving as they did the dual audiences of the curious and the already converted, described both the angelic and the human aspects of ghosts. Where the narrative emphasises the ghost as exponent or example of doctrine, the ghost itself is subsequently described as more angelic and less individual. In one 1876 letter to the *Medium and Daybreak*, for example, a 'Mr. Henry Powell' writes of one such spirit:

[13.] See also Swedenborg's work, most notably *Heaven and Hell* (1757). In Swedenborg's conception of the spirit world, the dead are organised in hierarchies based upon the same criteria: 'They who are more perfect, that is, who excel in good, and therefore in love, wisdom and intelligence, are in the centre; and they who excel less, are round about' (Swedenborg 1933, 26). Further, this correlates directly to their appearance; '[t]he most intelligent have garments that glow as with flame, and some, those that shine as with light; the less intelligent have garments that are bright and white without splendour, and the still less intelligent have garments of various colours' (113).

> I cannot describe the whiteness of her dress, it can be more easily imagined. Her form was splendid; her dress so full, with a long train of snowy whiteness. [..] I cannot find words to express the beauty of the form – so tall, some inches taller than the medium, so graceful, so majestic, with her flowing robes of pure whiteness. (Powell 1876, 261)

The favourable comparison of corporeal spirit to earthly medium here was one frequently made. Other letters to the *Medium and Daybreak* in the same year, for example, describe spirits as 'much smaller than the medium', with 'absolutely noiseless and most graceful' movements (Anon. 1876a, 249), and as 'peculiarly gliding and graceful, whereas the medium is rather stout and thick-limbed' (Anon. 1876b, 327). Descriptions of Katie King and her medium Florence Cook, such as this from Arthur Conan Doyle, likewise contrast medium and spirit:

> Katie's neck was bare last night; the skin was perfectly smooth both to touch and sight, whilst on Miss Cook's neck is a large blister, which under similar circumstances is distinctly visible and rough to the touch […] Miss Cook's hair is so dark a brown as almost to appear black; a lock of Katie's, which is now before me, and which she allowed me to cut from her luxuriant tresses, having first traced it up to the scalp and satisfied myself that it actually grew there, is a rich golden auburn (Conan Doyle 1926(a), 93).

Here, with this lingering description of the spirit's physical form, the angelic and the individual are combined.

The ghosts of the literary ghost story mirror those of spiritualism both in the differing emphasis given to the different aspects of their appearance and to the narrative purposes which that, in turn, serves. Most of these fictional ghosts resemble the more individualised, less sensational ghosts of spiritualism; they closely resemble the living, with, where necessary, small gestures towards their

supernatural origins in the form of fragments of ethereal, angelic images. (They may, for example, float rather than walking, seem more beautiful than in life, glow with a pale light, or appear dressed in white.) A smaller number follow the pattern established by spiritualism's definitively angelic ghosts, impersonal and ethereal. As with spiritualism, the different representations signify different roles in the narrative; while both varieties of ghost in the fictional story are likely to interact with the human characters, it is only the 'human' ghosts which interact on a personal and intimate level. Since fictional narratives are distinct from the religious or quasi-scientific narratives of spiritualism, however, and since the ghost's role must alter accordingly, this trend can sometimes seem opaque, conflicted, or overshadowed by the representations of the living characters surrounding the ghost.

From angels to companions: spiritualist ghosts in literature

In Margaret Oliphant's novella *A Beleaguered City* (1880), the inhabitants of a rural French town find their materialism and near-worship of money challenged by a vast crowd of the dead, who return the town to religious observance and spiritual piety. The narrative is far from subtle both in its condemnation of the townspeople's sin and in its foreshadowing of the consequences: one character proclaims that 'there is no *bon Dieu* but money', to which another responds, horrified, that such a sentiment is 'enough to make the dead rise out of their graves!' (5). The symbolism is no less didactic when the dead finally do arise, as the walled

town, its gates closed by supernatural hands, becomes shrouded in darkness, and its inhabitants exiled.

It is the situation thus created which is of primary importance here, rather than the dead's motivation in creating it; the image of earthly life as an isolated community unknowingly surrounded by a vast, invisible crowd of the dead is a common one in spiritualist literature, and the town's gates function as a direct metaphor for those of heaven. (At the sight of ghostly children, parents and spouses on the other side, a number of the townspeople rush towards one gate, 'beating upon it, and crying out, "Open to us, open to us, our most dear!"' [35].) The dead play a more direct role in the villagers' subsequent renunciation of materialism, first writing a declaration on the cathedral door demanding that the villagers 'leave this place to us who know the true signification of life' (25), then (peacefully, yet irresistibly) exiling them to the surrounding countryside, and finally sending one of the town's inhabitants (a man who 'entertain[ed] religious convictions of a curious kind' [13]) as an emissary to explain their origins and conduct to the rest. The story ends on an anticlimax – narrating, the town's mayor speaks despairingly of the short-lived rise in religious attendance, and of the 'wonderful manifestation […] which passed as if it had never been' (109) – but with the affirmation, at least, of the spirits' existence and of the significance of their message.

Through setting the story in a Catholic country, Oliphant builds upon a conception of the dead as part of the 'communion of saints', inextricably linked to the living.[87] 'Saints' is used throughout to refer to the dead, even in such seemingly casual references as that to a living character walking 'light and elastic in her tread, gliding out straight and softly like one of the saints' (32). The language used to describe the function of the dead is, however, one of introduction of a new belief rather than purely a reinforcement of the old, an impression further enhanced by the '*Sommation!*' attached to the cathedral door in a clear reference to Martin Luther nailing his '95 Theses' to the door of the Wittenberg church; '[t]hey have come to convert our people,' the mayor's wife tells him (48), and Lecamus, the visionary who will later serve as their messenger, affirms that the town will 'soon see other teachers more wonderful' than the Carmelite nuns who infrequently pass by (15). There remains an ambiguity here between different senses of 'conversion', with the townspeople described from the narrative's beginning as already so distanced from religious practice that belief in anything beyond the material could be so described, but by using the language of conversion while only once (and belatedly) mentioning the Church these ghosts place the emphasis firmly upon the significance of their own presence.[88] When they sing 'We have come out of the unseen […] for love of

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[14.] Moreover, while Catholic doctrine limits this community to believers – whether on Earth, in purgatory or in heaven – Oliphant uses the Catholic context of the setting to extend this also to the villagers, presumably still Catholic in theory if not in action.

[15.] The implication here is that the drift from religious observance and belief encompasses even the characters who bemoan it; the mayor, although condemning other characters for their near-worship of money, makes the connection between his own town and the fall of Jericho only through the vaguest of references: '[t]here is a story somewhere which I recollect dimly of an ancient city which its assailants did not touch, but only marched round and round till the walls fell, and they could enter' (46).

you; believe us, believe us! Love brings us back to earth; believe us believe us!' (63), it is clear that the dead are themselves the message, and not merely the messengers.

'Angels' is used to refer to both the dead and the living, extending the term to a broader definition of anyone who provides or embodies spiritual guidance. Lecamus declares that since childhood, he has 'felt the movement of wings, the gliding of unseen feet' (57), and another witness describes the dead as having 'wings like the wings of the great peacock on the terrace […] and robes whiter than those of any bride' (99); further, the mayor describes his own (living) wife as 'My angel!' (49), and assures her that 'so long as there are *des anges* like thee to pray for us' (7-8), humanity will never come to permanent harm. The wider use of the term to refer to the mortal as well as the immortal here is clarified with the mayor's belief that women are inherently spiritual in a way that men are not: he describes 'the faith of the women' (8) as a naturally-occurring force for good, and reports only women as being sufficiently horrified by the town's materialism to declare it enough to bring the dead out of their graves. The descriptions and exhortations of 'my angel', 'our angels', '*mon ange*' and *'des anges*' underlie the story itself, linking wings and white robes with domestic piety, and drawing both dead and living together into a religious community broken by its materialistic blindness.

The comparison of women to angels here brings inevitably to mind the Victorian notion of the 'angel in the house', the proper title of Coventry Patmore's poem published in 1856. (Oliphant herself praised the poem for its portrait of 'that

chastened and dignified love of marriage which has been much neglected by poets',
commending Patmore for his rejection of the tumultuous ground of illegitimate or
unfulfilled passion in favour of 'a story of sweet perfection, loveliness and truth,
scarcely ruffled by a lover's doubts' [Oliphant 1892, 448-50].) While not in itself a
theological argument – the 'angels' in Patmore's poem and in the domestic
Victorian image subsequently described in its terms were not, after all, supernatural
– the link between women and angels speaks to a particularly Victorian concept of
angels' appearance and function. Nina Auerbach describes how 'popular Victorian
angelology was itself a radical theological modification that flirted with blasphemy',
transforming the 'stridingly martial and potentially bisexual males' of Milton and
Blake into passive, limited and definitively female images (Auerbach 1982, 66, 64);
in embodying spiritual guidance and purity rather than spiritual warfare and
holiness, the living and dead 'angels' of *A Beleaguered City* have more in common
with each other than with their pre-Victorian predecessors as defined by that term.

Although ghosts rarely occupy a narrative position as impersonal as those in
A Beleaguered City, this association of the dead with elements somehow purer than
humanity is equally evident in the far more common subcategory of ghost stories
which feature a child as the central ghostly figure. In Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's
'The Lost Ghost', one of her many contributions to this subcategory, the
otherworldly innocence of a young girl neglected and eventually murdered by her
mother not only provides an apt contrast to the horrific nature of her death, but
also underlines the pathos of her continued appearances to the living. Seen by the

subsequent owners of the house in which she died, and on a single occasion by their boarder (who narrates the bulk of the story), this ghost's appearances contain none of the admonitions or commandments of those in Oliphant's novella. Indeed, she rarely speaks, and only then to repeat a plaintive 'I can't find my mother'.

'The Lost Ghost' is by any criteria a sentimental story, but its sentiment is not that of *A Beleaguered City*. Here, women are no closer to the divine than men; the child's mother is a caricature of wanton and selfish cruelty, forcing her young daughter to do most of the household chores ('the little thing used to stand on a chair and wash dishes', one character relates) and eventually abandoning her to starve in order to run away with her married lover (228). The other characters in the story, all female – men are noted by their absence here, in a sphere of domesticity, children, and mothers real and substitute – see her simply because they happen to be in the house where she died, and not because of any gender-linked affinity. Indeed, reactions to the pitiful figure of the ghost vary widely even among the small number of the story's characters. Our narrator is actively horrified by her single encounter with the ghost, and confesses to '[neither] a day nor night since it happened that I haven't thought of it, and always I have felt the shivers go down my back when I did' (209). The childless elder sister of the two who own the house responds quite differently: 'It feels to me sometimes as if I should die if I can't get that awful little white robe off that child', she declares, 'and get her in some clothes and feed her and stop her looking for her mother' (235). At the end of the story, this sister achieves in death what she longed for in life, and the narrator describes

'Mrs. Abby Bird walking off over the white snow-path with that child holding fast to her hand, nestling close to her as if she had found her own mother' (237).

Although the narrator initially reacts to the ghost with terror, the narrative affirms that it is the incongruity of a supernatural visitant she finds terrifying rather than the appearance of the ghost itself. Her first response immediately after the ghost disappears is to seek out the safety of the conventional; '[i]t seemed to me that I should go mad if I didn't see somebody or something like other folks on the face of the earth', she explains, as she describes the smell of biscuits baking downstairs as 'the only natural thing left to keep me in my right mind' (216). While she describes the ghost as terrifying, she affirms that its capacity to terrify lies in its very existence rather than any facet of its action or appearance from the very start of her narrative, with a declaration that 'it don't do anybody in this world any good to see things that haven't any business to be seen in it' (207). The ghost itself is, by contrast, a figure to be pitied rather than feared.

Indeed, the narrator's terror exists only to be overcome, illustrating the fragility and vulnerability of the ghost by demonstrating its ability to transcend the fear reaction. '[She had] a dreadful little face, with something about it which made it different from any other face on earth, but it was so pitiful that it did away a good deal with the dreadfulness' (214), the narrator explains; in a subsequent and more detailed description, she clarifies once again that 'she would have been very beautiful if she had not been so dreadful' (215). Even the household cat is not

afraid of her, purring as she strokes his back; 'I had always heard that animals were deathly afraid of ghosts', the narrator says, 'but then, that was a pretty harmless little sort of ghost' (224). For Abby Bird, who becomes the child's substitute mother at the story's end, the ghost's appeal to sentiment entirely outweighs any capacity to terrify ('I don't think she was ever so scared by that poor little ghost, as much as she pitied it', her sister explains [235]). It is pity, then, rather than fear, which governs the presentation of and response to this ghost throughout.

In her physical appearance, the ghost suggests some indications of her horrifying death. She is tiny, freezing and damp, her starved body 'mottled purple with the cold' through her nightgown (215). The effect thus created is, however, far from macabre, with the contrast between living and dead eliciting pity rather than horror. When the narrator describes 'two little hands spotted purple with the cold, holding up my winter coat' (214), the contrast is not between life and death but between warmth and cold, safety and neglect. There is, further, a distinction between the elements of the ghost's appearance which illustrate the manner of her death – her cold hands, her damp hair – and those which place her definitively as one of the dead, regardless of her reasons for being so. Although not initially described as supernatural in provenance, it is the child's long white nightgown which becomes in implication the strongest sign of her otherworldliness, our attention immediately drawn to it by the narrator's inclusion of and emphasis upon this one non-bodily element in her first description:

> When I had the coat I could see the child more plainly. She was dressed in one little white garment made very simply. It was a nightgown, only very long, quite covering her feet, and I could see dimly through it her little thin body mottled purple with the cold. Her face did not look so cold; that was a clear waxen white. Her hair was dark, but it looked as if it might be dark only because it was so damp, almost wet, and might really be light hair. It clung very close to her forehead, which was round and white (214-5).

Later, the gown serves to make her unearthly in an entirely literal sense, demonstrating a freedom from physical restrictions even as she embraces them. 'She did not seem to run or walk like other children', the narrator explains; '[s]he flitted, like one of those little filmy white butterflies, that don't seem like real ones they are so light, and move as if they had no weight' (215).

In Peter Newell's 1903 illustration, the ghost's pure white gown seems almost to glow with its own light, the brightest thing in the picture (see Appendix 1). The child-ghost stands between two door-frames, surrounded by the shadows cast by their angles and corners and by the dark pattern on the rug beneath her. The narrator's clothing is dark, too, with her face turned into the shadows while the ghost's is illuminated by an unseen source of light. The gown brushes the floor, hiding the ghost's feet and adding to the impression of a figure who seems to float rather than stand. The winter coat that the ghost is holding is huge, almost as large as the figure herself; she holds it close to her body, its heavy folds and thick, fur-lined cuffs a dark and cumbersome contrast to the light, airy gown she wears herself (see Appendix).

While the image of a tiny, cold figure giving away a winter coat underlines the pathos of the narrative itself, the contrast suggested by Newell's illustration is not between warmth and cold but between dark and light, between the heavy bulk of the coat and the ethereal gown the ghost is wearing. Positioned as it is, the ghost seems almost to be emerging from the coat and from the physical, bodily mass it represents; her hands clinging to its collar, halfway between pulling it close and pushing it away, illustrate the connection she maintains with an earthly life. Abby Bird's wish to 'get that awful little white robe off that child and get her in some clothes' (235) is here affirmed as misguided, a wish to bring the child back into the confines of life. It is little surprise, at the story's close, that the comforting embrace between woman and child can only happen after the former has joined the latter in death.

In Katharine Holland Brown's 'Hunger' (1907), the ethereal otherworldliness of the ghost – here a mother missing a child, rather than vice versa – is also used to sentimental effect. Here, Eleanor, a woman left motherless at a young age dreams continuously after her marriage of another woman in a grey dress watching her sleep, 'as if she wanted to look through me, body and soul'. She never speaks, but nevertheless implies an intense curiosity in her gaze; 'I know that she's longing to ask me some question', Eleanor explains, 'and I can't answer' (113). After the birth of Eleanor's first child, the 'frail, grey shape' appears again, gathering the baby up in her own arms with 'an ecstasy that lay white as joy upon the little face' (116). As Eleanor's son grows older, he begins to speak of the 'gone-away lady' who visits

and plays with him, and Eleanor herself gradually realises the reality of her dream-vision. Eventually, when helping her great-aunt sort through a pile of old family clothes in order to make a hereditary sleeping-robe for the child, she finds a grey gown identical to that worn by the ghost and realises the ghost is her own mother, who died before she could watch her daughter grow up. Returning to the nursery, Eleanor is met by the child's nurse, who describes him playing happily with an unknown woman; picking up her son, Eleanor calls to the invisible presence 'You poor little hungry, eager thing! He's yours, too, dear. Yours and mine' (122), as her son whispers 'Lady' and falls asleep in her arms.

While supernatural in origin, Eleanor's mother is described predominantly as an individual, human figure, with 'long brown curls [that] blow across her face' (113). Her otherworldliness is subtle, enhancing rather than replacing her natural, personal beauty. There is nothing explicitly supernatural indicated in the description of her hands as 'warm and soft, and all sweet with some queer old-fashioned perfume' (113), nor her 'hurrying, scented robes', nor the 'slender, hovering palm against [Eleanor's] hair' (115), but the cumulative effect suggests an ethereal, otherworldly beauty. When her description shifts focus to the general rather than the specific, this implication is made plain; her being is 'beautiful, mysterious' (113), 'beautiful with a beauty that glowed like a pale star through the twilight mist of dreams' (115), and the old-fashioned perfume 'swung [Eleanor] past her broad, familiar world, into another world, star-distant' (119).

Initially, the ghost's clothing here suggests a figure constrained and held down, rather than glorified, by its own magnificence:

> A long majestic gown of velvet, ashen grey in silver, paling to shadow, dragged on her slender body and sheathed her little arms. Her hands were strung with jewels and smothered in falling lace; broad dulled chains of cameos shone on her neck and bound her tender wrists. In all her wide-flowing magnificence, she looked like a child playing at queen. (115)

Later, however, when Eleanor's great-aunt describes her mother's fondness for such clothes, their excess becomes an idiosyncrasy rather than a prison. '[T]he most ridiculously unsuitable thing for a girl of nineteen', the great-aunt explains, '[b]ut she always loved such sumptuous, solemn clothes, the little dear!' (120). As a metaphor for the ghost's relationship to a worldly existence, clothing here performs a similar function to the child's white gown and the overcoat she carries in 'The Lost Ghost', signifying a wistful attachment to a worldly life. In 'Hunger', the ghost's initial appearances to her daughter are unexplained, and the reader shares Eleanor's pity for her when her clothing seems to trap and restrain her; when her motives are revealed, Eleanor understands them in the same sense that her great-aunt understood the unsuitable clothes, as a sign of longing for a life she can never quite obtain. Her attachment to an earthly life restricts her, just as the heavy gown and jewellery did in life, but the restriction itself is a chosen one, and the reason for choosing it a cause for sympathy. 'You'd waited till you were half-starved, you wanted to have him so' (122), Eleanor exclaims, finally realising what it was the ghost had wanted so much. '[Y]ou couldn't stand it any longer. You just *had* to see him, and love him – and know' (122).

As Eleanor begins to fully understand the ghost she sees, the narrative alters the ghost's appearance accordingly. Again, the transformation here is a subtle one; the ghost's clothing remains the same throughout, with only the emphasis placed upon its various properties changing, gradually, towards the story's conclusion. The gown no longer drags on her body, but seems almost to become part of her, a 'frail, grey shape' (116) at first, whose presence is later indicated by a 'sweep of long grey gown' (121). She does not transcend her physicality, but embraces it, 'glowing and triumphant' (116) as she holds her grandchild for the first time. The indications of her ghostly status serve here not only to create pathos, as we see the gloriously-dressed ghost still too small both physically and spiritually for her glorious gown and jewels, but to complete the illusion of a completed, fulfilled presence by the end of the story. As Eleanor's wish for 'somebody my own age, to show [the child] to' (116) is granted, so too is her mother's unspoken but always-present wish to see a child of her own blood grow to adulthood.

As well as ghosts whose indications of supernatural origin play a significant role in the story, Victorian and Edwardian supernatural fiction is replete with ghosts for whom the absence of any such indications form an intrinsic part of the narrative. In Vernon Lee's 1890 story 'Oke of Okehurst' (initially published as 'A Phantom Lover', but known predominantly by its later title), a living woman's fascination with one of her ancestors blurs the boundary between human and ghost, reality and fiction. The narrator, hired to paint Mrs Oke's portrait, is

fascinated with her from the start, and his effervescent descriptions already paint her as something beyond the merely mortal:

> I must repeat and reiterate over and over again, that she was, beyond all comprehension, the most graceful and exquisite woman I have ever seen, but with a grace and an exquisiteness that had nothing to do with any preconceived notion or previous experience of what goes by these names; grace and exquisiteness recognised at once as perfect, but which were seen in her for the first, and probably, I do believe, for the last time (Lee [1880] 1971, 306).

Despite his praise, the reader remains unenchanted, seeing only a calculated cruelty in her obsession with the ancestor who shares her name. The first Alice Oke murdered her lover in the guise of a highwayman, and his ghost is said to haunt the house still; as the living Alice Oke grows more indistinguishable from the dead woman, dressing in her clothes and talking of little else, the lover's ghost seems to come closer and closer to reality. We never learn whether any of the story's ghosts are real, or, indeed, what separates the living from the dead. 'A Phantom Lover' takes place in a transitory world, a hereditary estate soaked with as much nostalgia and longing as history, and here the line between Alice Oke living and Alice Oke dead is drawn so faintly that neither narrator nor reader can see it.

