University of Glasgow

Bissell, Sarah Jane (2014) *Haunted matters: objects, bodies, and epistemology in Victorian women's ghost stories.* PhD thesis.

https://theses.gla.ac.uk/6402/

Haunted Matters:

Objects, Bodies, and Epistemology in Victorian Women's Ghost Stories

Sarah Jane Bissell

MA Honours in English Literature and Film and Television Studies

MLitt in Victorian Literature

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of PhD in English Literature

School of Critical Studies

College of Arts

University of Glasgow

December 2014

Abstract

Haunted Matters interrogates objects, bodies, and epistemology in a selection of Victorian women's ghost stories, arguing that these things provided a means through which the chosen writers could critique women's troubled cultural position in mid- to late-nineteenth-century Britain. The four authors considered – Charlotte Riddell, Margaret Oliphant, Vernon Lee, and Edith Nesbit – were all fundamental figures in the development of the ghost story genre, using this popular fiction form to investigate social arenas in which women were subjugated, professional venues from which they were excluded, and the cultural construction of femininity. Each chapter is thus keyed into a specific aspect of women's material lives: money and the financial market (Riddell); visual science and the male gaze (Oliphant); object culture and 'feminine' mysteriousness (Lee); and *fin de siècle* marriage and the female corpse (Nesbit). This study argues that these writers – in making things, bodies, and forms of perception central to their ghost stories – implicitly condemned the patriarchal society which perpetuated a range of contradictory assumptions about women, as being both bodily and spiritual, overly invested in the material world or too prone to flights of fancy. Their diverse literary endeavours in this popular fiction form enabled the selected writers to earn money, engage in public discourse, and critique the dominant culture which sanctioned women's subjugation. *Haunted Matters* thus questions the ghost story's designation as an anti-materialist genre through a focus on gender, instead foregrounding the form's explicit connections to the material world.

Contents

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, thanks are due to my primary supervisor, Christine Ferguson, for her support and guidance over the past four years. Christine was always extremely generous with her time and remained invariably patient and reassuring throughout. I couldn't have asked for a better supervisor. This thesis has also benefitted from input from several other members of the English Literature department at the University of Glasgow. Kirstie Blair, Matthew Creasy, and Andrew Radford provided much-appreciated advice at certain stages, and I am especially grateful to Rhian Williams for her detailed feedback on various chapters. Thanks are also due to Justin Livingstone and Patricia Pulham for their helpful post-submission advice.

I am also extremely grateful to the friends who have supported me throughout the process, both within and outwith the university. Special thanks are due to Laura Eastlake, Aislinn MacLeod, Holly Taylor, Hannah Tweed, and the members of the university's Victorian Reading Group.

Finally, and especially, thanks to my family – Mum, Dad, Laura, and Adam – without whom this thesis would not have been written. It's impossible to describe my gratitude for their love, enthusiasm, and support throughout every stage of this PhD. This thesis is for them.

Introduction

What might we expect from a Victorian ghost story? Nineteenth-century Irish writer, J. Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-73), wryly asserted that ghost stories 'may be read with very good effect by a blazing fire on a shrewd winter's night.'[1] This setting also frequently recurs in the framing devices attached to many tales in the genre, as an anxious narrator recounts uncanny experiences to a group of sceptics. Chris Baldick, in discussing slightly later examples of this convention, playfully elaborates on a common scene:

> There is a very familiar model followed by many ghost stories in English from the early twentieth century: this usually begins with an assembly of gentlemen gathered at a dinner-table or in a London club, debating the existence of spirits. Then a nervous-looking member of company pipes up with a first hand account of [some] inexplicable occurrences […] At the close of the narrative, the materialist doubters are silenced, and some moralising is made to the effect that that there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in […] narrow secular philosophies.[2]

While Baldick admits that his somewhat facetious example does 'no justice to the many more sophisticated writers' who have produced work in the field,[3] this homosocial stereotype has pervaded popular perception of the Victorian ghost story. Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert suggest that Dickens was responsible for embedding this image of fireside winter's ghost stories 'firmly in the national consciousness' to the extent that it became 'a national institution' ripe for parody by the 1890s.[4] We might additionally connect this convention to the genre's oral roots, and to the fact that one of the most famous representations of the form – Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) – knowingly draws on this diegetic model. M. R. James, often cited as the 'master' of the genre,[5] also influences this tradition: his male-dominated, antiquarian ghost stories mirror this type at an extra-textual level insofar as they were frequently first recited to male undergraduates at

---

[1] J. Sheridan Le Fanu, 'Ghost Stories of Chapelizod' (1851), in *Ghost Stories and Mysteries*, ed. by E. F. Bleiler (Mineola: Dover, 1975), pp. 116-17 (p. 117).
[2] Chris Baldick, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, ed. by Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1992]), pp. xi-xxiii (pp. xiv-xv).
[3] Baldick (2009), p. xv.
[4] Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology,* ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1991]), pp. ix-xx (p. xiii).
[5] 'Many consider M[ontague] R[hodes] James (1862-1936) the master of ghost fiction in English.' Cyndy Hendershot, 'Ghost Stories', in *A Guide to United States Popular Culture*, ed. by Ray B. Browne and Pat Browne (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), pp. 319-20 (p. 320).

Christmas.[6] The 2000 BBC adaptations of James's tales, which feature a lugubrious Christopher Lee as the author, pouring out red wine for a youthful male audience, similarly capitalise on this model.[7]

This familiar representation is, however, a convention which apparently excludes women. Despite its recurring motifs, the ghost-story genre remains, as Nina Auerbach claims, 'fiendishly difficult to generalise about.'[8] Male ghosts and male narrators may be prevalent in many examples, but recent criticism has sought to emphasise the importance of women writers to the form.[9] The ratio of male to female ghost story writers in the Victorian period remains difficult to determine, due to the sheer quantity of tales, many of which were published anonymously or pseudonymously. Various commentators, however, argue that female-authored ghost stories outnumber those by men. Jarlath Killeen acknowledges that women writers 'dominated the field in the nineteenth century as any examination of Victorian periodicals […] will attest,'[10] and Mike Ashley asserts that 'for each [ghostly or supernatural] story by a man [in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries] you would encounter three or four by women.'[11] Other critics remain more cautious in their estimations, though most agree that women's contributions were at least slightly more prevalent.[12] Regardless of the actual figures, male writers, as Killeen notes, 'have received the lion's share of critical attention.'[13] The complex publishing history surrounding the Victorian ghost story demands that critical commentary looks beyond the widely-recognised male authors long associated with the genre – Charles Dickens, Henry James, and M. R. James[14] – in order to fully appreciate its politics and aesthetics.

---

[6] Shane McCorristine describes how James 'told his tales around a single candle to a select collegiate audience, usually at Christmas,' thus assigning them 'the status of an after-dinner curio, like a fine cigar.' Shane McCorristine, 'Academia, Avocation and Ludicity in the Supernatural Fiction of M. R. James', *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*, 13 (2007), 54-65 (56).

[7] *Ghost Stories for Christmas with Christopher Lee,* dir. by Eleanor Yule (BBC, 2000).

[8] Nina Auerbach, 'Ghosts of Ghosts', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32. 1 (2004), 277-84 (280).

[9] See, for example, Jenny Uglow 'Introduction' (1988), in *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*, ed. by Richard Dalby (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1992 [1988]), pp. ix-vii; Thomas H. Fick, 'Authentic Ghosts and Real Bodies: Negotiating Power in Nineteenth-Century Women's Ghost Stories', *South Atlantic Review*, 64. 2 (Spring 1999), 81-97; and Jarlath Killeen, 'Gendering the ghost story? Victorian women and the challenge of the phantom', in *The Ghost Story from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century: A Ghostly Genre*, ed. by Helen Conrad O'Briain and Julie Anne Stevens (Dublin: Four Courts Press Ltd., 2010), pp. 81-96.

[10] Killeen (2010), p. 83.

[11] Strangely, Ashley cites no source for this somewhat excessive estimation. Mike Ashley, 'Introduction', in *Unforgettable Ghost Stories by Women Writers*, ed. by Mike Ashley (Mineola: Dover, 2008), pp. v-vi (p. v).