In Charles Willing Beale's 'The Ghost of Guir House' (1897), the ability of ghosts to appear in forms effectively indistinguishable from the living is presented as one consciously chosen and used to deliberate effect. Here, the story's two ghosts – a young woman and an older man – deceive the living protagonist into believing them as mortal as he is, in the hope that he will offer to marry the woman

and thus grant her a second chance at the life she missed. Death is not necessarily preferable to life here (indeed, one ghost explains, the unwitting Paul should '[t]hink happily of the dead […] for what you call their death is but their birth' [419]), but Dorothy, the young woman with whom Pal does eventually fall in love and agree to marry, is caught between mortal life and 'the land of spirits' (414) due the nature of her death: she was murdered in her youth, and it is her father, Ah Ben, who now arranges her marriage as self-imposed penance for failing to protect her. Despite the canvas of trickery and violence created, the story's events are remarkably undramatic, with the ghosts' origin and motivations revealed not through action but through a long and detailed conversation between Ah Ben and Paul. When spirits are distanced from the flesh, it is only the ugly and violent elements of life which they lose; in all else, Ah Ben reminds him, 'you are dealing with a nature far more intense, and with far greater capacity to love, than any you have ever known' (414). Paul himself, having become temporarily separated from his physical body with Ah Ben's guidance, describes returning to his body as being 'suddenly plunged back into a dungeon with chains upon [his] shoulders' (405), and agrees.

Throughout the story, both the ghosts and their narrative set up the boundary between reality and illusion only to cross it continually. The first description of Dorothy paints an image remarkable only in its assertion that Dorothy herself is entirely *un*remarkable:

> [A] graceful young woman, rather tall and slight, with blue eyes, set with dark lashes that intensified their color. Her complexion, although slightly freckled, charmed by its wholesomeness; and her hair […]

> seemed almost too heavy for the delicate head and neck that supported it. Although not strictly beautiful, she had one of those intelligent and responsive faces that are often more attractive than mere perfection of feature and form (345).

It is only near the story's end that we discover this to be a deliberate projection, one limited to Paul (and by extension the reader) and invisible to the crowds around him. It is, however, no less real for that. Dorothy, we are told, is seen 'as [she] was' (419); it is Paul who sees the reality, not those around him to whom she is only 'visible as a shadow' (419). Guir House itself is likewise presented as it was in the past, although Paul is permitted brief glimpses of the 'tottering ruin' (406) which anyone else would see. It is in one such sighting that the true horror of Dorothy's murder and Ah Ben's suicide is represented in true Gothic excess, as Paul finds a hidden chamber decorated with portraits of the family's corpses and holding still the rags and bones which remain of their physical selves. Again, however, this reality is no more true that the illusion created in its place. Death is hideous and horrifying seen through Paul's limited, mortal vision, but with the guidance of the dead, he comes to understand both it and they in their full complexity.

Although the spiritualist-influenced model of ghosts prevailed in the majority of supernatural fiction written in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, its reign did not last forever. In the work of M. R. James and his imitators, the macabre returns to prominence and death is portrayed once again as vicious, ugly, and threatening. James himself pioneered this revival of the grotesque, with his first collection (1904's *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*) standing out among its

contemporaries if not its successors; his first published ghost story, 'Canon Alberic's Scrap-Book' (1894), features a revenant somewhere between corpse and animal whose '[p]ale, dusky skin, covering nothing but bones and tendons of appalling strength' (15) contrasts vividly with the ethereal and beautiful spirits presented in other stories of the period. For his formulaic originality and his continued popularity (his *Collected Ghost Stories* has not been out of print since first published in 1931), James has received more critical attention than the bulk of ghost-story writers, and most of the critics view his contribution to the genre as a curious combination of tradition and novelty. Jack Sullivan, for example, argues that James 'gave the ghost story a new theme' by presenting ghosts which 'materialize not so much from inner darkness or outer conspiracies as from a kind of antiquarian malaise' (Sullivan 1978, 90); Julia Briggs that '[h]e was perhaps the only writer who deliberately studied the ghost story in order to write it himself, and the resulting pieces exhibit a unique degree of critical control and an exception grasp of the force of traditional elements' (Briggs 1977, 139). The only comparison thus drawn between James's ghosts and their Victorian predecessors is one of absence, framing James himself as a pioneer independent of existing (rather than already outmoded) traditions. In James's stories, however, true horror is created through a deliberate deviation from existing form; without ethereal, angelic spirits to provide an implicit contrast, the shambling malevolent revenants of James's stories would lose much of their effect.

In some of James's earlier stories, conventions of ghostly appearance are referenced only to be subverted. 1904's 'Oh Whistle And I'll Come To You, My Lad', probably James's best-known story, features a terrifying ghost whose form is only seen from the outlines of the white bed-sheets draped over it; 'a figure in pale, fluttering draperies, ill-defined' (135), it moves blindly, feeling its way rather than seeing, searching for Parkins, the man who blew the eponymous whistle in true Jamesian ignorance of its possible consequences. The story ends with a physical grapple between Parkins and the ghost, and the narrator's brief description (for Parkins 'very much dislikes being questioned about it') of 'a horrible, an intensely horrible, *face of crumpled linen*' (148). In 'Casting The Runes' (1904), the ghost is a white, powerful shape, but an undeniably malevolent one; it appears on a magic-lantern display shown to a group of school children, in which a child is 'followed, and at last pursued or overtaken, and either torn in pieces or somehow made away with, by a horrible hopping creature in white' (239).

In the majority of his stories, however, James presents a model of ghosts almost entirely alien to the ethereal Victorian spirit, somewhere between the human and the angelic. His ghosts are, rather, animated and malevolent corpses somewhere between human and beast: '[a] thing like a man, all over hair, and two great eyes to it' in 'An Episode of Cathedral History' (437); 'an appearance of a form [with] waving black arms' and a 'burnt human face' in 'Mr. Humphreys And His Inheritance' (356); the 'beastly thing' described by a schoolboy in 'A School Story', 'wet all over, and […] I'm not at all sure that he was alive' (188); the faceless figure

of 'The Diary of Mr Poynter', which 'crept along the floor on its belly' (408), and which had 'so horrible an air of menace that [the protagonist] bounded from his chair and rushed from the room' (409). These are not spiritualist ghosts, but neither are they James's own invention.

Julia Briggs argues for a choice driven by the implausibility of alternatives here; James resorts to the animated corpse 'since skeletons have become the familiar property of art and medical students' (Briggs 1977, 139). The striking similarity between the ghosts of medieval folklore and those in James's stories cannot, however, be attributed to a lucky coincidence of folkloric elements, of James happening to seize on a particular combination used several hundred years previously. It was not merely the literary ghost story which James studied, but its history; it was James who rescued the ghosts of Byland Abbey from their relative obscurity in the literal marginalia of medieval pamphlets, and published them in their original Latin in the *English Historical Review*. James's combination of antiquarianism and the truly old, and his presentation of the past as not only alive but malevolently so, are doubtless his own, but his ghosts belong to the stories and conventions of the Middle Ages.

The critical tradition which views James and his ghosts as a formulaic postscript to Gothic excess, or as an Edwardian anomaly invalidating any claims to a coherent theory or history of the ghost story genre, testifies itself to the prevalence and near-domination of the spiritualist-influenced Victorian ghost.

Rather than seeing Victorian spectres as the defined standard for ghosts, then, we should view them as they are: the spirits of a particular time and place, inseparable from those beliefs and conventions of the ghostly which were an intrinsic part of their surroundings. Unlike the malevolent and macabre revenants of M. R. James, of the anonymous monk of Byland Abbey, and of Sabine Baring-Gould's 'Glámr', the Victorian ghost existed as a spectacle, its glory in death transcending, for good or ill, its humanity: these were ghosts to see, not to shudder at.

Chapter Four. The role of the narrator in the construction of ghost stories.

Hence my four little tales are of no genuine ghosts in the scientific sense; they tell of no hauntings such as could be contributed by the Society for Psychical Research, of no spectres that can be caught in definite places and made to dictate judicial evidence.

(Vernon Lee, introduction to *Hauntings*, xi)

[W]hen I first began to read, and then to write, ghost stories, I was conscious of a common medium between myself and my readers, of their meeting me halfway among the primeval shadows, and filling in the gaps in my narrative with sensations and divinations akin to their own.

(Edith Wharton, introduction to *Ghosts,* 8)

The Victorian ghost story's reputation for formulaic structures and repetitive plots is understandable, if not wholly deserved. Narrators are typically first-person, male, and overwhelmingly protagonists in their own narratives; the ghost is revealed as such towards the end of the story in a moment which fundamentally changes the narrator's mindset; and that encounter with the supernatural is told retrospectively with periodic gestures forward to the narrator's present, wiser, self. While settings may vary, and ghosts may be malicious or benevolent, a focus on the narrator's *experience* of the supernatural is the fundamental element connecting them into a unified genre.[89] The conversion of a sceptic into a believer typically implies a

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[89]. There are exceptions if *all* characters are ghosts, but this is fairly rare: M. E. M. Davis's *The Soul of Rose Dede* (1892) is one example.

narrative stance on the place of the supernatural in a rationalistic world, but centralising the narrator's own perspective suggests something more: a reconsideration of the individual's place within their own world, when that world has revealed itself to be something other than their previous conclusions allowed.

It is this narrator's role that I wish to consider in this chapter, with particular emphasis on how the story relies structurally upon their understanding of the supernatural and its effect upon their own worldview. Although first-person narrator-protagonists are typically reader proxies, and the reader's vicarious encounter with the ghost is thus at the heart of the story, such an encounter is more than a reaction to an impression; the reader is drawn into the narrator's compulsion to decipher and make sense of the supernatural. The ghost's origins, its motivations for appearing and the meaning of its actions when it does, the appropriate measures for responding to it and the alterations that must be made to one's own worldview as a consequence, are all brought to the fore of the story. While such a structural emphasis itself, I argue, is common to both literary and veridical ghost narratives from at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, its practical applications differ depending on the conception of spectrality at play. As the idea of what a ghost is changes, so do the thought processes and conclusions necessary to understanding it, and when the narrator's experience and understanding of the supernatural is at the heart of the story, so does the story itself change according to what that understanding involves. The new conception of spectrality introduced by

spiritualism, then, affects the ghost story far more than the portrayal of the ghost itself.

Narrators and narrative structures of the ghost story.

The reader is typically better placed than the narrator to judge whether the events in question are supernatural at all, due in part to their awareness of the events taking place within a fictionalised world in which natural laws may be suspended, and emphasised by the ghost story's typical presentation of itself as such via the retrospective position of a narrator who frames their own experiences with their supernatural provenance in mind. Consequently, that moment of revelation is rarely as central to the reader as it is to the narrator.[90] Instead, readerly focus is drawn to the process leading up to that point. Narrators do not come to understand that they are encountering the supernatural because they know they are in a ghost story, but because they are able to reconcile their understanding of the world with the reality they see around them, and to develop a conception of the supernatural with (to borrow from the scientific discourse beloved of the psychical researchers of the period) substantial explanatory value.[91]

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[90]. This is further helped by titles, which often give indications of a ghost story's subject matter; location (a story printed in *Household Words* at Christmas, for example, was not necessarily a ghost story, but readers would be expecting the possibility nonetheless); or even authors, if they are primarily known for their supernatural fiction.

[91]. To highlight the presentation of the supernatural as something to be explained, compare the Victorian ghost story with its literary predecessors. The role of the supernatural in the Gothic tradition was to illustrate that the narrative was taking place in a space distant from and other from the reader's; the Gothic ghost is, as Peter Penzoldt describes it, 'less an individual character than part of the scenery' (Penzoldt 1952, 34), and the protagonist's task

The narrator's role as reader proxy, however, should not lead to a neglect of the narrator-protagonist as an entity in itself, nor of its notable characteristics in that position. Few narrators show as much clear discomfort with their own narratives as those of the nineteenth-century ghost story; '[a]lthough every word of this tale is as true as despair,' as the narrator of E. Nesbit's 'Man-Size in Marble' begins, 'I do not expect people to believe it' (113). Whether or not his pessimism on this particular matter is misplaced, he is far from alone in confessing to it, and statements such as his abound. The narrator of Amelia B. Edwards's 'The Phantom Coach',[92] for example admits to telling his story 'with a reluctance which I find it difficult to overcome', and that of Mrs Henry Wood's 'Reality or Delusion?' ends his tale in the certainty that he 'shall be called a muff and a double muff' if he claims belief in the supernatural events he describes (129). Ghost story narrators rarely assume belief, either in the supernatural in general or in their experiences in particular, on the part of the audience they appeal to directly, emphasising instead the inadequacy of their own stories in convincing anyone of their truth. By the nineteenth century, the concept of credibility has become such a tangible presence in ghost narratives that it often seems to eclipse even the supernatural itself.

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is to navigate that landscape rather than relate to or understand its individual manifestations.

[92]. Originally published as 'The North Mail', Edwards's is more commonly known today by the title I am using.

Tzvetan Todorov's work on the fantastic provides what is probably the most comprehensive framework for considering matters of belief and scepticism in regards to the supernatural in fiction, although most examples of the Victorian ghost story would not match his definition of the form. (The true fantastic, according to Todorov, must maintain ambiguity until the end of the narrative, never providing the reader with resolution by defining the apparently supernatural as either definitively naturalistic or definitively marvellous.[93]) In emphasising the importance of the narrator-protagonist's relationship to the reader, whose 'role is so to speak entrusted to a character' in many examples of the form (Todorov 1973, 33), Todorov allows for a central focus upon the *experience* of the supernatural: '[t]he perception of this implicit reader is given in the text with the same precision as the movements of the characters', and thus the 'hesitation' he considers the primary defining factor of the fantastic is embedded within the text (31). The fantastic, then, lies not in the events described but in the protagonist's perception of those events, a hesitancy transmitted to the reader (implied and actual) by textual means. He points to the tendency of the fantastic to 'realize the literal sense of a *figurative* expression', as, for example, with the description of the statue in Mérimée's 'La

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[93]. Other critics have expressed some uncertainty about Todorov's use of the fantastic, pointing both to the narrowness of definition thus implied (Todorov himself cites very few examples of the pure fantastic) and Todorov's own apparently inadequate definition of his term; Christine Brooke-Rose, for example, finds his willingness to temporarily omit the endings of some stories while considering them as fantastic 'a little dubious', and suggests that a reliance upon purely theoretical genres, as Todorov claims, is insufficient, since his definition 'is bound therefore to apply only to the nineteenth-century texts examined, a particular genre with a short life' (Brooke-Rose 1981, 64, 67), Since a full examination of the efficacy of Todorov's approach is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, I will limit myself to excluding the ghost story from the pure fantastic under his definition, rather than debating about whether the 'pure fantastic' as a theoretical genre should be expanded to encompass the 'fantastic-marvellous', under which the ghost story would more accurately be counted.

Vénus d'Ille' as having eyes that 'seemed to be alive' (79, 80), and extends this to the narrator's voice as a whole, as 'the figurative expression is introduced by a modalizing formula: "he seemed," "they would call me," "as if"' (80).

Within the ghost story, such hesitation can easily be read as speaking to a nineteenth-century atmosphere of rationalism in regards to the supernatural. Identification between narrator and reader in this scepticism, then, speaks in its turn to an audience already disinclined to view personal testimony as empirically proven fact. Where narrators are hesitant to present the supernatural without such distancing techniques, both the apparently supernatural event and the narrator's scepticism are communicated to the reader; what is apparently distancing is in actuality a means for bringing the supernatural closer to the reader, as it is framed in terms of a particularly rationalistic approach to understanding. So it is, then, that the narrator of Oliphant's *A Beleaguered City*, confronted with the first appearance of an invisible legion of ghosts, can describe feeling 'as if someone passed' (15) behind him, and seeing a man moving 'strangely, like […] a man making his way in the face of a crowd' (16). When the apparently supernatural is presented with such caution, some of the distance between reader and narrator is bridged, as the supernatural is presented not as it *is* but as how it is *experienced*.

It is not only isolated incidents of the supernatural which are presented with such distancing techniques. The ghost story is at its most self-referential in its

treatment of belief in the supernatural as a whole, with narrator after narrator establishing their credibility through criticising the conventions and claims of supernatural narratives: the narrator of Dinah M. Mulock's 'The Last House in C__ Street' is 'not a believer in ghosts in general,' for example (113), and the protagonist of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 'The Haunted and the Haunters', in both of that story's incarnations, nearly ends his story at the same time it begins with a defensive reply to his friend's 'What did you see?':

> Excuse me – I have no desire to be ridiculed as a superstitious dreamer – nor, on the other hand, could I ask you to accept on my affirmation what you would hold to be incredible without the evidence of your own senses. (224)

But in this, scepticism is present in order to be proven false. The language of rationalism permeates the ghost story down to its very structure: to grant this specific ghost its reality, and this specific narrative its strength, a sceptic must be converted.

It would be tempting to see both the ghost story's emphasis on rationalism and its reluctant narrators as arising out a particular nineteenth-century ethos, one influenced by the advent of psychical research and the atmosphere of rationalism in regards to the supernatural that created it. The interaction between ghost and living which lies at the centre of ghost narratives is, in the Victorian ghost story, framed in terms of reason and belief: the narrator's preoccupation with the credibility of their own reports, and the narrative's efforts to make those reports credible by

emphasising the reluctance of their narrators to believe in or discuss the supernatural, often gives the story the air of a report to some judicial committee rather than a piece of escapist entertainment. Characteristic though such conventions as reluctant narrators and obsessive attention to verifying detail might be of the Victorian ghost story, the impression they often seem to give is in part that of one genre consciously mimicking another: the scientifically rationalised supernatural of the nineteenth century.

The development of psychical research

Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature*, published in 1848 and discussed in previous chapters of this thesis, stands as a landmark in the history of Victorian efforts to apply scientific principles to the supernatural. Crowe's purpose was not to provide explanations for the supernatural anecdotes she recounted, but to lay the foundations for a debate about the supernatural that took place within the grounds of empirical science. The nineteenth-century view of reason was, in her view, not only conducive to such a project but essential for its very existence:

> [E]xperience, observation, and intuition, must be our principal if not our only guides. Because, in the seventeenth century, credulity outran reason and discretion; the eighteenth century, by a natural reaction, threw itself into an opposite extreme. Whoever closely observes the signs of the times, will be aware that another change is approaching. The contemptuous scepticism of the last age is yielding to a much more humble spirit of inquiry; and there is a large class of persons among the most enlightened of the present, who are beginning to believe that much

which they had been taught as fable, has been, in reality, ill-understood truth. (Crowe [1848] 2000, 16).

Ranging from telepathy and precognition to ghosts and poltergeists, the subjects of Crowe's narratives are framed with the structure and terminology of empirical reason. Without stumbling into what she views as an inflexible and ignorant scepticism, she nevertheless affirms a naturalistic approach in her belief that the experience, observation and intuition she suggests as guides will lead to scientific explanations for the phenomena she 'do[es] not propose to consider […] as supernatural' at all (22).

Since they rely overwhelmingly on personal testimony, then, the narratives Crowe uses must go some way to affirming their own credibility as objective evidence. To a point, she achieves this though volume: *The Night Side of Nature* is filled with hundreds of anecdotes (which she refers to as 'cases'), many of them describing similar stories from unconnected sources, relying on each other to bolster the claims they collectively make. Further, her narratives are bolstered with seemingly trivial detail regarding place, time and situation, most of it inconsequential to the events described in the narrative and ineffectual for purposes of identification. The purpose of establishing that a room measured 'twenty-one [feet] by eighteen' (256), that the ghost of a man killed 'by his horse falling, on Candlemaker Row' should appear to a man 'riding gently up Corstorphine Hill' (194), or that another such witness should have seen a ghost in his own home when

'in the kitchen, about three o'clock in the morning, taking his breakfast' (261) is not to ground the stories in a particular time and place, but to give the impression that they *could* be so grounded.

Where possible, however, individual narratives gain strength from an emphasis on the trustworthiness of their narrators. Many are known to Crowe personally ('a lady, with whom I am acquainted' (122), 'some friends of mine' (221)); others are members of the community in good standing ('a respectable citizen of Edinburgh' (221), '[t]wo gentlemen, the one a minister, and the other a man engaged in business' (146), 'a Mr. J. S., belonging to a highly respectable family, with whom I am acquainted' (192)); and a substantial number are marked out as individuals who would not otherwise have anything to do with the supernatural, such as the clairvoyant man 'as little likely as anyone [Crowe] ever knew to be troubled with a faculty of this sort' (54) or the witness to a ghost who is 'no believer in ghost stories […] nor in the least superstitious; nevertheless, I cannot help admitting that I have seen this; it is impossible for me ever to doubt or deny what I know I saw' (166).

As Crowe presents it, then, what qualifies individuals to be suitable candidates for a central role in a supernatural narrative is their incongruity with the supernatural as traditionally understood. Exemplars of the nineteenth-century everyman, they are modern, rational and sincere in their commitment to truth,

reluctant even to give voice to their experiences. '[T]here is an exceeding shyness in most people who either have seen, or fancied they have seen, an apparition,' Crowe explains; much of the difficulty in gathering narratives for her collection came from the unwillingness of many such witnesses to tell their stories to anyone other than close friends, and from the wishes for anonymity among others (22). As with the reluctant narrator of the literary ghost story, the narrator's discomfort with their failure to rationally explain their own supernatural experiences serves to strengthen the narrative's force and credibility by echoing the reader's own perceived worldview.

In claiming this connection between readers and narrators, I do not wish to suggest that narrators serve merely as stand-ins for readers with similar approaches to the supernatural. The relationship is, instead, rather more complex, with the reader placed alternately within and without the narrative. Ghost story narrators are not scientific investigators in their own right, and make no attempts to explain the occurrences they describe; they are merely reporters, without even the gloss of suggestion and tentative theory with which Crowe links their narratives. This, combined with narrators' reluctance to suggest explanations for their own experiences, implies the presence of an interpreter external to the events and their framing story, putting the reader in the role of narratee as well as narrator.

A focus on objective evidence within Crowe's book strengthened by a self-conscious scepticism which pre-empts the reader's possible objections, and the emulation of scientific discourse, through referring to narratives as cases, establishing the credibility of witnesses, and including seemingly trivial detail, creates association between reader and narratee. Such readers, then, are presented as concerned with the spirit of inquiry rather than dogmatic adherence to belief or disbelief, a mindset appealed to explicitly within the narratives as well as implicitly through their presentation as scientific evidence:

> 'And do you really believe all this nonsense, Creswell?' said my mother.
> 'Well, I don't know, my lady,' answered she, 'but there's the iron cage in the garret over your bedroom, where you may see it, if you please.' (233)

Scepticism, in other words, is reasonable; reluctance to associate oneself with the supernatural should be, if not exactly commended, then certainly sympathised with. Viewing the supernatural through the lens of science, however, requires a willingness to accept in good faith the evidence presented, and an interest in interpreting and explaining it without recourse to superstition, dishonesty, or ridicule. The absence of explanation or suggestion from the narrators themselves is therefore a direct invitation to the reader; investigation into the supernatural is, in Crowe's terms, a new science, and all sciences begin as 'but a collection of facts, afterwards to be examined, compared, and weighed by intelligent minds' (21).