[12] See, for example, Richard Dalby's statement that female authors produced 'at least fifty per cent of quality examples' of classic ghost stories published in Britain in the past one hundred and fifty years, particularly in the nineteenth century. Richard Dalby, 'Preface' in Dalby (1992), pp. vii-viii (p. vii).

[13] Killeen (2010), p. 83.

[14] We might also add J. S. Le Fanu to this list, although his excellent work remains relatively unknown outside of academia. The other authors are associated with the genre through extensive critical appraisals of their tales, as well as through radio and television dramatizations.

This thesis aims to contribute to the scholarly reappraisal of the Victorian ghost story and gender in particular by focussing on four women writers, all of whom were key figures in the genre's development. In staging a materialist analysis of the concerns and production environments of the ghost story, my study demonstrates how this popular fiction medium enabled female writers to critique and even alter the material conditions of middle-class women's lives. Critical work on the female-authored ghost story has already started to highlight the role played by writers such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915), Rhoda Broughton (1840-1920), Amelia B. Edwards (1831-92), Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-65), Violet Hunt (1862-1942), Margaret Oliphant (1828-97), Edith Nesbit (1858-1924), Charlotte Riddell (1832-1906), and Mrs Henry Wood (1814-87) in the nineteenth-century evolution of the spectral tale. While recent publications – both commercial and scholarly – have been successful in challenging the archetypal image of the male-narrated Victorian ghost story, few monograph-length critical studies of female-authored supernatural tales and the sites of their circulation exist.[15] This sparseness makes it difficult to trace the complexities of women's endeavours in the form, especially in terms of acknowledging correspondences and divergences between writers, discussing the impact and diversity of publication venues, and establishing a justifiable (but not homogenising) account of why so many women writers were attracted to the ghost story genre. Though treated in articles, these issues can be interrogated more comprehensively in monograph-length accounts. This thesis aims to perform such work, by focussing on ghost stories by Charlotte Riddell, Margaret Oliphant, Vernon Lee, and Edith Nesbit.

Haunted Matters: Objects, Bodies, and Epistemology in Victorian Women's Ghost Stories argues that mid- to late-nineteenth century ghost stories authored by British women capitalise on the ghost's encounter with, and dependency on, material objects, physical bodies, and the epistemological questions associated with such things. Frequently viewed as an ethereal or anti-materialist genre,[16] I suggest instead that the ghost story provided a means through which women writers could interrogate their cultural status in a patriarchal society that was continually attempting to objectify or 'fix' them into contradictory roles. Victorian women were subject to what Alison Bashford terms the 'tradition embedded in

---

[15] Perhaps the most famous and influential monograph-length study of nineteenth-century women writers' use of ghosts and the supernatural is Vanessa D. Dickerson's *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), discussed more fully later in this introduction.

[16] Srdjan Smajic, for example, argues that 'ghosts in the Victorian era […] channel a dissatisfaction with mechanistic models of the universe and the displacement of intuition- and faith-based forms of knowledge by materialism and scientific naturalism,' and that '[g]host stories contributed to [the] resistance to materialism.' Srdjan Smajic, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 55.

Western culture, of thinking of women *as* their bodies – defined and controlled by their organs, their sexuality, their corporeality.'[17] For some nineteenth-century commentators, this designation justified women's subjugation, and explained their seeming susceptibility to excessive emotion.[18] Women of the period were also critiqued for their apparent 'dreaminess, idealism, and reverence,'[19] but simultaneously condemned for failing to 'extend their reasoning beyond the range of the physical world.'[20] Too prone to flights of fancy or too invested in the 'follies and frivolity' of everyday life,[21] Victorian women's actions were explained away on the grounds of their seemingly inferior biological composition, their 'poverty of spirit and timidity of mind.'[22] A preoccupation with objects, bodies, and perception enabled the writers I focus on here to query this paradoxical cultural view of women as both spiritual and physical, as unearthly angels and leaking bodies, through varied explorations of the material world.