The efforts to frame the supernatural within scientific approaches and terminology continued into the later nineteenth century, with the advent of

psychical research as a movement in its own right. The organisation associated most closely with the movement, the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), was founded in 1882 with the express purpose of scientifically investigating claims of the supernatural, with 'a single-minded desire to ascertain the facts, and without any foregone conclusions as to their nature' (quoted in Oppenheim 1985, 123).[94] Pioneered by Henry Sidgwick, Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge, it was far from a fringe organisation of eccentrics; Janet Oppenheim lists Gladstone, Ruskin, Tennyson, Lewis Carroll and Frederic Leighton, President of the Royal Academy, as members in the later 1800s. Investigating the allegedly supernatural with the tools of scientific reason, and making no pronouncements on the reality of the phenomena in question before a full and rational investigation, was a societally sanctioned approach, and one which evidently held great appeal to hoping to find some objective, empirical basis for claims of an afterlife.

Given such a focus, it is unsurprising that the SPR should have been concerned with spiritualism from its inception. The society followed an already-established tradition of investigation into mediums in the public eye, a tradition that dated back to the 1850s. Discoveries of fraud among mediums, at the time of the SPR's creation, was most associated with the 'exposure' of Florence Cook during one of her séances, when a George Sitwell seized hold of the spirit guide 'Katie King' and revealed that the curtained alcove which should have held the medium

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[94]. The American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) was founded in 1885, and became affiliated with its British counterpart in 1890. For more on this, see Renée Haynes's *Society for Psychical Research 1882 – 1892: A History*.

was empty except for her clothes.[95] The SPR's history regarding spiritualism is, however, a more complex and tangled matter than the image of a group of dedicated investigators uncovering the fraudulent activities of celebrity mediums would suggest. Spiritualists made up a considerable proportion of the SPR's early membership; the conference at which it was founded was held at the headquarters of the British National Association of Spiritualists (BNAS), and its first meetings were held in a venue that organisation had provided. Spiritualism was, at its heart, concerned with experiencing and understanding the supernatural, and spiritualists did not view the scientific methods of psychical research in general and the SPR in particular as contradicting any of their essential principles.[96]

While spiritualists could enthusiastically embrace the opportunity for scientific verification of their claims, their aims and methods frequently sat uncomfortably alongside the more rationalistic psychical researchers. The investigation and exposure of Florence Cook had already created an association between psychical research and a hostile form of materialism in the minds of many

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[95]. Katie King was also the centre of a spiritualist controversy in America, when she and the medium were revealed to be two separate – and very much living – individuals. Although she was most often associated with Florence Cook, she seems to have appeared at other séances on both sides of the Atlantic and been introduced and recognised as such. If it was her widespread fame that made her and her mediums such celebrated targets for revelations of fraud, it was likely the same which contributed towards the avowals of trust still made by numerous spiritualists after both events.

[96]. The relationship between spiritualism and psychical research is documented extensively in Janet Oppenheim's *The Other World*, but Richard Noakes's paper 'Spiritualism, the supernatural and science in mid-Victorian Britain' provides a useful summation. As he argues, disputes between spiritualists and psychical researchers 'were not, as traditional historiography suggests, struggles between proponents of 'science' and 'pseudo-science', but fights between individuals who disagreed on what counted as the proper scientific approach to the spirit world' (Noakes 2004, 24).

spiritualists, and the later investigations into well-known mediums such as Eusapia Palladino and William Eglinton, among others, seemed to confirm their fears. In combination with a growing perception that the methods and discourse of psychical research were incapable of appreciating the spiritual and moral substance of spiritualism, this concern led to friction and mutual distrust between spiritualist and non-spiritualist members from the start, and a number of spiritualists, among them William Stainton Moses, left in its early years (see Oppenheim ch. 4, *passim.*). Even if the ghosts of spiritualism were the same as the ghosts of psychical research, as the spiritualist members of the SPR hoped, their narratives remained distanced and distinct, with the language of each proving inadequate to address the most fundamental questions of the other.

Psychical research's incompatibility with the spiritual and emotional aspects of spiritualism, its emphasis upon relating to the dead as both moral guides and emotionally textured individuals, also tended to make it unsuitable source material for the literary ghost story. Julia Briggs's claim that '[i]t was precisely on the grounds of prosaicness and pointlessness that the investigations of psychic research societies were rejected by most writers as unsuitable material for fiction' (Briggs 1977, 15) is hardly an abstract supposition; Henry James complained in his preface to the 1908 edition of *The Turn of the Screw* that 'the mere modern "psychical" case, washed clean of all queerness as by exposure to a flowing laboratory tap' made for poor ghost stories when compared to the 'really effective and heart-shaking narratives' of the

past (James 1999, 123). The converted sceptic of the ghost story, a figure who typically attempts and fails to decipher the supernatural using empirical reason, can read as a response to the discourse of psychical research, and a reclamation of the supernatural into a territory that lies outside rationalism and science. Even in countering that discourse's aims and conclusions, however, the narratives confirm its substance; as the substance of the ghost story proves the sceptical narrator's worldview false, the meticulous attention paid to the matter of the reader's belief, something tackled throughout the genre with direct appeals to reason rather than faith, suggests that its basic rationale persists.

If the ghost story was indeed modelled after the nineteenth-century application of rationalism to the supernatural, many of its conventions could likewise be read as a deliberate attempt to mimic the narratives of psychical research, be they in the strictly codified reports of the SPR or the more narrative style of writers such as Catherine Crowe. The common use of first-person narrators who present their experiences as testimonies, the tendency among those narrators to cast doubt upon their own ability to convince others through that testimony alone, the presentation of living characters who see ghosts as rational and modern individuals belonging so much to their time that they would rather question their own sanity than accept the evidence of their senses, the use of trivial detail and appeals to the good character of the protagonists in order to convince, the very

need to convince in the first place: all of these belong as much to the literary Victorian ghost narrative as to its counterparts within psychical research.

To place all these features definitively within the nineteenth century, however, would be premature. While no previous movements approached the degree of pseudo-religious reverence that psychical research had for the scientific method, ghost narratives had been attempting to reconcile the rational and supernatural since the seventeenth century. E. J. Clery discusses the apparition narratives that preceded the ghost story as rigorous to the point of tedium in their

> patient, methodical and exhaustive display of facts […] proper names of objects and people, exact measurement of distances of time and space, precise recollections of speech and actions. Here, monotony became a virtue. (Clery 1995, 20).

Even psychical research can trace its origins to narratives such as these; Clery points to writers such as Joseph Glanvill, a member of the Royal Society who in 1688 called for an application of scientific method to supernatural phenomena, as the rule rather than the exception.[97]

Since the methods and terminology of psychical research had begun long before the foundation of the SPR and the research and reporting practices it introduced to the late nineteenth century, it is unsurprising that the narrative

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[97]. Nor were those who saw themselves as psychical researchers were not ignorant of the tradition which preceded them. Catherine Crowe disagreed with what she saw as the simplistic and premature conviction of works such as John Ferriar's 'An Essay Towards a Theory of Apparitions' (1812), Samuel Hibbert's 'Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions' (1824) and John Thatcher's 'An Essay on Demonology, Ghosts, Apparitions and Popular Superstitions' (1831), but named them as forerunners to her own work nonetheless, as she did the writings of Samuel Johnson, Joseph Addison, Plato, Pliny and Lucien.

features listed above should be evident in literary ghost stories from the genre's origin. Walter Scott's 'The Tapestried Chamber' (1821), often cited as the first example of the ghost story proper,[98] deliberately emulates a factual report: its narrator begins by stating his aims 'not [to] add to or diminish the narrative by any circumstances, whether more or less material, but simply rehearse, as I heard it, a story of supernatural terror', and nods to an already-established tradition of narrators 'detail[ing] the minute incidents which serve to give [the story] authenticity' (15). Scrooge talks to Marley's ghost while adamant about his refusal to accept its objective existence, stating that '[a] slight disorder of the stomach' could interfere with the reliability of his senses, and explaining the ghost before him as 'an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato' (27).

While organisations such as the SPR represent the culmination of the cultural forces behind them, then, both veridical and literary narratives testify to the increasing influence and discourse of the rationalised supernatural throughout the nineteenth century. Scott's narrator's claims to a detached reporter-like style are echoed throughout the ghost story's later history: Ada Trevanion's 'A Ghost Story' (1858) begins with the narrator's assertion that '[t]he reader will draw his own inferences. It is for me simply to relate the whole history, from the beginning to the end, only premising that it is true in every particular' (16), and Amelia B. Edwards'

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[98]. See, for example, Briggs (1977) and Sullivan (1978).

'How the Third Floor Knew the Potteries' (1863) with a similar claim on the narrator's part that 'I do not pretend to explain [these facts]. I only know that they happened as I relate them, and that I pledge myself for the truth of every word of them' (154).[99] In their very claims to detachment, they place their narratives within a discourse of the rationalised supernatural and its fundamental principles of a dedication to understanding the events described. The split role of the narrator – between their past and present selves, between their roles as individuals and their roles as reader proxies – allows them to affirm their own determination to understand, while in the very act of repudiating that effort.

Scepticism and its associated narrative conventions are thus woven into the fabric of the literary ghost story; just as psychical research acted within an already-established tradition of rationalising the supernatural, so did the new conception of spectrality brought about by spiritualism work within a genre already preoccupied by the issue of how the living viewed and understood ghosts. In demonstrating how that new conception functions in the ghost story as a form, then, I will not treat the

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[99]. Narrators' pretences to a detached, scientific style, as one of the most notable features of the ghost story, were characteristic enough for writers to highlight when satirising the form itself. See Sabine Baring-Gould's 'The 9.30 Up-Train' (first published in 1853), for example: 'I think that I partook of a bun, but if put on my oath I could not swear to the fact; a floating reminiscence of bun lies in the chambers of memory, but I cannot be positive, and I wish in this paper to advance nothing but reliable facts' (336-7). Jerome K. Jerome, in his *Told After Supper*, extends this to a preoccupation with overly detailed pseudo-journalistic prose in the form in general:

> He made inquiries the next day, and found that, strangely enough, his rich uncle, whose only nephew he was, had married a widow with eleven children at exactly a quarter to twelve, only two days ago.
> The young man does not attempt to explain the circumstance. All he does is to vouch for the truth of his narrative. (20)

central emphasis on the narrator's experience of the supernatural as something uniquely Victorian, but will instead endeavour to show a shift in how that experience is presented over the period in question. Just as the appearance and agency of the ghost changed over the nineteenth century, so did its role within the narrative, as suggested by Penzoldt's claims of the Gothic spectres as essentially scenery rather than intrinsic elements of the story. Narrators confronted with pre-spiritualist ghosts, then, need to frame their understanding in terms of not merely how those ghosts act and appear, but how they function within the narrative as a whole; coming to understand the supernatural means coming to accept one's own role within the ghost story.

Narrators in the literary ghost story

In the literary ghost story, the twin features of the reluctant narrator and the form's tendency to associate itself with non-fictional narratives result in one of the genre's most peculiar characteristics: narrators who criticise the merit of the form they write in, ghost stories which disavow ghost stories. Take, for example, the introduction of Walter Scott's 'The Tapestried Chamber':

> [I]t must be admitted, that the particular class of stories which turns on the marvellous possesses a stronger influence when told than when committed to print. The volume taken up at noonday, though rehearsing the same incidents, conveys a much more feeble impression than is achieved by the voice of the speaker on a circle of fireside auditors, who hang upon the narrative as the narrator details the minute incidents

which serves to give it authenticity, and lowers his voice with an affectation of mystery. (13)

It is not the subject matter of the literary ghost story which Scott's narrator criticises, nor any of its conventions (such as the tendency to include trivial details to increase its plausibility as a factual account), but rather its existence as a printed and published object.

Print was far from a new introduction to ghost narratives in the 1820s; apparition narratives had been collated in written form for several hundred years, and it was only the literary ghost story as a strictly fictional form which was relatively new. This lament for a dying age of oral narrative is rather a conscious echo of the Gothic tradition in fiction, with its pretences of ancient foundations in an almost-forgotten past. Nevertheless, written narratives seem to be situated as relatively recent inventions here, with the fireside tales the narrator purports to prefer being granted an elevated position as the ideal medium for ghost stories. Written narratives fail, then, in their differences from their oral counterparts. As Scott's story explains it, not only do written narratives lack the auditory advantage of a speaker whose voice can be modulated into all of the tones desired, but even the apparent freedom they provide the reader – to read the tale at noonday or at night, to read by a fireside or elsewhere – is a weakness.

If the ideal narrator of the ghost story is a charismatic speaker, as Scott's story would have it, the ideal narratee is passive and compliant. In the words of the

narrator of Joseph Sheridan LeFanu's 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances on Aungier Street' (1853), 'a 'reader' [is] decidedly a more critical animal than a 'listener'' (68); the enraptured crowds gathered around the fireside must hear the story in the manner it is given and at the moment it is told, and the pseudo-democracy of a readership able to choose when and how the narrative is received is thus presented in terms of distance and detachment from the narrative itself. The authenticity which Scott's narrator associates with oral narratives does not come from content, but from form: the narrative's very existence as an object turns it into a visible intermediary between reader and narrator.

While 'The Tapestried Chamber' notes this separation in its first paragraphs but isolates it from the story itself, LeFanu's 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street' allows doubt and concern about the form itself to permeate the entire narrative. Its narrator begins with a comparison of oral and written narratives which seems on face value hardly distinguishable from Scott's: '[p]en, ink and paper are cold vehicles for the marvellous', he relates, and future readers should be encouraged to take up the story 'after nightfall, and when the fireside talk has run for a while on thrilling tales of shapeless terror' (68). This is not presented as a plea for the future of the genre itself, however, but as a more direct and personal wish for credibility. Unlike Scott's story, 'An Account…' retains the same individual narrator throughout, leaving no clear separation between the

supernatural events described and the narrative commentary on the form chosen to describe them.

This narrator's reluctance to tell his story, then, comes not from its supernatural content but from a perceived discomfort over how well that content can be expressed in written form. Although he begins with the admission that his account of the events has been well received as an oral narrative, told to 'a circle of intelligent and eager faces' by a winter fireside, its transformation into a written narrative requires the presence of an outside force suggesting he do so; even then, as he explains, 'it is a venture to do as you would have me' (68). As in Scott's narrative, the form itself is thus presented as a modern construction, something weakened and inadequate in the face of an image of the supernatural which is still primarily presented as horrific and threatening at this early stage in the ghost story's history. If the archaic, Gothic, and crumbling haunted house in which the events take place is itself symbolic of what it contains, the written narrative is the paper which covers its walls as the sole 'modernising detail', and which itself seems 'raw and out of keeping' in its surroundings (69).[100] Given the story's writing and publication at a time when the popularity of the literary ghost story was rapidly increasing, and the concept of written narratives becoming more strongly associated

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[100]. Viewing the house as itself symbolic should not, however, imply a broader disregard of the importance of the house and the idea of domesticity in the Victorian ghost story. While largely outside the scope of the present discussion, increasing anxieties about the stability of domesticity as an ideal play a significant role in many stories within the genre; Lara Baker Whelan provides a fascinating insight into depictions of suburbia within the Victorian ghost story as a whole.

with this new form, it seems reasonable to suggest that it is the genre itself being held up for criticism here, and that the 'you' demanding that the story be told in print could be understood as the reading public as a whole.

Despite this, it is not the literary ghost story which warrants direct reference in this narrative. If Scott's story countered the uncomfortably modern idea of the literary ghost story with a feigned nostalgia for its Gothic predecessors, LeFanu's narrator looks to the veridical narratives of the rationalised supernatural to provide meaning for his experiences. The pseudo-empirical tone set by the title recurs in the body of the story; 'I shall waste no more words, but tell you simply how it happened' (68), the narrator begins, later claiming to 'borrow the technical slang of the day' in suggesting that an apparent supernatural vision might have been 'subjective' (71). Unusually among ghost story narrators, this one begins the story as a believer in the supernatural. The true sceptic's role is occupied by his companion, Tom, who stays with him in a haunted house for several days, eventually finding his scepticism converted to belief when he sees the horrific figure of the ghost for himself, and leaves in incoherent terror.

While Tom flees upon first encountering the supernatural, the narrator, Richard, remains behind alone, giving no better explanation than that of a 'series of petty procrastinations and accidents' (73) for his choice. This seems a puzzling decision, especially from a narrator who admits to his 'superstitious weakness' (70)

near the beginning of his tale; the horrific and apparently malicious figure of the ghost has after all already made its presence known to him through the sounds of 'lumpy, flabby, naked feet' (76) on the staircases. While he does not attempt to hide his belief, then, his determination 'to *see* the being, if visible at all, who troubled the nightly stillness' (75, italics in original) suggests a tendency he is less willing to face in himself: his rationalism, as determined not by disbelief in the supernatural but by a wish to experience and understand it.

Where rationalism is presented as an attitude, scepticism is presented as something which must be performed. Tom's declaration that '[a] cataleptic dream should explain it, and I was determined that a dream it should be' (79) in regards to the first sighting of the ghost is not a statement of fact about the reality of his experience, but a resolution to convince himself of a naturalistic explanation through repeating the statement that it is so. His conversion is not merely to a belief in the supernatural, then, but to a recognition that his previous scepticism was no more than a calculated attempt at deception; indeed, he compares himself to 'charlatans and impostors, who tire people into credulity by the mere force of reiteration', interpreting credulity as a willingness to be deceived instead of a tendency towards specific beliefs. Scepticism is thus a process rather than a position, and one in constant danger of being halted or thrown backwards by an insufficient adherence to its practice. For Tom, who does not describe the apparition he sees until several days after leaving the house, simply telling his own

story would weaken his scepticism: 'I did not like to revive in their intensity the hated impressions of the last night', he explains to his companion, 'or, to risk the constancy of my scepticism, by recounting the tale of my sufferings' (78).

Richard's desire to experience the supernatural directly comes from a wish not to believe, but to understand. The significance of his first encounter with what he believes to be a ghost, in which 'an ocular delusion of my fancy sporting with the outlines of our cupboard' leads him to imagine an advancing figure in the shadows of furniture, lies not in the bathos of the moment but in the efforts to deduce what had happened which follow it (75). When he fails to reach any conclusion, it is not images but 'fantastic and horrible speculations' which haunt him through the night, thought processes in which he attempts to piece together fragments of experience into a consistent, explanatory narrative (75).

It is not rationalism, then, but dogmatic scepticism which the narrative presents as an ultimately flawed approach to the supernatural. Although the candle Tom carries is unable to shine its light into the dark, haunted alcove in his bedroom, and represents the loss as well as the inadequacy of his scepticism when he leaves it behind as he flees from the ghost he witnesses, attempts to symbolically shine light into darkness are not in themselves predisposed to failure; 'I lighted *two* candles instead of one', Richard explains of his own efforts to make sense of what he had seen, efforts which are themselves validated by the story's conclusion, when

Tom reveals that he saw the ghost himself (75). A dedication to scepticism is here presented as a refusal to extend rational thought processes to the supernatural, an aversion towards experiencing anything which might damage or destroy rationalistic beliefs, and an aversion even towards telling one's story, in case the very act of doing so shakes the foundations upon which the previous two avowals are built.

If the ideal method for understanding ghosts and other supernatural events is careful, deductive reason, then written narratives seem a better medium for the supernatural than the oral tales Richard claims to prefer. The overt importance given to abstracted thought in the narrative itself, however, should not obscure the implicit weight still carried by direct experience. '[I]f you had seen that, *you* would have felt it might be *anything* but what it seemed', Richard says of one apparition, a peculiarly malicious rat, which as he describes it must be experienced in order to be fully understood; after his own encounter with the supernatural, Tom agrees that '[n]o one can conceive or imagine what it is for flesh and blood to stand in the presence of such a thing, but one who has had the terrific experience' (77, 82). Full understanding must come from such direct experience; like the spirits of Christmases past, present and future taking Scrooge from the comfortable safety of his home to directly confront his actions, this narrative holds the position that one must not merely see but feel in order to understand.

Where written narratives falter in this understanding is by standing between narrator and reader, serving as an obstacle to what could otherwise potentially be a direct transmission of sensation between the two. Oral narratives can exert some influence upon the senses that is not diluted by the choice implicit in presenting the same story in written form, where a reader can opt to have its events related in surroundings and circumstances not necessarily conducive to fear. The self-effacing tone of the narrator, of course, should not be confused with the beliefs of an author clearly confident in his own ability to convey the intended effects in written form; as discussed earlier in this thesis, LeFanu had a formative influence upon the ghost story in both his authorial and editorial roles, in a career spanning over thirty years.[101] If written narratives remove some of the immediacy and intensity of a more direct experience, then the author's task is to recreate the desired sensations through the text alone, without recourse to what LeFanu's narrator calls the '*mollia tempora fandi*' - the time favourable for speaking – of a situation already associated with inducing fear (68).