The ghost story, in being aligned with both ethereality and materiality, allowed female authors to investigate the interdependency and ambiguity between these concepts through a focus on gender. Ghosts, as Auerbach asserts, 'were often more prosaically present than the living,'[23] and the fictional forms which enclosed them regularly relied on material things in conveying their sense of mystery. Victorian ghost stories teem with haunted houses, wraithlike but physically powerful creatures, traumatised bodies, and troubled perception. Women's supernatural writing, as Rosemary Jackson argues, might be considered a 'feminist enterprise' insofar as it 'threatens to dissolve' many of the seemingly 'rigid boundaries' upon which patriarchal culture relies.[24] Crucially, however, the spectral tales considered here did not always directly reject materialism, but instead

---

[17] Alison Bashford, *Purity and Pollution: Gender, Embodiment and Victorian Medicine* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000 [1998]), p. 57.

[18] Women's emotional responses were often attributed to their nerves, in line with the Victorian trend of pathologising and thus delegitimising female behaviour. One nineteenth-century commentator, for example, intimated that women's emotional experiences were intellectually inferior to those of their male counterparts, in stating that women 'cannot soar into the region of abstract emotion' as men do, as '[m]uch of what passes in women for true emotion is mere nervous excitability.' J. C. H. 'The "Eternal Feminine" Question', *The Magazine of Music*, 11. 6 (Jun 1894), 125-26 (125).

[19] Susan Poznar, 'Whose Body? The "Willing" or "Unwilling" Mesmerized Woman in Late Victorian Fiction', in *Women and the Victorian Occult*, ed. by Tatiana Kontou (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), pp. 138-61 (p. 153).

[20] J. G. Spurzheim, *Phrenology, or the Doctrine of Mental Phenomena, Vol. 1* (Boston: Marsh, Capen, and Lyon, 1833), p. 97; quoted in Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 18.

[21] Susan Johnston, *Women and Domestic Experience in Victorian Political Fiction* (Westport: Greenwood, 2001), p. 25.

[22] Margaret Oliphant [published under 'M. O. W. O.'], 'The Grievances of Women', *Fraser's Magazine*, 605 (May 1880), 698-710 (698).

[23] Auerbach (2004), 277.

[24] Rosemary Jackson, 'Introduction', in *What Did Miss Darrington See?: An Anthology of Feminist Supernatural Fiction,* ed. by Jessica Amanda Salmonson (New York: The Feminist Press, 1989), pp. xv-xxxv (p. xviii).

employed things, bodies and epistemologies as vehicles for feminist critique. The ghost story thus supplied a platform through which women writers could negotiate the troubled dynamics between 'masculine' materialism and 'feminine' ethereality through narratives which also 'criticis[ed] and undermin[ed] the structures which constrained their lives.'[25] Encouragingly, to engage these ideas through popular fiction simultaneously allowed women to alter their material circumstances by earning money. This earning potential offered women a significant means by which to address the conditions of literary production in the period, with the ethereal supernaturalism of their subject belying the materialist concerns of their intervention. This study thus questions the assumption that the ghost story was solely focussed on 'otherwordly' concerns and that its 'necessary insistence on the reality of life after death […] provided a buttress of sorts against materialism.'[26] Its reappraisal of women's ghost stories contributes to the recovery of the breadth and variety of nineteenth-century female literary production, while also refining and redefining critical approaches to Victorian representations of femininity.

This study's interest in the ghost story as specifically concerned with these material questions is focused through four key representational sites: their treatment of money and the financial market; of empiricist theories of vision and the male gaze; of object culture and the construction of femininity; and of late Victorian marriage and the female corpse. Each of these sites forms the context for readings of stories by Riddell, Oliphant, Lee, and Nesbit, most of whom pursued careers in the periodical market. *Haunted Matters* is therefore focused, but not parochial, in its concerns, which enables it to avoid the generalisations and sweeping assumptions that can sometimes diminish accounts of women's literary production. Although brought together here, these women utilised ghost stories in significantly different ways: Oliphant's consolatory tales privilege a traditionally 'feminine' epistemology, contrasting with Nesbit's violent horror stories, which stage a stinging critique of the misogyny encoded into Victorian marriage and *fin de siècle* Gothic fiction. And while Riddell's tales capitalise on the insecurity of wealth and capital in Victorian Britain to demonstrate women's specific vulnerability within a patriarchal system, Lee's stories are more concerned with the personalised connections accreting to