And it is fear, most certainly, which is the intended effect of this story. The ghost of 'An Account' follows the pre-spiritualist conception of the spectral, as a macabre and malevolent form whose influence does not extend beyond the house he occupied in life.[102] He moves 'stiffly and slowly', his head 'hung a little at one

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[101]. See footnote 23 of Chapter One for more on LeFanu's career.
[102]. While the idea of the haunted house is far from unique to early ghost stories, the importance of the house in this story, to the point where the narrator states that 'what the flesh, blood and bone hero of romance proper is to the regular compounder of fiction, this

side' and the rope with which he hung himself in life still wrapped around his neck (78). At no juncture is there any suggestion that characters or readers should regard him with sympathy; indeed, his appearance is preceded by the declaration that he was known in life as 'a particularly 'hanging judge'' and followed by the housekeeper's explanation that he was 'an unnatural ould villain […] by all accounts an ould villain every way, an' the hangin'est judge that ever was known in Ireland's ground' (69, 83). Although the ghost does not speak to either of the characters, the slow, deliberate and apparently malevolent nature of his movements in contrast to their panicked reactions suggest an awareness and enjoyment of the effect he causes:

> The abhorred phantom was before me there; it was standing near the banisters, stooping a little, and with one end of the rope round its own neck, was poising a noose at the other, as if to throw over mine; and while engaged in this baleful pantomime, it wore a smile so sensual, so unspeakably dreadful, that my senses were nearly overpowered. (82)

The close relationship between experience and rational understanding in LeFanu's narrative, then, emerges from the pre-spiritualist conception of the spectral as typically limited, horrific (whether threatening or not), and inhuman. Veridical narratives might use the above as a *memento mori* or a moral fable, and literary narratives are hardly prevented from doing the same, as the example of *A Christmas Carol* and stories like it amply demonstrate; this ghost, however, conforms

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old house of brick, wood and mortar is to the humble recorder of this true tale' (85), suggests a focus on the building as location and limitation more common in pre-1850 and post-1900 narratives. Compare, for example, LeFanu's story with Charlotte Riddell's 'The Haunted House at Latchford' (1873) (subsequently published as 'Fairy Water'); the eponymous house of the latter is certainly central to the narrative, but its role is as a home and a family legacy rather than as a stage for the supernatural,

to neither, belonging instead to the tradition of entertainment through horror or terror which the literary narrative also inherited from its veridical forebears. The ghost here is intended to terrify, rather than enlighten, and if the ghost story as a form is centred upon attempts to *understand* the supernatural, then that understanding must, at this stage in the form's history, concentrate on the ghost's effect.

In later narratives, efforts to understand the figure of the ghost usually involve a spiritualist-influenced conception of the spectral and an affirmation of that conception by the story's protagonist. Edith Nesbit's 'Man-Size in Marble' (1893) uses the same language of scepticism as LeFanu's story, and contains ghosts also intended to be terrifying rather than enlightening, but emphasises understanding and belief as central elements of the narrative without equating them to sensation and experience. The protagonist is again a first-person narrator, a young man who moves with his new wife to a cottage in a seemingly peaceful village, who finds himself faced with ghosts for whom death represents a particularly physicalised power. The couple's rural idyll is disturbed by a local legend of two knights, buried in the church nearby, whose marble effigies rise from their tombs every All Saint's Eve to return to the house now inhabited by the story's protagonists. The sceptical narrator, Jack, learns the legend from his housekeeper but decides against telling his wife; on All Saint's Eve, he leaves her alone and returns to find her dead, her hand clutching a broken marble finger.

In this story, it is in the interplay between the physical and the ethereal that the supernatural must be encountered and understood. Jack's dismissal of supernatural narratives, and thus his implicit stance that with death comes not merely immateriality but loss of ability to have any effect on the physical world, is countered by the malevolent physical presence of the ghosts he faces. While the threat they present is suggested initially by indirect means, through the housekeeper's terror of these figures and her description of the knights' history (they were guilty of deeds so foul, she says, that their house was struck by the vengeance of heaven), it is their ability to clothe themselves in marble and walk as physical beings which makes this threat real.

> They do say, as on All Saint's Eve them two bodies sits up on their slabs, and gets off of them, and then walks down the aisle, in their marble […] and as the church clock strikes eleven they walks out of the church door, and over the graves, and along the bier-balk, and if it's a wet night there's the mark of their feet in the morning (71)

The physicality of these figures is emphasised repeatedly, and echoed in heavy, thudding stresses by the housekeeper's monosyllabic language. They progress to the house laboriously, each separate movement described; they walk, not glide, and in the morning their feet have left marks in the earth. Bodies of marble can literally overpower bodies of flesh, as Jack learns after his wife's death, and coming to understand the spectral in this story means accepting its materiality.

Since this conception of ghosts does not require that they be primarily understood through direct sensation, there is no authorial incentive to give concessions to such sensation via commentary upon the perceived superiority of oral narrative. Instead, the narrator's preface is concerned with questions of belief and testimony in the abstract, citing another individual who can 'speak to the truth of the least credible part' of the story and lamenting a modern climate of rationalism in which 'a "rational explanation" is required before belief is possible' (66). As with the criticism of written narrative in LeFanu's story, this apparent disavowal is implicitly a challenge to the reader, simultaneously allying them with the narrator and inciting them to exceed that narrator's expectations. If responding to a narrative with genuine fear (in the case of LeFanu's story) or belief (in Nesbit's) is presented as both desirable and difficult, readers are implicitly encouraged to attempt it: to go some way towards persuading themselves, rather than passively relying upon the narrator to persuade them. While the preface of 'An Account' is concerned with the narrative's past and present reception, that of 'Man-Size in Marble' focuses on the narrator's reflections upon his own experience, using the chronological placement of the preface after the events of the story to provide a contrast between present knowledge and past ignorance. By the time readers reach the narrative proper, then, they are already inclined to agree with the older Jack in seeing his scepticism of the supernatural as mistaken, and his worldview as incomplete.

As Jack combines disbelief in the marble ghosts with a fascination with the insubstantial, he unknowingly affirms the reality of the spectral. Consider, for example, his account of the landscape on All Saint's Eve as he finds himself walking towards the church where those knights lie:

> What a night it was! The jagged masses of heavy dark cloud were rolling at intervals from horizon to horizon, and thin white wreaths covered the stars […] When now and again [the moon's] light reached the woodlands they seemed to be slowly and noiselessly waving in time to the swing of the clouds above them. There was a strange grey light over all the earth; the fields had that shadowy bloom upon them which only comes from the marriage of dew and moonshine, or frost and starlight (73-4).

The emphasis on the insubstantial here, in the form of clouds, wind, and moonlight, seems to strengthen Jack's resolve to treat the legend of the knights as irrelevant. For the reader, however, reading this description with the accompanying knowledge of his likely future confrontation with ghosts whose most prominent feature is their physicality, it signifies his incomplete knowledge about his own circumstances. Just as Jack's happiness is only possible through a lack of knowledge, so is his scepticism only possible through a reduced, limited concept of the spectral.

While marble ghosts are relatively unusual, a focus upon the power and materiality of the spectral is also evident in stories with more conventional ghosts. In the same collection, Nesbit published 'The Ebony Frame', a story whose central ghostly figure takes on bodily form after the unnamed narrator finds her portrait.

As she explains, she was known to him in a previous life; they were lovers, until she was executed for witchcraft. Despite her innocence, she made a pact with the Devil on the night before her death in which she gave up her hope of heaven in return for the possibility of a reunion on earth. The narrator agrees to meet her again the next night when she will leave the portrait for good, but there is a fire in the house, and although he struggles through the flames to find her, both portrait and frame are destroyed. He ends the story married, 'stout, and dull, and prosperous,' but certain that 'it is all this that is the dream; my dear lady only is the reality' (35).

This ghost's power is most obviously connected to her physical presence in the story's premise itself: she literally steps out of the portrait to become a real, corporeal woman, and her ability to do so is presented unequivocally as a choice on her part, with no sense of any coercion or regret. That power seems to come at the cost of the narrator's own, as he becomes so fascinated with her that he no longer spares any thoughts or patience for anyone or anything else, his living fiancée included. Upon first viewing the mysterious woman's portrait, he is held still by the power of her gaze, which 'command[s], as might [that] of an empress', and finds it difficult to turn his eyes away; when he sees it for a second time, he is 'lying back in a pleasant langour' and held 'fixed as by strong magic' to her image (19).

As such, of course, this ghost follows in a tradition of seductive, demonic women, often associated with portraits; see, for example, the women in Vernon Lee's 'Amour Dure' (1887) and 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' (1896). The

significance of magic should not be seen as entirely separate from the spiritualist-influenced conception of the spectral, whose easily-crossed boundary between ghost and angel implied, for some, an equivalent connection between ghost and demon. This, in its turn, appears frequently in anti-spiritualist writing, resulting in some ghosts startlingly similar to the woman in 'The Ebony Frame'. A former spiritualist writing of his experiences in the American *Galaxy* magazine in 1867, for example, described his seduction and deception by a woman claiming to be his spirit soulmate; her assurances that 'it is no dream, it is real, more real than any earthly experience' (Frothingham 1867, 1001) mirror the ideas and even the language of 'The Ebony Frame', whose narrator tells himself that '[s]he was no ghost, she was a woman, the only woman in the world' and 'all other things in my life were a dream; this, its one splendid reality' (22, 23). The idea of this figure predates spiritualism as the demonic Rosario/Matilda in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* indicates; it seems that in this, at least, non-literary accounts were as much influenced by literary narratives as vice versa.

Whatever the spiritual status of the woman in Nesbit's story, she is indubitably a powerful figure. Her influence over the narrator extends even to his view of reality, shaping it to the point where the supernatural is not only accepted but preferred to the natural world around it. 'The world seemed to give a bewildering half-turn', he says; 'it seemed not awful, not even unusual, for portraits to become flesh – only most natural, most right, most unspeakably fortunate' (21). The absence of any concession to scepticism here, whether in a preface or within

the body of the narrative itself, underlines that total transformation of his worldview. As with 'Man-Size in Marble', the physicality of the ghost's body affirms the narrator's perspective, this time by making the extraordinary mundane through descriptions of its apparently human form. The use of the word 'flesh' itself shifts focus away from the transformation and towards the body of the ghost, described as entirely natural; the hand she places on his shoulder is 'soft, warm and human' and her interaction with the narrator is tender in its humanity as she touches his cheek and he rests his head on her shoulder (21). As her ability to assume a bodily form is symbolic of her physical power over the narrator, so is that transition's presentation as entirely human and natural symbolic of her ability to comprehensively affect his mind.

In both of these stories, the emphasis granted to the ghost's physicality underlines fundamental flaws in the narrator. Ignorance of the supernatural, and the particular form it takes, is symbolic of a greater disregard for the living. The narrator of 'The Ebony Frame' neglects the reality of his living fiancée for the promise of a ghost and a portrait, and reduces the importance of his present life to that of a dream. In 'Man-Size in Marble', Jack's fascination with the immaterial extends also to his wife, Laura; while he presents his marriage as idyllically happy, his view of her as an idealised image rather than a physical being is inescapable throughout his narrative. His most loving description of her comes when he views her through a window, sitting by the fire and unaware of his presence, and he

concedes that he paid little attention to the housekeeper's warnings because he was painting his wife's portrait and 'could not think of much else' (127).[103] Indeed, his apparent avoidance of real physical contact extends to an implicit culpability in Laura's fate: on the night of All Saint's Eve he leaves her alone, and the door unlatched, after she 'flung her arms around my neck, and held me as if she would never let me go again' (131). While conceptions of the spectral may be at issue, then, such conceptions influence far more than the narrator's understanding of the ghost itself.

Although all three of the stories so far discussed feature ghosts who are threatening if not directly destructive, ghost stories with more benevolent ghosts typically give an equally prominent role to the narrator's experience of the supernatural, and to how that is affected by the new conception of the spectral. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's 'Since I Died' (1873), for example, features a ghostly narrator speaking in the present tense and has little in the way of plot, focusing instead on the ghost's thoughts and reflections.[104] The ghost's power may not be a central feature of this narrative – she seems unable to make the living aware of her existence, let alone affect their behaviour in any sense – but by giving narrative

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103. In this, 'Man-Size in Marble' resembles James's 'Maud-Evelyn'. The imagery in Nesbit's story, however, suggests an active and demonic figure, with at least as much complicity as the narrator for his later state of mind. The flames the narrator falls into when reaching for her portrait are symbolic of the fires of hell, an image echoed in one deft touch by the narrator's living fiancée when she asks if the portrait is '[o]ne of your flames' (30). With this said, a reasonable case could be made for viewing her as a demonic rather than ghostly figure; with the possibilities brought about by the spiritualist conception of ghosts, however, the two need not be mutually exclusive terms.

104. For another example of a story narrated by a ghost, see Vincent O'Sullivan's 'When I Was Dead' (1896)

primacy to her emotional state, the narrative relies no less upon the spiritualist-influenced conception of the spectral. The reader's view is not of the ghost as other, but of the ghost as essentially human in its wishes and motivations. As with the transformation of the ghost in Nesbit's 'The Ebony Frame', it seems only natural here that the supernatural should become ordinary.

Although the first image of this story concerns a living woman, it is not life but death which seems stressed in her description. A focus on stillness leads the reader to the reasonable supposition that the subject is herself dead, and the subsequent suggestions of movement are indications of the supernatural at work:

> If the shadow of an eyelash stirred upon your cheek; if that gray line about your mouth should snap its tension at this quivering end; if the pallor of your profile warmed a little; if that tiny muscle on your forehead, just at the left eyebrow's curve, should start and twitch; if you would but grow a trifle restless, sitting there beneath my steady gaze […] – Ah, there! You sigh and stir, I think. You lift your head. The little muscle is a captive still; the line about your mouth is terse and hard; the deepening hollow in your cheek has no warmer tint, I see, than the great Doric column which the moonlight builds against the wall. (230).

It is, in fact, the speaker who is a ghost, and the subject a loved one who has survived her.[105] As the narrator's lament that she is not 'permitted […] [to] cross the current of your living breath' (231) makes this clear, the helplessness of the repeated

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[105]. The relationship between the two women is never directly defined, with the exception of brief mentions of a never-seen 'Mother' whose status is not qualified by pronouns. Jessica Salmonson argues that the clear erotic overtones throughout the story, as well as the existence of the later story 'The Presence' (1910) in which Phelps applies what is effectively the same idea to a heterosexual couple, suggest the two are most likely lovers; Carpenter and Kolmar, in their annotated bibliography of women's ghost stories, agree.

'if's is reframed in the reader's understanding, so that what was previously presented as a boundary between life and death becomes a more personal divide between the two women. Her use of terminology such as 'permitted' and 'willed' is likewise reinterpreted, as referring not to a divine prohibition but to the other's inability to notice her attempts to communicate. *'Death is dumb, for Life is deaf!'* she concludes, passing into the afterlife proper with none of her wishes resolved (235). What seems initially to be a meditation upon death in the abstract, then, is revealed as an intensely personal reflection upon the divide imposed between two individuals, and understanding the mechanics involved requires an acceptance of the emotional complexity which, in this conception of the spectral, remains after death.

Since the narrator quickly becomes aware that she is a ghost, the narrative is not centrally preoccupied with her attempts to understand the supernatural. Although the story does not lead up to a moment of revelation in this regard, however, the reader is still charged with the responsibility of making sense of the ghost's words and behaviour. On a fundamental level, of course, the narrative makes little sense to a hypothetical reader determined to apply pre-spiritualist models of the spectral: this ghost loses none of her self with her physical body, and remains among the living purely because of her love for the other woman. Indeed, it is this which serves as the only real revelation in the narrative, if we treat the Todorovian literalisation of her statement that 'Death is dumb, for Life is deaf' as

doing no more than illustrating what was established before. The curiosity is not that a ghost can think and feel, but that this particular ghost should appear in these particular circumstances, when remaining among the living seems to be unintentional if not directly outside her control. The answer lies in the longing conveyed by the lists of conditional clauses with which she describes her situation, as 'if' after 'if' testify to a strength of will which can cross the boundary between life and death. Her loved one's eyes, as she describes them, were '[s]tronger than death', and the last grasp of her hand '[m]ore cruel than the grave' (233); it is love which keeps her among the living, and which allows her to conflate symbolic and actual as her eternal life is compared to the other woman's death-like grief ('[t]o live, is dying; I will die. To die is life, and you shall live', she recalls the other saying in her last illness [231]).

The reader implied by the narrative is therefore one who reads with the spiritualist-influenced conception of ghosts in mind, and can therefore understand this ghost as an emotionally complex being rather than an object to be studied. Just as the appropriate means through which to understand the ghost in LeFanu's 'An Account' was emotional, as the ghost's ability to incite fear in the narrator was transferred to the reader, so must this ghost be understood primarily through the reader's capacity for empathy. Ghosts are no longer apparitions to be feared, but individuals to be empathised with, related to, and regarded as emotionally, if not physically, fully human in all relevant particulars. While the supernatural is not the

subject of empirical or pseudo-scientific analysis here, and the narrative seems far distanced from the veridical accounts submitted to the SPR, it is still fundamentally concerned with how the ghost should be understood.

An emphasis upon the ghost as an emotional being is not limited to stories with a narrative structure as unusual as that of 'Since I Died'. Margaret Oliphant's 'Earthbound', published in 1880, provides one example of a more conventionally structured narrative where the primary feature of the spiritualist-influenced ghost is its humanity. The story is told in the limited third person, with the protagonist, a young man visiting his former guardian's home for Christmas, struggling to make sense of a ghost of a woman who walks in the grounds and seems surprised that he can see and speak to her. While he remains puzzled by her enigmatic remarks and behaviour, the reader is guided from the beginning of the story to understand that she is a ghost: the story is subtitled 'A Story of the Seen and the Unseen',[106] the first description of the family home stresses a recent death (although not that of the young woman whose ghost the protagonist sees) and the family's grief, and the events take place at Christmas, when:

> The commonplace ghost-stories which are among the ordinary foolishness of Christmas did not suit with the more serious tone in which their thoughts flowed; but […] [t]hey talked about what is called spiritualism, and of many things, both in that fantastic faith and in the older ghostly traditions, which we are all half glad to think cannot be explained. (32-3)

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[106]. 'Earthbound' was in fact the first of Oliphant's stories to be classified thus.

Even the direct textual references that come later, such as the narrator being described as 'silent as a ghost' (50) testify to the story's supernatural content without directly pointing to the figure of the ghost itself.

The actual ghost of this story is far from silent, and that phrase seems in itself designed to stress her distance from the pre-spiritualist conception of the spectral as limited in word and deed alike. Her conversations with the protagonist, although they confirm her ghostly status beyond all reasonable doubt to the reader, are not concerned in themselves with supernatural matters; instead, she describes her happiness at being able to speak to him, and her love for the house and the gardens in which she walks. It is this latter point, we eventually learn, that explains her continued existence in ghostly form. Although the story's title and the ghost's references to her 'punishment' (47) and her being 'not permitted to answer questions' (53) suggest her continued ghostly existence as some sort of divine punishment, her eventual explanation suggests at least a partial choice on her part. 'I had loved the earth and all that was on it', she explains; 'I could not go if I would, and I would not if I could' (61).

The story is a curious one, with the moralistic tone never really resolving itself into a definitive lesson directed at protagonist or reader. The protagonist, Edmund, falls in love with a ghost and ends up marrying a living woman who shares her name, but there is no sense that his marriage to the living Maud

represents a choice of life over death, or of real over ethereal; in fact, the eventual marriage is mentioned only briefly, and serves as no real conclusion to the supernatural events the story describes. The revelation that the first Maud is a ghost certainly shocks Edmund, who falls into unconsciousness and refuses to return to the house upon his recovery, but we learn nothing about any fundamental changes to his life or his philosophy except for a claim that '[v]arious changes were perceptible […] in his life; but other people were unconscious of them' (62). As for the ghost, who ascends to the afterlife proper at the story's end, and whose own narrative would seem thus concluded, the narrator provides only a suggestion: 'Perhaps her time of willing punishment is over, and she is earthbound no more' (62).

What presents itself as conclusion, then, is revealed as something far less substantial. The ghost's eventual departure is accompanied by 'a roaring of echoes, a clanging of noises, a blast as of great trumpets and music' (61), but no real decision or revelation on her part, and the passage from Dante's *Purgatorio* which Oliphant adds as a footnote provides little in the way of explanation:

> Prima vuol ben; ma non lascia il talento,
> Che divinia giustizia contra voglia,
> Come fù al peccar, pone al tormento. (103)

Vineta and Robert Colby give Binyon's translation to this:

> It wills indeed before, but is not free
> From that desire, God's justice against will
> Sets, as toward sin once, now to its penalty… (102)

and suggest that the context of the original verses, in which the poet Statius describes the mindset of the souls in Purgatory, explains the ghostly Maud's continued existence in a kind of secular Purgatory among the living. Maud's apparent sin, however, is presumably the love of the material world that she describes, and there is little suggestion that this extended to the kind of iniquitous materialism of the inhabitants of Semur in *A Beleagured City* (published, incidentally, in the same year as 'Earthbound'), which would warrant such an epic punishment. Esther H. Schor suggests a reference to the embrace between Virgil and Statius in the same canto, through which Edmund's apparent susceptibility for 'treating the shades as one treats solid things' can be read as a possessive gesture revealing 'his own tenuous linkage to the social order' (377), but such a reading seems rather to neglect the relevance of Dante's lines to the ghost herself. The idea of the 'willing punishment' which the narrator ascribes to her, it seems, summarises all the uncertainty and contradiction of her story.

It is perhaps, then, Edmund's own lack of understanding which lies at the heart of the narrative. His determined quest to identify the ghost after first seeing her fails on multiple counts, as she not only lacks a home and family but provides little in the way of social signifiers through her appearance; as the living Maud tells him, a dressmaker's girl could 'walk like a lady and dress like a lady', leaving his attempts to deduce her origins from her appearance flawed from their start (40). Her words likewise confuse him, as he tries to make sense out of her declarations

that she 'never was any more than nineteen', or that 'they all come and go, but they do not see me' (46, 47). He assumes mental instability, and imagines himself in the comfortable role of 'her tender protector, her keeper to preserve her from anything that could hurt her innocence' (49), but this is challenged once again when Edmund's former guardian reveals a portrait of her in eighteenth-century dress. In a last attempt to place her within a structure he can interpret, he misreads the date on the portrait: "Seven, seven, seven,' he said to himself; seven is one of the numbers of perfection. It must be that the painter had meant' (57). Once this, too, is revealed as incorrect, he finally abandons his efforts to decipher what he sees, and his broken speech mirrors his capitulation. 'There are many things I don't understand – but I am willing to accept – anything, Sir, Robert –', he says, as '[c]onfusion seemed to envelop everything around him' (57, 58). In his final encounter with the ghost, it is his lack of true comprehension which connects the two individual: he finishes a letter describing the account with the affirmation that 'I know there are things which I can't understand,' and goes to stand before the portrait, before which the ghost appears to tell him that she 'did wrong to speak to you […] you do not understand' (59, 60).