---

[25] Uglow (1992), p. xi.
[26] Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Book of [English] Ghost Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1986]), ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert, pp. ix-xvii (p. xiii). Cox and Gilbert reference this issue when discussing the ghost story's links to Spiritualism and theological doubt; however, they also offer several other reasons for the enduring popularity of the genre, and remain aware of what they term 'the difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of imposing order on the tradition of ghost fiction in English' (p. xvi).

objects in their role as what Bill Brown terms 'things,'[27] using them as a platform through which to interrogate cultural myths about femininity. Nonetheless, all four writers engage with the well-recognised concerns around the status of Victorian women, crucially re-orientating the ghost story form itself towards material concerns.

Countering claims that female-authored ghost stories are escapist, anti-materialist, or passive reflections of their reduced status,[28] *Haunted Matters* participates in the critical rehabilitation of the popular from 'something that cheapens public discourse' into a more dynamic and self-reflexive mode which can critique or undermine dominant ideologies.[29] Three of the four selected authors were driven by financial imperatives to write, acutely illustrating how intertwined were the supernatural features of the stories with the hard-pressed material realities of women's everyday lives. This important context shapes the stories themselves, and necessitates that critical assessment addresses the relationship between literature and material economies (not always undertaken in studies of the supernatural). My decision to focus on ghost stories, particularly those published in the periodical press, emerges from this critical nexus, favouring a historicist, broadly cultural studies approach. This popular fiction medium enabled the chosen writers to critique the masculine social and professional venues from which they were often excluded.

Critical perplexity surrounds the question of why many women writers were drawn to 'a genre which could be seen as perpetuating the view of women as peculiarly disposed to feel the attraction of the phantasmal.'[30] Vanessa D. Dickerson argues that the figure of the ghost functioned as a useful metaphor through which women could articulate their own liminal and partially invisible cultural status.[31] Although I draw on aspects of this approach, I revise its criteria in questioning the designation of women as inherently ghostly, focusing on these female writers' engagement with (rather than exclusion from) cultural questions surrounding things and bodies. Rather than reading the ghost as an

---

[27] For Brown, objects become 'things' when we begin to take notice of them; mundane material objects are transformed into mysterious and/or evocative things via the subject-object relationship. Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28. 1: Things (Autumn 2001), 1-22.

[28] Julia Briggs, for example, suggests that '[m]any of the most effective ghost stories are quite reasonably concerned with entertaining, rather than making a serious contribution to literature' and that 'much of' Vernon Lee's supernatural work 'was escapist in its tendency.' Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1977), pp. 8, 123. More recent critics, however, counter their discussions of the genre's escapist pleasures with acknowledgement of its weightier impulses.

[29] Roger Luckhurst uses this term in arguing against '[o]ne of the standard denigrations of popular culture' which links it to 'uncritical gorging and passive absorption [...] sensation and emotional excess.' Roger Luckhurst, 'The public sphere, popular culture and the true meaning of the zombie apocalypse', in *The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction*, ed. by David Glover and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 68-85 (p. 68).

[30] Killeen (2010), p. 83.

[31] Dickerson (1996), p. 5.

emblem of liminal femininity, a tendency which often pervades studies of female-authored supernatural fiction, I chart these women's very real contributions to debates about finance, science, object culture, and marriage through the medium of the ghost story. My study thus follows on from Simon Hay's recent challenge to perceptions of the form as antithetical to the realist novel,[32] and looks specifically at how its entanglements with the material world intersect with gender. The ghost story supplied a fertile site against which these writers could stage a coded critique of Victorian Britain's gendered regulations regarding the body and property. Whether discussing the fragility of money or the inadequacy of visual epistemology, gratuitous images of destroyed female bodies or the endurance of the *femme fatale*, these authors utilised the ghost story to critique the ways in which their limited property and legal rights were routinely justified on a range of contradictory assumptions about womanhood.