What is it, then, that Edmund fails to understand? The reader is placed in the privileged position of realising that the woman Edmund sees is a ghost from her first appearance, with 'movements […] so gentle and light that Edmund felt himself noisy, stumbling, awkward in every step he took' (47). Even in this,

however, something seems to escape us. With its suggestions of a more profound focus in the juxtaposition of a family mourning the death of a child with the appearance of a ghostly young woman who loved the world too much to truly leave it, the narrative seems to be reaching for something beyond a protracted wait for Edmund himself to realise the same. The ghost does not, after all, hide anything from Edmund; with the appropriate framework in place to signify that this is a ghost narrative, the reader can make sense of all of her statements. All that Edmund must do to understand her is view her as the centre of her own narrative, rather than peripheral in his, trusting that the enigmatic statements she gives him are fragments of a broader story rather than direct messages to him which contain a whole meaning in themselves. His eventual realisation is perhaps not of her ghostliness, then, but of his own irrelevance; she appears not because she is a broken individual needing his assistance, or because some divine force has ordained that they meet, but because her love for the world around her was strong enough after her death.

Just as Edmund must accept the ghost for what she is, then, rather than attempting to understand her in such a way that makes him essential to her existence, so must the grieving Lady Beresford, who waits until her family and guests are out of the house before weeping 'all the tears that had been gathering and gathering' in the privacy of her own room (41), allow her own grief to pass. While there is no indication of the mother's grief somehow compelling the dead child to

remain among the living, 'Earthbound' suggests that the boundary between life and death is, to some degree, one that is constructed and maintained by force of will. The ghostly Maud is kept in the world she loved because she refused to accept the finality of that boundary, and 'thought that there was nothing better, nothing so good' (48) as the house and gardens she knew. Lady Beresford, however, is not judged or condemned on the same measures; instead, the message of the story is one of reassurance. What separates her from her dead son is not the destruction of his soul, nor the loss of any part of his individual self bar his physical body, but only the temporary distance she must allow death to place between them. The two strands of the narrative are thus unified in an understanding of the dead, whether here or in the afterlife proper, as purified but essentially unchanged versions of their mortal selves.

M. R. James and the post-Victorian ghost story

As the spiritualist-influenced conception of the spectral transformed in the twentieth century into the more classically macabre ghosts of writers such as Algernon Blackwood and M. R. James, Edmund's failure to understand the ghost became a more typical feature of the ghost narrative as a whole. In this, however, 'Earthbound' should not be considered an exception to the Victorian trend, nor as having more in common with these later stories than with its immediate predecessors. Instead, stories such as James's represent a return to the aesthetic of

the early-period stories, and a corresponding reframing of the importance of understanding on both the protagonist's and reader's part. Just as LeFanu's 'An Account' presents understanding as something which requires some sense of visceral experience, some emotional response to the ghost described, so do many of these later stories tend towards horrific ghosts which must be feared rather than empathised with.

I do not intend to minimise the variety among late-period stories, a corpus of works including the human-like ghosts of Richard Middleton, Ellen Glasgow and Olivia Howard Dunbar as well as the inhuman apparitions of James, Blackwood and May Sinclair. Even the importance of understanding hardly assumes a uniform role in this period; it is notable that the psychic detective, a figure perhaps best associated with LeFanu's Dr. Hesselius in the 1870s collection *In a Glass Darkly*, returns to prominence in the early 1900s with the work of E. and H. Heron's Flaxman Low and William Hope Hodgson's Carnacki. Inasmuch as a trend can be determined in a period where the presentation of the supernatural experienced such an expansion of variety, however, it is worth singling out an individual author to trace the progress of the sceptical, materialistic first-person narrator who seeks to understand the supernatural: M. R. James, who began writing ghost stories in the late 1890s and achieved his reputation of the creator of the definitive post-1900 English ghost story with subsequent collections published in the 1910s and 1920s.

Typically, James's protagonists are sceptics of the supernatural but aficionados of the past. Collectors, archaeologists, and historians, they have little individual identify of their own, existing rather as catalysts for the supernatural event itself. The ghosts they encounter are likewise iterations of a single type rather than entities in their own right, epitomising the macabre horror of the animated dead. Appearing usually because of some unresolved circumstance of the past, they exude malevolence even when given no opportunity to be immediately threatening: the 'skelington, or whatever it is' of 'The Mezzotint' steals an infant, the 'horrible hopping creature in white' (239) of 'Casting The Runes' terrifies an audience of children, the apparition of 'The Uncommon Prayer-Book', with spiders in its eye-sockets and discoloured flesh, attacks a man 'like a ferret going for a rabbit' (511), and a long-dead man returns to a living companion in 'A School Story', the two bodies later found intertwined at the foot of a well.

While the protagonists of James's stories are concerned with making sense of the supernatural, such efforts are ultimately condemned to failure. James's narratives are strung together with enigmatic inscriptions, textual fragments and epitaphs which seem to contain some meaning forever tantalisingly hidden from protagonist and reader both; while the titular inscription of 'O Whistle, And I'll Come To You, My Lad' does indeed summon a ghost, for example, neither ghost nor whistle are placed within a wider explanatory framework. A carving above the hoarded gold of 'The Treasure of Abbot Thomas' reads 'Depositum custodi' –

'keep that which is committed to thee' – but there is no explanation given for why that treasure should be guarded by a corpse, although a seemingly nonsensical cryptogram was deciphered earlier in the same story to give the treasure's location (179). 'Ibi cubavit lamia', the inscription over the tomb in 'An Episode of Cathedral History', gives the location of the 'monster's lair', but goes no way to explaining the origin or explanation of the 'thing like a man, all over hair, and two great eyes to it' which emerges (437, 438).

Further, James's stories directly address the fragmentation of meaning in the narrative form itself. The ghostly events of 'A School Story', for example, are framed with a discussion between the narrator and a friend about enigmatic ghost stories told at private schools, none of which 'had any explanation or sequel'; the main narrative itself, although narrated by one of the individuals directly involved, is little different in this regard, and the narrator concedes in his introduction that 'I haven't any explanation of it' (181). While the suggestion of meaning is not entirely absent from James's work – the inclusion of indecipherable inscriptions and pieces of narrative given without explanatory framing context suggest that the supernatural can be explained, after all – the overwhelming message of James's stories is that neither narrator or reader can access such a meaning themselves. Resolution rarely follows the supernatural events, and although the narrator has presumably changed as a result of his experiences, a more complete framework of the supernatural is not

included in that transformation. As the narrator of 'The Rose Garden' concludes, 'I suppose – well, it is rather hard to say exactly what I do suppose' (208).

In a sense, James's work places rather more emphasis on the importance of explanation than do stories such as LeFanu's 'An Account'. While efforts to decipher and understand the supernatural in these later stories are ultimately futile, the immediacy of an emotional reaction does not serve in their stead; rather, the sudden, horrific experience of the ghost itself frequently comes as a counterpoint to the narrator's continued efforts to understand, and the tantalising fragments of possible meaning are left abandoned by a protagonist who no longer wishes anything to do with the supernatural. Where they differ from mid- and late-period stories, then, it is only through playing on the reader's expectations of the conventions of their predecessors. Readers accustomed to understanding the ghost, whether through the analytic model of psychical research or the more empathetic ideals of the sentimental ghost story, will share in the abrupt clash of expectations when James's narrators find their own efforts to do so defeated. Indeed, the criticisms of James's stories as repetitive and formulaic relies upon this narrative model established much earlier, in which the reader shares with the narrator an encounter with the supernatural framed by an attempt to understand it. The characteristic narrative structures of the Victorian ghost story, then, are not abandoned by the early decades of the twentieth century; instead, they have become

the norm, a set of conventions from which future stories could create their own variations.

Chapter Five. Textual mediumship in the narratives of Borley Rectory.

> All I entreat, meanwhile, is that you will abstain from forcing your own conclusions upon me. I want nothing explained away. I desire no arguments. My mind on this subject is quite made up, and, having the testimony of my own senses to rely upon, I prefer to abide by it.
>
> (Amelia B. Edwards, 'The Phantom Coach', 122)

> One of the thoughts that, as I don't in the least shrink now from noting, used to be with me in these wanderings was that it would be charming as a charming story suddenly to meet some one. […] What arrested me on the spot – and with a shock much greater than any vision had allowed for – was the sense that my imagination had, in a flash, turned real. (*The Turn of the Screw*, 15.)

Had the protagonist of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* been less inclined to view her life as a story constantly in the process of being written, it seems doubtful that the ghosts of Bly would have had the impact they did. Where the previous chapter discussed the form the ghost story took under the influence of the new conception of the spectral, then, this chapter will discuss the decision by individuals such as the governess to present their story *as* a ghost story. The governess's experiences, assuming she is truthful about what she sees, constitute some form of ghost narrative in that she experiences the supernatural in the form of apparitions of the dead, but it is a wilful (if perhaps not conscious) decision on

her part to portray the ghosts in a particular light which turns this narrative into a ghost story of the kind developed and popularised in the nineteenth century. For her, and for other narrators who choose to interpret or present their own narratives as ghost stories, the form represents a stage on which existing situations can be reinterpreted and reframed to place the narrator in a more sympathetic, more liberated, more central or more influential role.

Since there is no singular position occupied by narrators or protagonists of ghost stories, there is no singular advantage to portraying one's self as occupying such a role, and simplistic explanations of any individual's motives for so doing must by necessity be avoided. Instead, I wish to argue for a more comprehensive view of the interaction between the protagonist as a character and the ghost story as a form, as presented in narratives where the protagonist either explicitly or implicitly tries to frame their experiences within the structure and conventions of the ghost story. There are, of course, numerous examples of narratives in which the protagonist gains some advantage from the appearance of the supernatural, and the high preponderance of first-person narrators in ghost narratives suggests that any line between protagonists who actively intervene to present their narratives in such a way and protagonists who accurately represent situations beyond their control should be drawn with caution. With this in mind, then, I shall discuss several literary and non-literary narratives as clear examples of the former, arguing that their narrator's decisions to present them as such are intrinsic parts of the narrative.

Ranging from literary ghost stories of the late nineteenth century to sensationalistic pseudo-journalism of the mid-twentieth, these narratives present a spectrum of uses to which the ghost story as a form can be put.

'It is all obscure and imperfect': Henry James and *The Turn of the Screw*

In an 1898 letter to A. C. Benson, Henry James gave his most substantial account of a veridical source for *The Turn of the Screw*. Speaking of a story Benson's father once told him, James's description remains frustratingly vague, but he affirms that this absence of detail represents the story as he received it:

> On one of those two memorable – never to be obliterated – winter nights that I spent at the sweet Addington, your father, in the drawing-room by the fire, where we were talking a little, in the spirit of recreation, of such things, repeated to me the few meagre elements of a small and gruesome story that had been told *him* years before and that he could only give the dimmest account of – partly because he had forgotten details and partly – and much more – because there had *been* no details and no coherency in the tale as he received it, from a person who also but half knew it. The vaguest essence only was there – some dead servants and some children. (Quoted in James 1999, 113-4)

James's notebook echoed the same sentiment in his first plans for *The Turn of the Screw* itself, noting of the source that '[i]t is all obscure and imperfect, the picture, the story, but there is a suggestion of strangely gruesome effect in it' (ibid., 112).[107] Certainly, then, most of the detail and structured narrative the story ever had was

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107. See also James's preface to the 1908 New York edition, in which he describes Benson's story as 'but [the] shadow of a shadow – my own appreciation of which, I need scarcely say, was exactly wrapped up in that thinness' (quoted in James 1999, 124).

lost long before James heard it; a few fragments of character and setting, and a 'strangely gruesome' atmosphere, alone remained. It would, however, be a mistake to view James's own narrative as somehow a correction to this. While the governess herself goes to great efforts to impose coherence upon what she may or may not see, readers are left with little in the way of a progressing linear narrative or conclusive explanations of the ghosts themselves. What James's story provides is what was already included in the narrative he received from Benson: some dead servants, and some children.

Although James himself cited it as his sole inspiration, critical debate over sources for *The Turn of the Screw* does not end with Benson's narrative.[108] Dorothy Scarborough briefly, followed by Francis X. Roellinger Jr. more substantially, posits a source in the veridical narratives collected by the SPR. While Roellinger concludes that Scarborough is likely mistaken in her suggestion of a *direct* inspiration in these reports (and certainly, none has since come to light), he makes a compelling argument that James was likely inspired in a more general way by such narratives. James, as I have previously discussed in Chapter 4, explicitly rejected the ghosts of the SPR as material for his own fiction, even stating that he 'had to decide in fine

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108. My focus on veridical narratives here does not, of course, exclude consideration of other arguments beyond the scope of this thesis. Robert Lee Wolff suggests that James was subconsciously inspired by an illustration in *Black and White* magazine, picturing two terrified children staring across a lake to a house with a tower, which was printed in the same number as James's story 'Sir Edmund Orme' (1891); Oscar Cargill posits an explanation for the governess, and one which 'supplies more important elements than Archbishop Benson's narrative' (quoted in James 1999, 140), in Freud's case histories; and T. J. Lustig connects Peter Quint to a character in James's earlier story 'Gabrielle de Bergerac' (1869) (ibid.)

between having my apparitions correct and having my story "good" – that is producing my impression of the dreadful, my designed horror' (James 1999, 127).[109] As Roellinger points out, however, the apparitions of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel resemble the very ghosts James claimed to reject.

Although I would disagree with the specifics of Roellinger's argument, which largely rests on the assumption that James's ghosts, being unlike the shrouded revenants of pre-spiritualist literature, must therefore be inspired by veridical rather than fictional narratives, his more general point warrants consideration. James dismissed veridical ghosts as largely useless for fictional purposes due to their being 'as little expressive, as little dramatic, as little continuous and conscious and responsive, as is consistent with their taking the trouble […] to appear at all' (ibid., 127), but the ghosts of *The Turn of the Screw* hardly exemplify the contrary. They do not speak, are never seen to directly interact with the governess, the children, or any other character, and have no clear motivations. Indeed, as Roellinger states, 'his phantoms are a baffling mystery until the governess begins to develop her theory that they have come "to get hold" of the children', and even then the governess's theory is never confirmed (although

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109. James' opinion of the SPR as an organisation, however, was less condemnatory. While he was never a member himself, he counted F. W. H. Myers and Edmund Gurney among his friends, and did attend a number of SPR meetings. Roellinger notes one such meeting at which James read a paper on trance phenomena on behalf of his brother William, who was an active member of the society (Roellinger 1948, 403). For more on James's relationship to the SPR and to the psychical research movement in a broader sense, see Martha Banta's *Henry James and the Occult* (1972).

Roellinger believes, along with the majority of earlier critics, that 'the reader is hard pressed for a better one' [406]).[110]

The governess's task, then, is not merely to serve as an interpreter of the supernatural. Although neither of the ghosts in *The Turn of the Screw* contradicts her explanation of their motives and actions, they give little in the way of verification, and she provides ample suggestion throughout her narrative that much of their story originates with her. We know that she lies on at least one occasion, telling Mrs Grose that Miss Jessel spoke to her after describing their encounter as a silent one, and even one in which Miss Jessel seemed unaware of her presence;[111] we know that she relies heavily on Mrs Grose's recollections of the living Quint and Jessel to shape her own interpretations, as demonstrated by the myriad of conversations between the two in which one's broken sentence is completed with the other's words; and we know that her descriptions of the ghosts frequently include a level of psychological detail far from evident to the reader, although that reader sees them through her eyes. How, for example, are we to make sense of her assertions that

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110. Martha Banta suggests that James's previous supernatural fiction, the majority of which contains objectively real ghosts, suggests that those in The Turn of the Screw are unlikely to be different: 'There is no reason to believe he suddenly turned fastidious in 1898, not with 'The Jolly Corner' and The Sense of the Past still to come' (117). I would add the caveat that The Turn of the Screw was immediately followed by 'Maud-Evelyn' in 1899, James's fictional attack on spiritualism through the story of a young man who enters into a 'spirit-marriage' with a ghost whose existence is in doubt (see Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion of this story). 'Maud-Evelyn', however, neither achieves nor attempts to achieve the kind of ambiguity evident in The Turn of the Screw; while not all of James's ghosts are indubitably real, The Turn of the Screw would still be unusual among the more psychological stories in actually describing the ghosts' physical appearance directly to the reader.

[111] It is perhaps significant that when The Turn of the Screw was initially published in serial form, the period between the governess seeing Miss Jessel and describing the experience to Mrs Grose marked an interval between weekly instalments.

Peter Quint is 'never – no, never! – a gentleman' (23), or that Miss Jessel is 'infamous' (31), after only brief visions of both? In order to believe she is reliable to any degree, the reader must grant her the privileged position she claims for herself in regards to the ghosts. Readers, then, who approach the story with their own pre-existing concepts of ghosts as powerful and psychologically complex, are placed in the position of Miss Jessel: ostensibly passive receivers of the story, 'receptacle[s] of lurid things', whose understanding nevertheless contributes towards its own plausibility in their eyes (44).

The importance of such a position is established from the beginning of the novella. Even in the framing narrative, in which the governess's story is presented as a written document related by an acquaintance, the listeners' role in creating a story according to their own expectations is brought to the fore. Consider, for example, the original narrator's appeal to one such listener concerning the governess's motive:

> "She had never told anyone […] You'll easily judge why when you hear."
> "Because the thing had been such a scare?"
> He continued to fix me. "You'll easily judge," he repeated: "*you* will."
> I fixed him too. "I see. She was in love." (2)

Although initially explicit, the vocal appeal rapidly becomes replaced with hints and silences, confirming that listener's essential role:

> Douglas completed my thought. "She did wish to learn, and she did learn. You shall hear tomorrow what she learnt. […]" And Douglas, with this, made a pause that, for the benefit of the company, moved me to throw in –

> "The moral of which was of course the seduction exercised by the splendid young man. She succumbed to it."
>   He got up and, as he had done the night before, went to the fire, gave a stir to the log with his foot, then stood a moment with his back to us.
>   "She saw him only twice."
>   "Yes, but that's just the beauty of her passion.
>   A little to my surprise, on this, Douglas turned round to me. "It *was* the beauty of it." (6)

Like the governess, this listener is not necessarily *in*correct in his conclusions. Neither is guilty of so coarse a move as misrepresenting an existing narrative; rather, they impose a story upon an existing scaffolding, adding nuance, texture and substance to narrative blank spaces. While this interpreter is working within a more detailed framework, however, and one in which the governess's motives are already evident, the governess herself imposes motive and meaning upon apparitions who demonstrate neither.

Throughout the narrative, James provides indications of her tendency to dramatise events through imposing a story upon them, even when the ghosts are not present; as she dines with Miles, her comparison of the two of them to 'some young couple who, on their wedding-journey, at the inn, feel shy in the presence of the waiter' slips from simile to reality as the maid of the breakfast-room becomes the waiter of the inn in a seemingly non-metaphorical description (78). She does not seem to view her stories as concealing reality but rather enhancing it, replacing the mundane with the dramatic and adjusting her role accordingly. By presenting the ghosts as she does, then, she superimposes a story over them in the same manner. Peter Quint and Miss Jessel do not merely become more threatening as she retells

her experiences, but more threatening in a particular way: she grants them intention and agency where their actions imply neither, and assumes that their motives must be consonant with those held in life.

It is through re-presenting her own role that the governess gains the most significant benefits of the ghost story as a form. By presenting herself as a conduit for the ghosts, both the only adult who can see them and the only person who can protect the children from their apparent malice, she rewrites their narrative, turning it from a veridical report into a literary story. Without her commentary, the ghosts' appearances and actions, such that they are, would be meaningless; under her guidance, the reader gives them histories, personalities, motivations and desires, and grants the governess herself new relevance accordingly. For her own part, the governess is evidently aware of her role as guardian and protagonist:

> I scarce know how to put my story into words that shall be a credible picture of my state of mind; but I was in those days literally able to find a joy in the extraordinary flight of heroism the occasion demanded of me. I now saw that I had been asked for a service admirable and difficult; and there would be a greatness in letting it be seen – oh in the right quarter! – that I could succeed where many another girl might have failed. It was an immense help to me – I confess I rather applaud myself as I look back! – that I saw my response so strongly and so simply. I was there to protect and defend the little creatures in the world, the most bereaved and the most loveable, the appeal of whose helplessness had suddenly become only too explicit, a constant ache of one's own engaged affection. We were cut off, really, together – we were united in our danger. They had nothing but me, and I – well, I had *them*. It was in short a magnificent chance […] I was a screen – I was to stand before them. (27)

Her claim that she can barely 'put [her] story into words' summarises what she has achieved in doing so: the 'words' in which she frames and phrases her situation are those of the ghost story, and through that form she can present the children as innocents, the ghosts as actively and wilfully malicious, the house and its inhabitants as overwhelmed by a history of disobedient servants to which she can provide a shining counterexample, and herself as their saviour. Far from being an incidental outsider, she is central to the narrative she creates.

As the governess weaves a tapestry out of the threads of the ghost story, it is her presence which connects the disparate images of the story together into a coherent and unified whole. Through her deductions, Bly's history is given direct relevance in the everyday life of the house and its occupants; the behaviour of the children comes to depend upon the activities of the ghosts; and even her minimal relationship with the children's guardian, the source of clear dissatisfaction on her part, is reconstituted in terms of her heroism as she refuses Mrs Grose's pleas to summon him: 'She didn't know – no one knew – how proud I had been to serve him and to stick to our terms' (48). Since those pleas arise from a situation, or at least an understanding of that situation, which the governess has herself engineered, her position at the story's heart is once again reinforced. Compare this to the powerless position she would otherwise have been placed in, where the features of her story which carry such narrative weight when connected to the ghosts – Felix's expulsion, the house's history, its owner's prohibition against contact – would serve

only to underline her own social and geographical isolation, and the benefits of the ghost story as a form are made clear. Although the story's conclusion provides little in the way of concrete resolution, it is difficult to imagine another frame in which the death of a child at his governess's hands could have been presented as in any sense morally ambiguous.

Given the degree of importance it places on the ghost story form itself, the curious contradiction of *The Turn of the Screw* is that the objective existence of its ghosts is a largely irrelevant matter. Whether or not any supernatural activity is taking place at Bly, the governess's determination to believe in it stands, and with that the central importance of the narrative form. With this said, it seems reasonable to suggest that the governess's belief is sincere, whether or not it is misplaced, and that a psychological explanation for her conclusions does not exclude the possibility that the ghosts themselves existed independently of her observations. Indeed, her need to so drastically reinterpret the behaviour of the ghosts implies a textual suggestion that they do exist outside of her imagination; if they were merely the psychological projections of an unstable mind, it seems unlikely that they should need such reinterpretation to begin with.

While *The Turn of the Screw* may be a ghost story in essence as well as in presentation, however, the focus it draws to the narrator's decision to present her story as such is by no means restricted to narratives with arguably objective

apparitions. Other stories in which the supernatural is much less evident, or even absent entirely, may still exhibit such a feature. Rather than a minor, self-referential sub-genre of the ghost story, such narratives represent a transition of the ghost story form itself: once established to the point where conventions have become clichés, the genre is no longer a container by which stories are prescriptively or descriptively grouped together, but a tool to be incorporated into a much broader range of literary and non-literary narratives.

'I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before': Creating stories from paper in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'.

Ironically, and unfortunately, the ghost story form had become so well established by the end of the nineteenth century that references to its conventions in other narratives became subtle enough for later critics to disregard. It is thus that E. Suzanne Owens makes a convincing case for Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892) to be considered a ghost story, pointing to its almost unanimous early reception as such and arguing that '[r]eaders familiar with ghostly conventions' would have noted gestures to the ghost story throughout the narrative: the attempts to rationalise away a strange feeling of the supernatural, the association of supernatural events with darkness and night, the strange odour of the haunted room, the sceptic's defeat in the face of the unexplainable (Owens 1991, 75). While none of this is evidence for a wholly – or even partially – supernatural

explanation of the narrator's madness, the cumulative effect suggests that the ghost story as a form plays a more significant role than the narrator's short-lived excitement over reaching 'the height of romantic felicity' in a haunted mansion would imply ('The Yellow Wallpaper', 433).[112]

The issues of power and repression implicit in James's narrative are explicit in Gilman's, to the point where a truly supernatural explanation would do the story a disservice by failing to connect the narrator's fate to the nature of the 'rest cure' treatment she undergoes. The ghost story form, however, is no less important for this, contributing narrative conventions to the story rather than elements of the supernatural. Just as James's governess frames her story in terms of a pre-existing narrative which grants her credibility and importance with greater authority, so does the narrator of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' use the ghost story form to exert some control over a situation in which she is effectively powerless. References to the supernatural thus serve to reinforce rather than nullify the psychological elements of the narrative; infantilised and frustrated in her own life, the narrator can achieve some semblance of freedom of thought and action both as the central character of a ghost story.

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112. Other critics have connected the story to a broader Gothic tradition reaching back to the eighteenth century; see, for example, Beverly A. Hume's 'Gilman's 'Interminable Grotesque': The Narrator of 'The Yellow Wallpaper'' on the narrator's apparent rejection of 'gothic conventions' (479), or, conversely, Margaret Carol Davison's 'Haunted House/Haunted Heroine: Female Gothic Closets in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'' on the story's position as the 'daughter-text' of Ann Radcliffe's 1794 novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (56). I would suggest, however, that the drastic transformation of the figure of the ghost in the century preceding Gilman's story renders such comparisons substantially less useful than those between 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and its late Victorian contemporaries.

Owens's supposition that a reading of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' sensitive to the conventions of the nineteenth-century ghost story would classify it amongst them seems a reasonable one. The idea of the long-uninhabited house being let for a suspiciously low amount is, as the narrator points out, a reliable indicator that there is 'something queer about it' (433); as a convention of ghost narratives, this trope can be traced through the earlier nineteenth century and beyond, to the story related by Pliny the Younger in the second century.[113] Further, for a Victorian readership attuned to the convention's adaptations in the nineteenth century, even the narrator's dismissal of her 'ghostliness' through the house's seemingly mundane circumstances – 'some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and coheirs' - would seem unconvincing (434). Owens draws some intriguing parallels to *Jane Eyre*, but I would further suggest connections with Charlotte Riddell's fiction, much of which features protracted legal struggles over property alongside appearances of the supernatural. *Fairy Water*, for example, contains both in the story of a young, isolated widow, kept a virtual prisoner on a seemingly idyllic country

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113. See footnote 5 of Chapter One for Pliny's story. Its echoes, certainly, were still prominent by the later nineteenth century; Catherine Crowe describes a house in Lille, 'long uninhabited, on account of the *revenant* that walks about it', which is temporarily occupied by a family who encounter not only the ghost but 'an old rusty chain with a collar fixed to the end of it' in an empty room (Crowe 232, 233). Its representations in nineteenth-century supernatural fiction are numerous, although the more active figure of the ghost created under the influence of spiritualism led to the loss of chained and restricted figures. See, for example, the 'palace at the cost of a hovel' in Rhoda Broughton's The Truth, The Whole Truth, and Nothing But The Truth' (341), the 'absurdly cheap' house in B. M. Croker's 'To Let' (350), or the building in Charlotte Riddell's *The Uninhabited House* (1875) from which 'not a shilling of profit has accrued' to the law firm responsible for letting it. Narrated by a clerk in that law firm, this story provides an interesting and unusual approach to the convention; 'If ever a residence [...] haunted a lawyer's offices', he begins, 'the "Uninhabited House", about which I have a story to tell, haunted those of Messrs. Craven and Son, No. 200, Buckingham Street, Strand' (1).

estate (just such a one of those 'English places that you read about' (434) suggested by Gilman's narrator) by the will of a patriarchal husband who treated her like a child in life.

From the start, then, the narrator's descriptions of her new home suggest an undercurrent of supernatural activity, and one intrinsically bound up with the weighted sexual politics at the story's heart. John, who 'scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures' (433), is placed in opposition to both the narrator's imagination and the supernatural itself, linked by the narrator's undermined authority to name and classify her own narrative. The writing which John forbids her from indulging in, and which she continues without his knowledge, takes on added significance in this light: her ability to construct her own narratives is fundamental to her own autonomy, as she herself seems gradually to recognise.

> I don't know why I should write this.
> I don't want to.
> I don't feel able.
> And I know John would think it absurd. But I must say what I feel and think in some way – it is such a relief! (438)

As she is restricted from doing so by a husband content to read to her, although determined not to let her produce any writing herself, the weakness she describes becomes self-exacerbating. In being unable to write her own narrative, she becomes unable to exercise any control over it, or even over herself as an individual; 'John

says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition' (434), she says when introducing the narrative in which she attempts to do exactly that.

The ability to write and to read, and the corresponding possibilities of being written and being read, are not, however, presented as unambiguously beneficial. Where the narrator's diary is 'dead paper and a great relief to my mind' (433), the wallpaper is clearly its living equivalent; enigmatic and malevolent, its pattern seems to shift and change as she tries to follow it. Her discovery of a woman's figure moving behind the pattern's bars marks a turning point in the story, as she moves from attempting to *write* her own narrative to attempting, with questionable success, to *read* it. As Barbara Hochman suggests, the narrator's 'critical and somewhat detached' fascination with the wallpaper, along with her ruminations on its aesthetic quality, 'reflects a growing disposition to read the pattern like a plot – a sequence of events – structured around human agents', complete with lolling eyes, broken necks, and figures that waddle, run and crawl (Hochman 2002, 95).[114] In being presented in a situation already coloured by implicit and explicit references to the ghost story, the horrors of this 'text' take on elements of the supernatural, and the fragmented images achieve cohesion: the woman behind the paper was the narrator's predecessor in the room, who took her own life. Death brings the possibility of liberation for her, as she pulls down the bars with the narrator's help; but for the narrator herself, who still cannot acknowledge that she herself is trapped

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114. See also Davison, who links the use of the word 'arabesque' in the narrator's descriptions of the wallpaper to Poe's mid-career tales of terror.

in just such a way, liberation means a merging of her own self with the newly-freed ghost.

Reading, here, means something more than the act of receiving an existing narrative. Although she arguably becomes the ghost-woman at the story's conclusion, the narrator spends the majority of that story trying to decipher and understand the 'strange, provoking, formless' figure she sees (437). Her resolution that she '*will* follow the pointless pattern to some sort of conclusion' stresses her determination to impose a model of order on the fragmented existences of the women on both sides of the wallpaper, and while her imagination proves no counter to John's opinion as a 'physician of high standing' in her own circumstances, it gives her fertile ground for reading the text in which the other woman is trapped (437, 433). She is primarily narrator rather than narrated, then, and as with the governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, there is a power in being the individual around whom the story is structured, as well as the only one who sees and interacts with the ghost. She becomes secretive in her quest to 'read' the wallpaper, at first hiding her efforts from John and Jennie as she tells the reader of her diary 'privately' that she has seen the woman get out in the daytime, and then isolating herself entirely: 'I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much' (442). The satisfaction she gains from the wallpaper, although it is mixed with repulsion at 'the vicious thing' (443), comes from the position of privilege she is placed in simply by virtue of being the

only one who sees anything there to read. By engaging in the seemingly passive act of reading, she becomes an active, powerful figure.

In this, at least, she is far from alone. The medium's role has always embodied such a seemingly contradictory relationship between passivity and power, a quality which lies at the heart of spiritualism's interactions with movements of activism and social change. Alex Owen suggests that the appeal of spiritualism arose from the possibilities thus granted to the medium, who could advocate socially radical positions in a context which framed their action as passivity. Mediums rarely presented direct and overt challeges to Victorian concepts of femininity; rather, as Owen argues,

> [spiritualists'] conception of women as uniquely spiritually gifted was intrinsically bound up with a theory of gender-specific attributes which afforded women scope and status as mediums, but also defined them in terms of contemporary codes and expectations. […] [I]n everyday life the majority of believers held fast to conventional gender attitudes. The séance room, however, was a distinct realm governed by different rules of conduct. (Owen 2004, 202).

To allow a spirit to speak through one's self – to, in effect, vacate one's own body for its temporary use by another – required an extreme degree of passivity, a quality typically gendered as feminine.[115] Spiritualists' celebration of mediumship therefore became a subversive elevation of feminine 'weakness' to a level of spiritual strength

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115. Owen even cites one spiritualist work which explains Christ's birth as the ultimate achievement of passive mediumship: 'Mary, His mother, was the active medium for the material body, in consequence of her high purity […] Her nature was purely receptive, peculiarly passive, entirely truthful and trustful' (quoted in Owen 2004, 93).

far less likely to be obtained by men.[116] In the séance-room itself, this spiritual strength became physical, as the medium's task in relating messages to and from the spirits constituted what Owen describes as 'a direct contravention of the female role in polite society, that of the dutiful woman whose required 'stillness' ensured strictly controlled conduct and limited and contained access to speech' (210). Lecture tours and quasi-spiritualist publications, many of which combined a nominal gesture towards the 'influence' or 'teachings' of the spirits with detailed arguments for various kinds of social change, took this to a logical conclusion.[117] Mediums, then, subverted passivity through epitomising it.

For the narrator of 'The Yellow Wallpaper', as for the governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, mediumship plays a dual role. Both characters present themselves as mediums in a literal sense, as the only means through which the ghost's actions can be related to the living; while there is nothing so simplistic as the question-and-answer format of a typical séance in either story, the ghosts seem to be invisible to all characters but the narrators, and other individuals (including the story's readers) can therefore only know what these narrators choose to tell. Since their stories – and, by implication, the ghosts themselves – are created as much as they are related, the narrators' mediumistic roles extend to the narratives themselves. Both present

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116. It is noteworthy that this concept of mediumship largely developed with full-form materialisations in the 1860s and 1870s, after the careers of (in)famous male celebrity mediums like Daniel Dunglas Home and the Davenport brothers had finished.
117. The combination of the two is neatly summarised in the title of Mrs M. G. Parker's 1878 pamphlet, 'Why am I a Spiritualist? and, Indissoluble Marriage Laws: Are They Wise Or Just?'

themselves as passive readers, gradually coming to understand a pre-existent situation which exists independently of their agency; both, in contrast, are instrumental agents in the construction of that story itself, choosing to present their experiences as a ghost story and accept the privileged, empowering position in which they are thus placed. James's narrator uses the form of the ghost story, with its powerful and all-too-human ghosts, to turn her unwilling isolation into a heroic siege; Gilman's to literalise the 'bars' behind which she is trapped, relying upon the concept of ghosts liberated by death in order to share with her ghostly counterpart the task of tearing those bars down.

The popularity of literary ghost stories began to fade in the early twentieth century, as the enthusiasm for spiritualism waned. Writers such as M. R. James, Algernon Blackwood and H. P. Lovecraft fostered an appetite for the marvellous and macabre, something for which the all-too-human ghosts of the spiritualist-influenced ghost story proved unsuitable subjects. The appeal of literal and metaphorical mediumship, however, did not dissipate along with them. With the conventions of the literary ghost story, spiritualism and psychical research far from forgotten, the kind of mediumship presented in stories like *The Turn of the Screw* and 'The Yellow Wallpaper' assumed its own autonomy, no longer restricted to literary stories and their protagonists but scattered across a wider range of narratives, literary, veridical and otherwise. The next section of this chapter will discuss one of the best-known British veridical narratives of the twentieth century with this in

mind, demonstrating how the medium – and mediums – of the ghost story form lent themselves to its adaptation for various purposes by a number of different narrators.

'It will forever be a model for psychical researchers as to how a report should be prepared': Harry Price and Borley Rectory.[118]

Insofar as any ghost story can truly have a beginning, the story of Borley Rectory starts in the early twentieth century. A large and rambling house built in 1863 by the Reverend Henry Bull, its history as the 'most haunted house in England' falls into three clear periods corresponding with its occupants. Bull's own family was followed by Reverend G. Eric Smith and his wife, who were in turn succeeded by Lionel and Marianne Foyster. However, as the story reached larger audiences in different forms (during, for example, its transition from local folklore to national newspaper), narratives produced during one period would often focus on key elements taken from another. For purposes of clarity, therefore, my discussion of these narratives is only loosely chronological.

Literature on Borley, in expositions, reports and psychical research proceedings alike, usually begins with the building's first claimed supernatural event: the ghostly figure of a nun in the rectory orchard, seen by three of the Reverend Henry Bull's daughters on the 28th of July, 1900. As with the first sighting of Peter

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118. The quotation from Glanville's article in *Fate* (89).

Quint in *The Turn of the Screw*, an isolated image without framework or plot can hardly be considered a story in its own right; one is reminded of Julia Briggs's argument that veridical narratives make poor fodder for literary ghost stories, lacking artificially imposed patterns and therefore 'only too often […] hav[ing] no discoverable meaning or application' (Briggs 1977, 15). When expanded into broader narratives, however, including a combination of oral tradition with written reports, such narratives are as subject to artificially imposed patterns as their literary cousins, and the story built around the Borley nun is no exception. I do not intend to contrast veridical with literary narratives in discussing Borley, nor to attempt to draw a line between the two, but rather to demonstrate how tenuous such a distinction becomes after the reign of the nineteenth-century ghost story began to pass.

Sidney Glanville, an amateur psychical researcher, interviewed two of the sisters, Ethel and Milly Bull, several decades after their sighting of a figure in the orchard.[119] Their description of what they saw already demonstrates a tentative identity being given to the apparition, complete with some psychological depth through the attribution of appropriate emotional states: 'They all clearly saw the Nun walking slowly across the garden […] Her head was bowed and her hands clasped in front of her, hanging at full length' (Dingwall et al. 1955, 30). In

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119. There were indeed professional psychical researchers, both in the mid-twentieth century and in the nineteenth. The SPR was not, however, a professional association as such; many of its members were independently wealthy, and their investigations were not conducted for profit. Harry Price, however, certainly earns the dubious honour of such a title, as I shall discuss below.

comparison with more prosaic descriptions, such as those in the later book written by four members of the SPR, even this brief image shows a clear shift towards both constructing a story around the figure and framing her in terms of the spiritualist-influenced conception of the spectral. The figure is 'walking slowly' rather than simply walking, with her hands 'clasped together' and her head 'bowed'; by contrast, the four members of the SPR who included Glanville's description in their own 1956 investigation report only that the sisters 'could not see [the ghost's] face' (ibid., 30). Further, the SPR writers question her identification as a nun, pointing out that there is nothing in this first sighting to suggest this. It was the description as collected by Glanville, however, that became a foundation for later Borley narratives. Already, the ghost has become more than an unidentified figure; she is a sorrowful nun, with, presumably, her own history, and as such, it remains only for the writers, researchers and mediums of the broader Borley narrative to 'reveal' the story of which she is a part.

Of course, the non-spectral figures in ghost narratives can provide a substantial purpose beyond serving as a representation of the implied reader or audience. In Sidney Glanville's 1951 article on Borley in *Fate* magazine, a periodical dedicated to the paranormal with tendencies towards the sensationalistic, an illustration of a spectral nun in the orchard shows three children with party dresses and bows in their hair in the foreground. These are described in the caption as 'the three little Bull sisters'; the article fails to mention that in 1900, the Bull sisters in

question were aged 35, 32 and 21.[120] Where they serve to 'give the effect another turn of the screw' in James's story (*The Turn of the Screw*, 1), the children's purpose in Glanville's narrative seems designed to convince rather than chill, their youth adding to their reliability as observers.[121] As individuals, the sisters do not play any significant role in the narrative's later development; as witnesses establishing the story's authenticity as a factual narrative, however, they are important enough to warrant not only mention but illustration in Glanville's piece for *Fate*. Whatever the significance of the nun, a figure who would pass in and out of Borley mythos in later developments of the narrative, the description of her witnesses here brings issues of belief and credibility to the forefront.

It is unlikely that Borley would ever have generated such literature, and indeed such interest, if it had not been for the figure of Harry Price. Price was an investigator with a considerable talent for showmanship, and consequently one of the best-known names in the (admittedly limited) field of psychical research at the

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120. Ages from the census records for Borley Rectory in 1901 (National Archives).

121. The position of children in supernatural fiction is a complex one, and a comprehensive discussion is beyond the scope of this project. Julia Briggs claims that children's 'lack of preconceptions, natural animism and intuitive responses make them ideal witnesses of the supernatural' (149). Certainly, children began to feature more heavily in the later Victorian sentimental ghost story, often as images of unworldly innocence uncorrupted and unaffected by death; the child-ghosts of writers such as Mary Wilkins Freeman and Annie Trumbull Slosson fit this category particularly well. James's ghosts are more unusual in that they represent a threat, although its nature is unclear, and thus seem to have more in common with the child in Elizabeth Gaskell's 'The Old Nurse's Story' than with their more immediate contemporaries. They also resemble the Fox sisters, as described in a great deal of spiritualist literature; Alfred Kitson's lyceum manual, for example, describes Mrs Fox's 'two little daughters' (Kitson 1881, 19), and Epes Sargent calls the daughter at the centre of the activity 'the child, Kate Fox' (Sargent 1876, 14), thus reinforcing the innocence and trustworthiness individuals at the movement's core. For more on this topic and how the depiction of children in supernatural fiction evolved, see Sabine Bussing's *Aliens in the Home: The Child in Horror Fiction* (1987).

time. While his motives were not always praiseworthy, as later discussion of his role at Borley will demonstrate, his interest seems to have been genuine. He was Foreign Research Officer to the American SPR, and his investigations in that role triggered a report by the *Scientific American* on spiritualism and mediumship; he had also opened a National Library for Psychical Research in London three years before the Borley investigation, and lobbied the University of London to open a department of psychical research.[122] He was active in uncovering mediumistic fraud, and even published in pamphlet form the account of one such investigation with the SPR: 'Cold light on spiritualistic 'phenomena': an experiment with the Crewe circle' (1922).

Many of his better-known investigations, however, showed a clear tendency to prioritise fame over scientific objectivity, and even the pamphlet above was circulated to a wider audience by Price himself, who disliked that the limited readership of the SPR's own journal (Price 1922, 2). When he was invited back to Borley during the Foysters' tenancy in the 1930s, it was Price who described the violent poltergeist[123] activity that made Borley's later narratives more dramatic, and it was Price who leased the empty rectory for a year to install a team of amateur psychical researchers, Sydney Glanville among them. He was well placed to create a newsworthy story out of a haunted building whose ghosts were, like those at Bly in

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122. For more on Price's life and career, see Paul Tabori's *Harry Price: The Biography of a Ghost-Hunter* (1950).

123. The term, meaning literally 'noisy spirit' in German, originally arrived in English through Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature* (1848).

The Turn of the Screw, insufficiently dramatic on their own merits without a framing narrative to give them force.

Although Price was instrumental in forming the Borley narrative at several stages of its development, the investigations conducted under his supervision in 1937 mark the most evident example of his use of the ghost story form itself. Price rented the empty rectory for a year, with the expressed purpose of conducting a comprehensive investigation into the supernatural activity reported by several of its previous inhabitants. His researchers were not gathered from associations like the SPR, but were members of the public who responded to an advertisement Price placed in *The Times*, asking for 'responsible persons of leisure and intelligence, intrepid, critical and unbiased' to assist in the investigation (quoted in Wood 1992, 46). The declaration respondents were asked to sign provides an intriguing insight into Price's aims in this, combining practical arrangements ('I will lock all doors and fasten all windows on my leaving the House') and gestures to the integrity of psychical research procedures ('I will furnish a report after each Observational Period') with Price's own concerns over being the only narrator of the narrative that would come from these reports: 'I will not write, nor cause to be written, any account of my visit/s to the Haunted House, and will not lecture on my experiences there' (Price 1937a, 5). Sidney Glanville himself was one of these reporters; his later article in Borley which appeared in *Fate* magazine, however, was published after

Price's two books on the subject, and as such presumably constituted no competition.

The 'Blue Book', a pamphlet of instructions given to investigators on their arrival, sets out clear expectations not just for the procedures they would be asked to follow but for the kind of phenomena they should hope to find. 'Spend at least a portion of the day and night (in complete darkness) in the Blue Room', one instruction reads, citing the room in which 'it is alleged that knocks can frequently be heard' (Price 1937b, 4, 6); if footsteps are heard, researchers are instructed to 'try to judge direction, note duration, and record type (heavy, soft, pattering, shuffling, etc.)', and if apparitions are seen, TO 'NOT MOVE AND ON NO ACCOUNT APPROACH THE FIGURE' (5). Further, researchers could clearly expect supernatural activity to escalate in potentially terrifying ways:

> If phenomena appear strong, of if experiencing a succession of unusual
>
> events, immediately communicate with one of the persons whose
>
> telephone numbers has been handed to you. Detail exact happenings.
>
> Expert assistance or futher instructions, will be sent you. (4)

By collecting a group of enthusiastic, suggestible volunteers together in a large and (by this stage) partially derelict house, providing them with a set of procedural instructions which would lend themselves well to any innocuous sound or

movement being attributed to the supernatural, and compiling guidelines which clearly laid out what kind of supernatural activity inhabitants should expect at Borley, Price acquired the sort of sensationalistic, exhaustively catalogued material that formed the backbone of his later books on Borley, 1940's *The Most Haunted House in England* and 1946's *The End of Borley Rectory*. The foundations for both, however, were laid long before the 1937 investigations.

When Price first visited Borley, both several of the Bull sisters and the rectory's next inhabitants, the Rev. G. Eric Smith and his wife Mabel, claimed to have seen the ghost of Henry Bull's son Harry as well as the nun. At the time of the sisters' sighting of the nun in 1900, Harry was rector of Borley and living in the rectory with several of his unmarried sisters. His marriage to a woman nineteen years his junior was the cause of apparent discontent within the family, and in Sidney Glanville's 1937 interview, the sisters made their antagonism clear. Ivy Brackenbury, they claimed, was 'a married woman, whose husband is still living […] There had been no divorce. By [Harry Bull's] will he left her a life interest in his estate, instead of to his sisters' (quoted in Wood 1992, 28). On the matter of his death, their accusations went so far as to imply murder: 'He was found dead, and no-one was present at the time of death. His wife nursed him exclusively during his last illness' (ibid., 28). Further to this, Glanville notes, the Smiths did not only see Bull's ghost, but found possible evidence of his murder on Borley's grounds:

searching through a locked seller, Mabel Smith 'came on a small bottle labeled 'Poison'. It appeared to be more recent than the other bottles, cleaner' (28).

In most contexts, speculation veering so far towards the melodramatic with seemingly so little to ground it other than rumour and bad feeling would hardly seem to warrant the exhaustive investigations, interviews and collections of reports that Borley generated. In the context of a ghost story, however, the very presence of the supernatural bypasses such concerns. Once the ghost's existence has been accepted, the existence of a narrative surrounding it becomes implicit, and surrounding events suggesting that the narrative is a suitably dramatic one are no longer incongruous. The conventions of the ghost story do not themselves require Henry Bull to have been murdered, but they do create fertile ground for accusations of such in their demands for some complex relationship between past and present of which Harry Bull himself is at the centre. Here, the ghost need no longer indicate its own murder, as did Old Hamlet on the battlements; instead, the ghost's presence gestures towards its own story, and the established conventions of such a story leave a cleared path for the narrative to follow.

By making the role of any one individual subservient to the ghost's story, then, those who present themselves as telling that story are free to make whatever statements they wish to about each individual's importance. The cellar in which Mrs Smith allegedly found the empty poison bottle, for example, Glanville notes 'was

locked […] [but] by the time they actually moved in, it had been opened by someone' (28). Although the narrative itself claims on its surface to be a record of facts, uninterested in any agency behind them, the passive construction here clearly accuses this 'someone' of murder through inviting the reader to draw the necessary inference. It is at no point necessary for the Bull sisters or the Smiths to claim this themselves; they have only to frame events within a specific narrative, and the narrative will make such claims for them. As with James's and Gilman's literary narratives, the ghost story form itself grants a proxy voice to those narrating it, who can claim passivity in their role as textual mediums. As a veridical narrative, however, Borley can incorporate a much broader range of texts; in addition to the magazine articles and transcribed interviews previously discussed, it featured spiritualist séances directly.

When the first séance was held at Borley in 1929, under the direction of Harry Price, the spirit Harry Bull was asked direct questions about his death for the first time. In the account of this séance which appeared in the *Daily Mirror*, 'no answer at all was received' to the questions specifically concerning Harry Bull (Wall 1929e); Sydney Glanville's notes of his interview with the Smiths, however, conducted eight years later in 1937, reports the following exchange taking pace:

Is that Harry Bull?
Yes. (three taps)
Are you happy?
No. (two taps)

[…] Is there money trouble?
Yes.
Were you killed?
Yes. (Quoted in Wood 1992, 27).[124]

What actually transpired during the séance is of little importance; what is remembered as having transpired, on the other hand, becomes part of the overarching narrative. When the next collection of séances were held at Borley in 1937, the participants seem to have acted on this knowledge, and even without the Bull sisters present (as they were in 1929), the accusations of murder moved from implication to statement:

Did you die in this house?	Yes
Did you die in the room we left?	Yes
Did you die naturally?	No
Were you poisoned?	Un[certain]
Were you poisoned by your wife?	Yes. (Price 1937, 141)[125]

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124. The séances that took place as part of Price's investigations followed the model of very early spiritualist séances, where the ghost mostly communicated through sounding out an agreed-upon number of rapping sounds for 'no' and 'yes'. Lengthier answers were conveyed via the time-consuming method of indicating individual letters through 'rapping' to correspond with their numerical position in the alphabet. Séances as tools of psychical investigation, rather than its subject, are relatively unusual in the field of psychical research, and certainly not something that would have been advocated by the resolutely empirical SPR. The Borley investigations were not conducted by spiritualists as such, however; to my knowledge, none of the researchers on Price's team identified themselves as spiritualists, and seem to have regarded the séance as merely another way to gauge information about an already haunted building. (Compare, for example, the Fox sisters' initial séances at Hydesville, in which the original rapping spirit identified himself as a murdered pedlar who had been buried in the house some years previously.

As for the choice of the relatively simplistic 'rapping' method of séances, the most likely explanation is a mundane one. While it is not my aim to determine the factual accuracy of claims of the supernatural at Borley, it is undeniable that full-form materialisations required a far more complex set-up regarding the physical proceedings of the séance itself, and none of the involved were professional mediums; if one wishes to fabricate ghostly activity at a séance, it is far easier to do this via rapping sounds than to present a visible, autonomous ghostly form.

125. My reference here is to the 'Locked Book of Borley Rectory', a collection of séance transcripts and floor plans of the house compiled by amateur psychical researchers under Harry Price's supervision in 1937. The idea of Henry Bull's murder at his wife's hands recurs in several of these transcripts, the questions indicating clearly that the questioners were working to a pre-existing knowledge of that narrative during the séance. Take, for example,

While many of the séance transcripts were limited to private distribution extending

no further than Price's teams of psychical researchers, the sensationalistic tone they

embodied lent itself well to Borley's rapidly growing position in local and national

news media.

Borley in the media: V. C. Wall and the *Daily Mirror*

Although the Reverend G. Eric Smith was a clergyman with the presumed

support of the Church of England for dealing with supra-worldly matters, when he

requested help for the haunted rectory in 1929, it was done via a letter sent to the

editor of *The Daily Mirror*, asking him to recommend a psychical research society.[126]

The reason for this extraordinary step does not appear in any of the Smiths'

correspondence or interviews, and Borley literature such as Robert Wood's *The

Widow of Borley* understandably attributes it to a desire for publicity. It does seem

clear from all reports, however, whether sceptical or otherwise, that the Smiths were

not subject to any great inconvenience from the haunting; they claimed to members

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the following exchange recorded as taking place between sitters and the spirit of Harry
Dawson Bull, Henry's father:

Did your son H.B. die naturally?	No
Was he killed?	Yes
Was he poisoned?	Yes (Price 1937a, 139).

126. Compare this with his successor, Lionel Foyster, who invited psychical researchers to
the house only after seeking help from his archbishop. Since Borley's history of alleged
supernatural phenomena was almost certainly known to the Foysters at the time of their
inception, however, it is uncertain whether the dual approach was taken with integrity or
publicity in mind.

of the SPR in later investigations that the main cause of their concern was the local rumours about Borley and its ghosts (including, presumably, Harry Bull and the nun). Their parishioners, they claimed, were reluctant to come to the rectory for parish meetings and social events, and the servants were scared of the spirits.[127] While this does not explain the choice to approach a national newspaper and psychical research society, it does reveal a significant feature of the Borley narrative as a whole: it was not the ghosts that the Smiths wished investigated, but the ghost stories.

The *Daily Mirror* sent a reporter, V. C. Wall, along with the professional psychical researcher Harry Price. Wall's role was presumably, of course, to uncover and present the objective truth of the matter; his narratives make it clear, however, that the story as he saw it lay in the entertainment value of an allegedly haunted house, rather than a serious SPR-style report of the supernatural. Wall's first article on Borley appeared in the *Daily Mirror* on the 10th of June, 1929, and was followed by five subsequent articles over the next ten days.[128] In the manner of the Smiths' initial enquiry, he began his story with an emphasis on narrative itself rather than its subjects, listing '[a]ll the ingredients of a first-class ghost story' to be found at Borley: dragging footsteps in empty rooms, the ghostly figure of a nun, and sightings of a carriage and horses that appeared and vanished before witnesses' eyes

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127. See, for example, G. E. Smith's letters cited in Dingwall et al., 1955: 'I am sure you will agree that it was no place for my wife to reside in, seeing as no maid would stay there', he writes in one (55).

128. Scans of Wall's printed articles are available at the Harry Price website, <http://www.harryprice.co.uk>; page numbers, unfortunately, have not been preserved.

(Wall 1929a). The footsteps in particular, described again as 'slow' and 'dragging' a few paragraphs later, indicate the apparition of an individual rather than any disembodied force, although the appearance of the individual thus indicated is left to the reader's imagination. A readership attuned to the fiction of writers such as M. R. James, who had published five anthologies of his ghost stories by the late 1920s, might have pictured a threatening, corpselike figure here; that these footsteps were heard in 'empty rooms' adds to the potential menace, creating the image of a ghost claiming its own right to a building that could never truly belong to its current inhabitants. Whatever their origin, Wall reaffirms his journalistic role by claiming that the footsteps were first heard by the Smiths, thus emphasizing his own position as impartial narrator (he did not hear any such footsteps himself) and his narrative's status as reliable (those who did hear the footsteps are named and interviewed).[129]

It was not long before Wall's reports returned to the more sensationalistic conventions of the literary ghost story. In his first article, he claims that 'the villagers dread the neighbourhood of the rectory after dark, and will not pass it'; in a later piece, a former servant confirms this with the claim that '[her] grandparents would never let [her] pass the building after dark' (Wall 1929c). The use of local legend to colour a particular location as frightening to the typically ignorant and

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129. The overlap between mainstream journalism and psychical research in the Borley case is a curious one, although it should not imply an absence of interest from the wider community of psychical researchers themselves. The SPR became actively involved in Borley only in the 1950s, when four members published *The Haunting of Borley Rectory*, an account of their findings which stressed their extreme scepticism over the likelihood of any genuine supernatural phenomena at the rectory

newly-arrived protagonist has a strong precedent in the literary ghost story. See, for example, the terrified housekeeper in E. Nesbit's 'Man-Size in Marble', or the locals in M. E. Braddon's 1879 story 'The Shadow in the Corner'; 'I don't say that I believe in ghosts,' the narrator of this latter comments, 'but the country people do. There's not a mortal among 'em that will venture across our threshold after midnight' (53).[130]

Wall's articles, however, were never intended to be truly frightening. Although Borley's ghost story was presented as *potentially* terrifying, readers were invited to declare themselves above such nonsense, enjoying Wall's narration as comedy rather than horror. When he reports the unsuccessful results of the second séance, his mock-disappointment is typical of the knowing, cynical tone of his reports; '[w]hile apparently willing to demonstrate itself at an informal setting', he complains, '[the ghost] flatly declined to exhibit himself before the two mediums brought down specially from London' (Wall 1929f). When describing the individuals present who truly expected and hoped to see ghosts, his tone becomes plainly disdainful in its account of eager, naïve figures 'wait[ing] anxiously for some phenomena to occur, and sat sometimes in darkness and sometimes with the lamp lighted' (ibid.) The use of 'phenomena' here suggests that Wall's mockery extends not merely to the mediums but to their discourse itself, as somber, pretentious and unaware of its own ridiculousness. 'I laughed at the idea of a spirit throwing

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130. See Chapter Three for a more comprehensive discussion of Nesbit's story.

mothballs about,' he confesses, 'but Mr Price said that such methods of attracting attention were not unfamiliar to investigators' (Wall 1929d).

Wall does not position himself as a sceptic in the same way that the SPR writers later would, and never comments directly on the reality of the supernatural or the reliability of his witnesses. His role, his reports suggest, is only that of an observer, and as such it is not his place to pass judgment on any of the events he describes. Consequently, he does not present himself as an authority on any of the events he describes, emphasising this by reminding his audience of his own susceptibility to believing in what his narrative portrays as plainly ridiculous, and playing his own supposed gullibility for laughs. His second article begins with the admission that 'Ghost-laying, to amateurs, is a serious business', and goes on to describe accompanying a *Mirror* photographer into the woods to search for the apparition of the nun. Their 'frayed nerves' turn every sound into a possible ghost, they jump 'like startled rabbits' at the snap of a twig, and when they finally do see a 'white figure flitting about in the gloom', the incident is weighted with comedy:

> Seizing my companion's arm, and wondering whether I should run forward or back, I stared at the apparition while the photographer frantically attempted to focus his camera, let off a flashlight, throw off my detaining arm, and erect his tripod all at once. (Wall 1929b).

The figure, of course, was not supernatural in nature, and after examining 'numerous tree-stumps which looked, at a distance, rather like nuns', Wall and the photographer gave up their search. Within his account, however, Wall aims another

jibe at psychical research; his self-confessed role position as an 'amateur' psychical researcher, and his unfamiliarity with the processes and practices of 'ghost-laying', suggest by implication the existence of others who are professionals and experts, as well as the absurdity of such a profession.

By the end of Wall's articles, his readers know little more objective fact about Borley than they did when he began. The ghosts of Harry Bull and the nun never appeared, and the allegedly paranormal phenomena extended no further than some thrown mothballs and a séance which demonstrated nothing about Harry Bull other than an apparent 'wish to attract attention' (Wall 1929e). None of this, however, constitutes a failure of Wall's 'first-class ghost story' to live up to its claimed status. From his first report, Wall focused predominantly on Borley as a narrative; his June 10th article, subtitled 'Mysterious Happenings at Site of Old Monastery', describes the folklore surrounding Borley in some detail, with only an occasional reference to its current inhabitants.[131] Wall's purpose was to entertain, and he did so not by disregarding the conventions of veridical and literary narratives but by placing himself in the space where the two interact (the story's 'ingredients', his first article begins, are 'awaiting investigation by psychic experts' (Wall 1929a)). Where his narrative voice speaks, then, it does so in the guise of passively reporting

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131. The rectory was not, in fact, built the site of an old monastery, a myth which seems to have been created to provide some narrative structure and historical credibility for the figure of the nun. The *Locked Book*, for example, contains transcripts of a séance held on the 10th of October 1937, in which the nun answers 'Yes' to questions of 'Was there a Monastery here?', 'Was there a Nunnery here?', 'Were you a Nun?' and (after answering that she was murdered) 'Were you buried here?' (Price 1937a, 154).

other narratives. Like the spiritualist mediums that provided Borley's investigators

with the structure and language of séances, this narrative can safely claim that any

statements it makes are not its own.

Mediumship and the media: Marianne and Lionel Foyster, and *Fifteen Months in a Haunted House*

The Smiths left Borley later in 1929, after expressing discomfort over both

the increasingly demanding maintenance work the house required and the 'coaches

of sight-seers' that regularly arrived during and after Wall's articles, hoping to see a

ghost for themselves (Wall 1929e).[132] Reverend Lionel Foyster and his wife

Marianne moved into the empty rectory in October of 1930. Although they had

been living outside the country for eight years, the Foysters were familiar with

Borley's reputation when they arrived; the rectory had become a well-known story

after its coverage in the *Daily Mirror*, and Lionel was a cousin of the Bull family.[133]

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132. See Dingwall et al. (1955) for more on the Smiths' reactions to Borley's publicity. Despite his earlier statements, G. E. Smith wrote to Price before the publication of *Most Haunted House in England* to suggest that 'Mrs Smith and I would rather be left out of it… we really did not believe there were any such things as ghosts!' (55). Mabel Smith in particular seems to have had a very ambiguous attitude towards the literature which sprang up around the subject, especially in the form of Price's books; although she wrote to Price after the publication of *Most Haunted House in England* to congratulate him a book she was 'awfully thrilled' by, her response to the same book was far more negative during the SPR members' investigations eleven years later, in which she expressed 'utter astonishment at the clever mixture of legend, truth, phantasy, and disregard of the intellects of intelligent people' (quoted in Dingwall et al. 1956, 55, 48).
133. See his 'Diary of Occurences', in which he admits to having 'heard about [his] predecessor's experiences' before arriving (Foyster 1931, 1). The 'Diary' is a brief chronological record of supernatural activity at the rectory in the first year of the Foysters' residence, written, according to Foyster, for a limited audience. The more detailed and comprehensive 'Summary of Experiences', written in 1938, elaborates further on the events described and adds those which happened after 1931. 'Since I have been asked by members of our family to tell what I know of the so-called Borley ghost', he begins the latter, 'and since I think it desirable that a record of our experiences should be preserved, I am writing this before the details have gone out of my mind' (ibid. 1). Despite the limited distribution

Under the Foyster incumbency the rectory's reputation as a centre of supernatural activity was reinforced, with its ghosts apparently becoming more expressive; the séances held by Price's investigators in 1937, after the Foysters had vacated the rectory, were lengthier, more detailed, and in all manners more dramatic than the séance Wall reported on in 1929.

The nature of this phase in Borley's history both allowed for and encouraged greater documentation. As well as the 'Diary of Occurrences' (1931) and 'Summary of Experiences' (1938) written by Foyster himself, a plethora of documentation was produced in the (collected) form of the 'Locked Book of Borley Rectory' by the team of psychical researchers brought in by Harry Price. These were encouraged, both directly by Price and implicitly by the conventions of psychical research, to list and document everything that might be relevant; all séance transcripts, for example, were recorded in full. In addition to this, and to the plethora of articles on the subject in local and occasionally national magazines and news media, Lionel wrote a novel titled *Fifteen Months in a Haunted House*, a loosely fictionalized account of the haunting.[134] Marianne Foyster, in contrast, remained silent despite occupying a

implied here, however – an impression bolstered by Lionel Foyster's assertions in the *Diary* that they avoided seeking assistance from neighbours, since 'we were most anxious to keep [it] to ourselves' (12) – both documents were intrinsic to the Borley narrative, which began to centre around Harry Price after the Foysters arrived. It seems likely that the *Diary* was written for Price himself, whose investigation into Borley continued at the instigation of two of the Bull sisters who informed him of continued supernatural activity at the rectory in 1931; Foyster's letter in response to Price's subsequent enquiry described 'accounts of occurrences' enclosed, presumably the 'Diary' itself. Further, Foyster sent Price a copy of the 'Summary' as part of his later investigations after the Foysters vacated the rectory in 1937. Price's two books on Borley, *Most Haunted House in England* (1940) and *The End of Borley Rectory* (1946), made extensive use of both documents.

134. While the novel was never published, a copy sent to Harry Price for proofreading has

central position in many of these narratives. Although the 'Diary' and 'Summary' both name her as the only witness to several of the phenomena, and suggest repeatedly that the ghosts targeted her in particular, she produced no such accounts of her own. Like the protagonists of Gilman's and James's story, Marianne's role at the centre of the narrative served to absolve her of the responsibility of creating it.

Within a year of the Foysters' arriving at Borley, then, the narrative had changed once again. The focus was no longer on Henry Bull's death and the story constructed around it to imply murder, nor on the privileged middle ground between the dramatic sensationalism of literary narratives and the dry absurdity of psychical research, but on an individual woman as a seemingly unwilling, unwitting medium. Whatever the truth of the allegations made about and around her in reports and literature on Borley, it seems clear that Marianne was unhappy at Borley. Even sceptical literature on the subject tends towards sensationalism, and there is little concrete evidence for claims such as that made by Robert Wood that Marianne was abused as a child by the man she later married; however, with a husband twenty-one years her senior, no close friends, and a move across the Atlantic to a hamlet of no more than three hundred people, his assertion that she was often lonely and bored seems eminently reasonable.[135] She embellished the

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remained largely intact along with his own exhaustive documentation of Borley and his collection of all relevant material such as the *Summary* and *Diary*. The Harry Price collection now resides at the Senate House Library, in the University of London. The manuscript of *Fifteen Months* is missing pages 3-9; Price's handwritten note on the cover explains that these were 'not supplied by Mr Foyster as they dealt with matter not directly connected with his Borley experiences' (Foyster 1940).

135. In fairness to Wood's claim, his biographical account of Marianne and Lionel's past does

details of her history to the locals of Borley, claiming to be the secretly adopted daughter of aristocrats, and even her name itself was an exotic embellishment of her own making: she was born Mary Anne Shaw. Through being placed at the centre of a pre-existing ghost narrative, and one that could easily be adapted to centre on her, Marianne could gain influence not only over her own life but over the way it was understood by others. At Borley, she became the centre of fascinated attention for ghost and living alike.

Fifteen Months in a Haunted House places Marianne squarely at the centre of Borley's narrative. Although it uses pseudonyms throughout, with Lionel and Marianne Foyster becoming John and Emily Jane Fowler, and Borley Rectory becoming Cromley Hall, it does not claim to be fictional. On the contrary, the choice of Harry Price as the author of a prefatory note (presumably for the benefit of publishers) is a clear gesture towards the veridical narrative as an authoritative source for the novel, and Price himself states that the book 'is in fact [Lionel's] diary, written in narrative form, of all the strange happenings that occurred at Borley Rectory during the period named' (Foyster 1940, i). Price further adds a list of pseudonyms corresponding to the 'real names' of the individuals involved, and suggests that his own book on Borley, *The Most Haunted House in England*, which had

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go some way to suggesting the possibility of such a history. They first met when Marianne was very young; Lionel, the then curate of her parents' parish, baptised her at the age of seven. He moved to Canada not long afterwards, in rather unusual circumstances which would be consistent with, if not directly support, Wood's suggestion of a scandal of some variety and a concerted family effort to conceal it, but stayed in contact with Marianne's family, and eventually proposed to her via a letter to her parents.

been published in the same year, 'should be consulted in conjunction with this MS' (ibid.). Overt references to Borley are not restricted to Price's notes; Foyster's own preface begins with the modest assertion that '[t]he only pretensions to merit that this book claims, is the very simple one that it is a record of facts and therefore true' (1).

Marianne certainly seems to have been at the centre of the supposedly supernatural activity at Borley during the Foysters' occupancy, and her role, I would argue, was an explicitly mediumistic one. While no visible ghosts appeared to witnesses other than Marianne, she seems beyond doubt to have produced most of the phenomena with which her years at Borley were marked: thrown stones, moved objects, scribbled and semi-decipherable messages on walls and scraps of paper, voices calling out her name. It is not my intention to enter the debate about her possible motives Robert Wood details so lavishly, or to discuss the various evidences for fraud catalogued by Eric Dingwall and the other SPR members in their 1955 book; it is enough for the present discussion to note that even Harry Price, on his first visit to Borley under the Foyster tenancy, was open about his belief that Marianne was responsible for all such phenomena (see, e.g., Dingwall et al., *passim*). While moved and thrown objects, writing by spirit hands and disembodied voices were all features of the spiritualist séance, especially before the advent of full-form materialisations, it was through her role as the sole, individual

connection between living and dead that Marianne truly placed herself at the centre

of the Borley narratives.

Marianne was not only the sole witness to many of the phenomena, and

thus implicitly tasked with reporting and describing them to fascinated others, but

also the direct target of the ghosts' attention, the figure upon whom most of the

malicious attacks appeared to be directed and to whom all the pleas for help in the

written messages were addressed. It is only her apparent persecution at the hands of

Borley's ghosts which might seem to place her apart from the spiritualist mediums

in whose tradition she followed, but the relationship between medium and spirit

was a complex one, and even here she follows in an existing tradition. Take, for

example, Epes Sargent's description of an overheard conversation between

Florence Cook and Katie King in the 1870s:

> A scraping noise was heard; Katie had some spirit drapery in her hand, which she rubbed down over the medium to collect some of the "influence" used by spirits in materialization. A conversation, in low tones, varied with an occasional scraping noise, then took place between Florence Cook and the spirit:
> *Miss Cook* – Go away, Katie; I don't like to be scraped.
> *Katie* – Don't be stupid. Take that thing off your head and look at me. (*Scrape, scrape.*)
> *Miss Cook* – I won't sit still for these manifestations. I don't like them. Go away.
> *Katie* – You are only my medium, and a medium is nothing but a machine. (*Scrape, scrape.*)
> *Miss Cook* – Well, if I am only a machine, I don't like to be frightened. Go away.
> *Katie* – Don't be stupid. (Sargent 1876, 50-1)

When spiritualist convention stresses the spirit's power over the medium, descriptions like this are far from unexpected. The greater vitriol seemingly targeted at Marianne by some of the spirits, however, does seem to exceed Katie's apparent selfishness, or the 'mischievousness' frequently described in spiritualist literature. Here, then, we see the ultimate destination of spiritualist conceptions of the spectral: without any clear divide between the literary and the veridical, the spiritualist séance and the fictional story, the one blends into the other, as fearful literary ghosts appear in pseudo-spiritualist narratives.

Fifteen Months in a Haunted House is certainly consonant with the phenomena catalogued in the *Summary*; Lionel Foyster's claim that it is 'true', however, suggests more than narrative consistency. His own aim, Lionel claims, is only to educate and inform, since 'any conclusive evidence of the existence of a spiritual world is surely of value'. In an echo of the veridical narratives used in medieval sermons, he even claims knowledge of at least one person 'led to investigate and finally to believe in the reality of that world' due to the events at Borley: '[a]nd if one why should there not be others?' (2). Although the motives indicated differ substantially from V. C. Wall's in 1929, Foyster's narrative resembles Wall's, too, in his claim of no special importance for his own role. He is only relaying the story, which by implication exists independently of any narrator; he has no view 'one way or the other' on the reality of the paranormal: 'I merely narrate what happened' (2).

'John Fowler', the pseudonym Lionel gives to himself, is close enough to the supernatural activity at 'Cromley Hall' to claim unbiased and accurate information in his reports. He is even its occasional target, with objects thrown at his head and his possessions moved without his knowledge. It is 'Emily Jane', however, 'my poor persecuted wife' (35), who is the most frequent target for the attentions of the spirits, and Marianne/'Emily Jane' around whom both the literary and veridical narratives revolve. Lionel describes her as the central focus of all the supernatural activity in the house, but stresses that the role came at the apparent cost of her own physical and mental strength; *Fifteen Months* even describes her as 'an invalid' due to the effects of the haunting, albeit one who returns 'refreshed in body and mind' when sent away from the rectory for a time. Phenomena frequently occur when she is in bed, ill or asleep, further emphasising her role as a medium as something which not only bypassed her own agency, but negated it.

Strength through passivity is a recurring feature of 'Emily Jane''s role in the narrative. When the supernatural activity reaches more dramatic proportions and a spiritualist association offers its help, she falls into a trance at their séance, showing 'distinct signs of loss of power with general fatigue' (170), and becoming the central focus of the séance in the process. Her lapses into unconsciousness provide both reassurance and ominous threat, at different times; she falls asleep in the presence of spiritualists so that the spirits can heal her, but then seems reluctant or unable to come out of a trance when the poltergeist activity becomes more frequent. On this

latter occasion, the spiritualists instruct her husband that she 'must not be allowed to sleep', but to no avail; 'she had an insane desire to lie down on the grass or anywhere if only she might be allowed to indulge this unconquerable appetite for losing consciousness' (Foyster, 182). Even individuals who accuse her of fraud do so in a way that emphasises her passivity, telling 'John', for example, that '[n]o doubt she did not know she was doing it, but it was her all the same. She was subject to trances; that explained it' (118). Whatever particular purpose it serves at any point in the developing narrative of her interaction with Borley's ghosts, passivity invariably increases 'Emily Jane''s importance.

The references to spiritualists and spiritualism here are far from incidental. Most of 'Emily Jane''s lapses into unconsciousness occur in the presence of the visiting spiritualist circle, who assure her husband in confident tones that this 'was what the spirits had wanted' (178), 'was a sign she was being controlled by a bad spirit' (182), and that they themselves had sufficient knowledge and ability to help her by carrying out a séance in full compliance with spiritualist norms:

> Well the circle will come over in the afternoon and bring a medium
> […] Then our plan is that we shall have a sitting; the medium will go
> into a trance, the entities will materialise in the medium's ectoplasm
> and be dealt with individually. (159)[136]

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136. Marianne's collapse prevented this plan from reaching fruition, although the structure was certainly distinct from those transcribed by Price's investigators in 1937. See footnote 18 of this chapter for some notes on séance procedures at Borley, however.

While 'Emily Jane''s trances and mediumship situate her firmly within the language and conventions of spiritualism, Lionel Foyster's prosaic language emphasises the narrative's place within the discourse of psychical research, with its extensively documented descriptions of all the material aspects of a story. The description of the building itself, included 'because it will make subsequent events easier to follow' (11), informs the readers of details neither dramatic nor particularly relevant to the plot: '[a] back stair case leads up to a passage on the first floor connecting the main house with bed rooms and a bath room' (10).

Such a discourse is pervasive in Borley literature, and often surprisingly so. Robert Wood's 1994 work *The Widow of Borley*, for example, which catalogues Marianne's history before, during and after her tenancy at the rectory and attempts in doing so to prove her fradulent beyond all reasonable doubt, derides the SPR and their investigations but echoes Foyster's own approach in its almost obsessive attention to apparently irrelevant detail:

> The ground floor included large dining and drawing rooms […] Upstairs on the first floor were eleven rooms including bedrooms, the bathroom and the lavatory. There were also a large attic and extensive cellars (Wood 1992, 10).

Details like these are intended to provide credibility through verification, in a kind of verisimilitude which attempts to move the events described from a world of the narrator's creation to one with mundane familiarity to the reader. Whether intended as confirmation or refutation of Borley's events, then, such exhaustive accounts

only serve to further establish Marianne or 'Emily Jane' as the central focus of the narrative.

While the audience of Borley's narratives are repeatedly encouraged to listen to Marianne, it is clear from the 'Summary' and 'Diary', as well as from *Fifteen Months*, that she had no particular message to deliver. Even the issue of her own reliability was never a matter for particularly vehement defense, with her husband's novel recounting many claims by locals and visitors alike that she had staged all the phenomena herself (a position, incidentally, which Wood and Dingwall et al. state was Harry Price's own view when he visited the rectory in 1931). Although she purportedly provided a conduit for the nun's ghost, with the various messages that appeared on walls and scraps of paper addressed to 'Marianne', these messages were unclear and incoherent.[137] In all three of these narratives, the ghost is recorded as asking 'Please help get' on the walls of the house, but when Marianne/'Emily Jane' writes 'I cannot understand, tell me more', there is no answer. A desire to communicate a particular message is not the same as a desire to be the individual communicating, and Marianne's efforts at the former serve to further suggest that the true appeal of the narrative lay in the latter. As with Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper', the physical paper here echoes the substance of the text itself; where Gilman's narrator emphasises convention and plot, however, Marianne focuses

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137. The other séances at which the nun was reported as revealing her own identity did not take place until 1937, after the Foysters had left the rectory. The nun gave her name as Marie; the similarity to Marianne's own name, especially in the context of investigators already familiar with the claims the Foysters made about the supernatural occurrences at the rectory during their residence, seems rather too great to be coincidental.

solely on its possibility for communication, leaving the substance of that communication as a series of largely incoherent scribbles.

Constructing the narrative in such a manner as to emphasise both the phenomena's reality (through the discourse of psychical research) and Marianne's passivity (through the conventions of spiritualism) does not objectively alter what really took place, a matter which is beyond the scope and interest of this thesis. It does, however, serve Marianne reasonably well, turning unhappiness into the justified result of spirit persecution and inaction into expected, and respected, helplessness. The privileged position individuals can be placed in through assuming the mantle of a ghost story protagonist contains the additional advantage of allowing, even requiring, claims of passivity on one's own part. As James's governess learnt in *The Turn of the Screw*, it is not necessary to rely on outside forces to create a ghost story around one's self; all that is needed is the possibility of such a story, and the readers' own understanding of how it will, once begun, develop.

Becoming Borley's medium

With Marianne Foyster's role reprising that of the protagonists in the literary stories discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the kind of mediumship she and they embrace could reasonably be considered particularly female, a response to social and textual invisibility that, like Alex Owen's mediums, mimics constructed

femininity in assuming power through passivity. The inclusion of individuals like V. C. Wall and Harry Price in the Borley narrative indicates that using the ghost story as a medium is not in itself a uniquely female act, but it would be as difficult to ignore the preponderance of women in these narratives who assume the literal role of medium as ghost-seer as it would to ignore the large proportion of male protagonists in earlier literary ghost stories.[138] Much of the recent critical literature on Victorian ghosts, whether in spiritualist séances or in the pages of literary periodicals, has focused on the particular significance they held for women, and with such qualities inherent in mediumship it is easy to see why. I would suggest, however, that considering the Victorian ghost story as a whole to exemplify the feminist potential suggested by this particular convention might be a step too far in terms of the form's historical development.

As Nina Auerbach argues in her overview of modern critical approaches to the Victorian ghost, Victorian ghost stories – and their successors – tend to be 'fiendishly difficult to generalize about' (Auerbach 2004, 280). While there is a correlation between female characters and the possibilities of literal and textual mediumship discussed above, the clearest examples of this only begin to arise with the development of the psychological ghost story; it is not a coincidence that in the examples above, the presence of an objective ghost with an independent existence

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138. In this aspect of the fiction, there is little difference between male and female authors. Carpenter and Kolmar do suggest that American female writers are more likely than their British counterparts to use female narrators, although this trend seems only evident from the early twentieth century (Carpenter and Kolmar 1991, 13).

from the medium is doubtful at best. Further, the correlation between mediumship and power is not always portrayed as a positive one; in Vernon Lee's 'Oke of Okehurst', for example, which I have discussed in Chapter Three, mediumistic power is directly equated with malice. The narrator, hired by the eponymous Mr Oke to paint his wife's portrait, is immediately enthralled by the woman, although he views the object of his fascination with well-advised caution even here. Mrs Oke's identity shifts and blurs, merging to her evident pleasure with a murderous ancestor she resembles in both physical form and calculated, dangerous character. She claims to see not only her ancestor, but that ancestor's lover; although the narrator sees glimpses of a figure that may, perhaps, be one of the apparitions, the real ghost here is Mrs Oke, mimicking her predecessor to a degree that can only be expressed in supernatural terms: possession, reincarnation, haunting. By the end of the story both Oke and his wife are dead, she murdered by her husband and he at his own hand; the narrator provides no conclusions about whether the ghosts were or were not real, but their involvement hardly seems to result in triumph for any of the parties involved.

Whatever its foundation in fact, the idea of mediumship is a constant presence throughout the story. The suggestions of real supernatural presence in the story seem in this light to be an extrapolation of Mrs Oke's fixation, as the force of her spirit shapes not only the objective world around her but the narrative itself. Whether her delight in the original Mrs Oke's misdemeanours is vicarious or

remembered, though, or the supernatural real or imagined, we are left again with the shape of spectral agency in the form of Mrs Oke's hands. Her connection to her ancestor is depicted a real, physical one, initiated at will; we do not learn that the house's library holds the books and belongings of the first Mrs Oke's lover, until her descendant lifts them down to show the narrator, 'touching the yellow papers with delicate and reverent fingers' (145). She, too, then, writes her own narrative as a ghost story, with a suitably dramatic history and a mysterious past. Power, agency, and ultimately the story itself, belong to the enigmatically spectral form of Mrs Oke, but in neither its execution nor its consequences is it presented as in any sense a positive presence.

To return to the link between mediumship and the psychological ghost story, it is notable that even the literary examples which make this explicit date from later in the ghost story's history. Nor is this a trend limited to the individual narratives selected here; of the many works discussed in Carpenter and Kolmar's *Haunting the House of Fiction*, a collection dedicated to discussing the subversive roots of women's ghost stories, few date from earlier than the 1890s. The convention of mediumship in non-spiritualist narratives, it seems, had to gain firm foundations before it could be put to such a use; there is little purpose in relying upon the conventions of the ghost story if those conventions have not yet solidified to a point where readers can be trusted to assume that ghosts are inherently both powerful and psychologically complex.

When we read ghost stories as literary critics, it is tempting to assume that these conventions of ghostliness were present throughout the history of Victorian ghost story, and that mediumship must thus provide us as later readers with the culturally subversive content we desire; as Nina Auberbach describes it, there is a pervasive tendency among 'writers about the occult and other weird topics […] [to] justify [our] work by politicising it' (Auerbach 2004, 279). Such an approach to the ghost story imposes needless limits upon a vast field of material, which must be understood in its development as well as in its eventual form (the narrator of 'The Yellow Wallpaper', after all, could not have torn down the wallpaper unless someone else had first pasted it up). To read the history of the ghost story with its eventual end in mind, to the exclusion of its growth in the process, is to become the same kind of reader as the governess at Bly; mediumship, whether literal or textual, suggests not compulsion but possibility.

Conclusion

There is a similarity here to what you call death. We call it transition.
(Findlay 1931, 125)

By the 1920s and 1930s, both spiritualism and the literary ghost story were rapidly fading into obscurity. While it would be inaccurate to describe either as disappearing entirely, they certainly no longer commanded the wide attention and mainstream distribution that they once had. Ghosts began to fade from the public view, and supernatural fiction moved instead towards the macabre, the fantastic, and the alien. It is perhaps unsurprising that some recent critics have seen the ghost story's development as one of a sliding descent into insubstantiality, from a theatrically supernatural Gothic past to a coldly rationalistic present. For Elton E. Smith and Robert Haas, for example, the psychological ghost story is merely the inevitable conclusion of the supernatural's perpetually weakening grip on the popular imagination:

> Medieval demons and werewolves, having become vampires and malicious poltergeists in the era of the Gothic novel (1764 – 1796), thinned into impalpable ghosts at the beginning of the nineteenth century and finally interiorized into malign forces living in people's heads. (Smith and Haas 1999, xi)

As I have demonstrated, such simplistic interpretations of the Victorian ghost are rooted in an incomplete understanding of Victorian spectrality in general. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that the ghost of the literary ghost story never regained the immense popularity it enjoyed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A fading interest in spiritualism might be seen as responsible. However, if as I have argued the conventions of the spiritualist ghost had become fully assimilated into the literary ghost story, as the later developments in the ghost story form discussed in Chapters Four and Five indicate, then supernatural literature had long since ceased to rely upon a constant influx of convention and custom from the spiritualist movement.

Furthermore, while supernatural fiction has yet to show any sign of regaining the popularity it once enjoyed, and while spiritualism will likely never attain the status of a semi-respected, pseudo-scientific religious movement followed by so many, I would caution that ghosts themselves have far from disappeared a hundred years after the ghost story's period of greatest popularity. Psychological ghost stories share space with the visual, immediately present ghosts of film and television; latter-day mediums, such as John Edwards and James Van der Praagh, convey spirit-messages from the ether to live studio audiences. Interest in the

supernatural seems as alive as it ever was for the Victorians, although its venues may have changed their backdrops in accordance with changing technologies and trends. The decline of the literary ghost story probably owes more to the decline of the literary periodical than with any increased rationalistic mindset of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Indeed, it is thanks to the Victorians that ghost stories in the forms we recognise them today continue to garner such popularity. While the twentieth century saw a general move away from the genre's conventions, the contributions made by spiritualism still exist beneath the surface. The appearance of M. R. James's ghosts may represent a return to the pre-spiritualist macabre, but the stories in which they appear would lose much of their effect without a central focus upon the protagonist and his attempts to understand and experience the ghost, something woven into the fabric of the ghost story by its spiritualist-influenced forebears. The reader's image of James's ghosts is formed through glances and suggestions, intriguing fragments rather than lavish descriptions; if these macabre revenants did not form such a contrast with readers' expectations, by now shaped around the spiritualist-influenced model long separated from the animated corpse, it seems doubtful that James's stories would ever have been effective enough to gain him the lasting reputation his works continue to enjoy.

The tension between the supernatural and the scientific, the ancient and the modern, which comes to the fore in each of James's stories, likewise relies upon the conventions established by a genre preoccupied with the apparent contrast. As the Victorian ghost story was nurtured and grown to fruition in the pages of the era's periodicals, it coexisted with the debates and criticisms of spiritualism, which took the same apparent contrast as their focus; the pages of *Harper's*, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, constantly negotiating the proper position and attitude towards the spectral, permanently shaped the ghosts appearing in those same volumes. Further, it is difficult to imagine how any ghost story could earn such popularity today without the model of psychologically complex ghosts, whether sympathetic or malevolent.

Spiritualism may have long faded from its earlier popularity, but it has so shaped our conceptions of the spectral that the contributions it made to ghost stories can no longer be separated from the form as a whole. The influence of spiritualism, in fact, remains such a powerful force that the idea of mediumship continually rises to prominence whenever individuals choose the existing conventions and boundaries of the ghost story to understand their own situations. From the narrators of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, to protagonists in veridical narratives such as Marianne Foyster at Borley Rectory, ghost stories value not only the ability to

communicate with the spectral but the willingness to allow the narrative conventions surrounding spectrality to shape one's own story.

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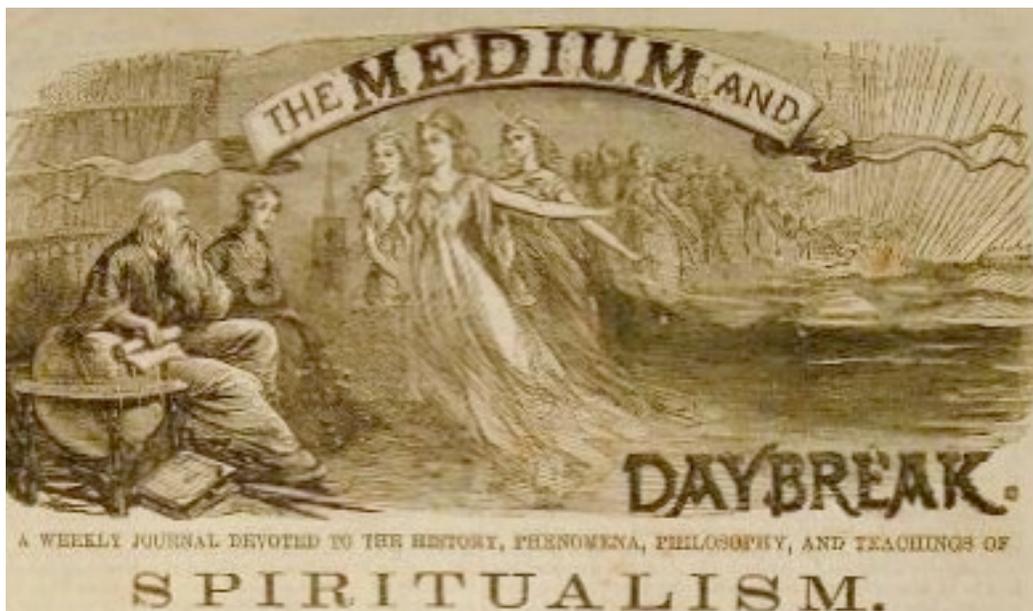-- 1929f. 'Shy "Ghost" of Borley Rectory'. *Daily Mirror* June 17th 1929

Fig. 1. Cover image of the *Medium and Daybreak*, published by James Burns.

Fig. 2. Robert Thew after Henry Fuseli, *Hamlet, Horatio, Marcellus and the Ghost* **(1796)**

Fig. 3. John Downman, *The Ghost of Clytemnestra Awakening the Furies* **(1781)**

Fig. 4. William Blake, *Richard III and the Ghosts* **(c.1806)**

Fig. 5. William Blake, *Hamlet and his Father's Ghost* **(c. 1806)**

Fig. 6. Illustration from Sabine Baring-Gould's 'Pomps and Vanities', in *A Book of Ghosts* **(1904)**

Fig. 7. Peter Newell's illustration for Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's 'The Little Ghost', in *The Wind in the Rose-Bush and Other Stories* **(1903)**