Critical Contexts I: Women, the Gothic, and the Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press

While recognising the dangers of reductive generalism, it is imperative to define what we mean by the term 'ghost story.' David Blair suggests that the genre was, in the nineteenth century, 'a major extension of Gothic writing,'[33] and critics sometimes assume the two genres are interlinked, or even almost synonymous.[34] The Victorian ghost story was certainly influenced by its eighteenth-century Gothic predecessor, but to read it as an inherently Gothic form is problematic insofar it neglects both the specificity and the diversity of the ghost story. The two genres may share focus on 'gloomy, isolated' environments,[35] but they differ structurally and stylistically: according to Cox and Gilbert, the ghost story's 'typically domestic' tone and continual rejection of rational explanation remains distinct from the more 'indulgently heroic and ostentatiously fictitious' flamboyance of Gothic fiction.[36] The issue is complicated even further by the fact that 'Gothic' itself is a highly vexed categorisation. Although *Haunted Matters* will at times

---

[32] Hay emphasises the similarities between the ghost story and the realist novel, suggesting that they are 'in pursuit of the same end – the representation of the structural truth of society – but going about that in a very different way.' Simon Hay, *A History of the Modern British Ghost Story* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 25.

[33] David Blair, 'Introduction', to *Gothic Short Stories*, ed. by David Blair (Ware: Wordsworth, 2002), pp. viii-xxvi (p. xvii).

[34] Diana Wallace suggests that '[i]f "the Gothic" is detached from the "Gothic novel" […] and regarded as a mode of writing rather than a genre then it becomes flexible enough to encompass the ghost story.' Diana Wallace, 'Uncanny Stories: The Ghost Story As Female Gothic', *Gothic Studies*, 6. 1 (May 2004), 57-68 (57).

[35] R. A. Gilbert, 'Ghost Stories', in in *The Handbook of the Gothic (Second Edition)*, ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009 [1998]), pp. 124-25 (p. 125).

[36] Of course, not all ghost stories are 'domestic' in tone, but it seems fair to argue that this tone recurs more frequently in ghost stories than in Gothic fiction. Cox and Gilbert (1992), p. x.

draw on the rich critical field on the Gothic, it remains imperative to distinguish the ghost story from the continually-debated Gothic tradition.

While some favour a historical definition which acknowledges the Gothic's first-wave and *fin-de-siècle* incarnations,[37] many recent critics have challenged this conventional 'ebb and flow' historiography,[38] arguing instead that 'the Gothic cultural phenomenon continues to break its boundaries.'[39] Although we might link the Gothic to the demise of the aristocratic family line, Darwin-influenced fears of degeneration, distraught heroines, ruined castles, haunted mansions, physical horror, corporeality, mutation, corruption, or morally-ambivalent urban spaces,[40] critics such as Julian Wolfreys have supported a broader classification, suggesting that the 'gothic is to be found everywhere […] but never […] in the same form twice.'[41] This loose designation, however, threatens to dissolve the form's historical significance.[42] If the gothic is an ever-changing, intangible entity to be found in everything, it becomes virtually meaningless. Baldick, wary of 'the risk of losing an important series of connected meanings,'[43] argues that we can draw together the genre's 'often nebulous associations' into a tentative definition:[44]

---

[37] For a discussion of competing definitions of the Gothic, see Julian Wolfreys, 'Preface: "I could a tale unfold", or, the Promise of Gothic', in *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. xi-xx. Wolfreys claims that a historically-stringent categorisation of first-wave Gothic depicts it as a literary movement between 1764 and 1818 or 1820, bracketed by the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* respectively. The *fin de siècle* or late Victorian Gothic emerged in the 1880s and 1890s, with the publication of texts such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).

[38] I borrow the term 'ebb and flow' from Roger Luckhurst's 'Introduction' in *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [2005]), pp. ix-xxxi (p. ix).

[39] Marie Mulvey-Roberts, 'Introduction to the First Edition', in Mulvey-Roberts (2009), pp. xx-xxiii (p. xx).

[40] I am here conflating aspects of the first-wave Gothic (heroines, castles, aristocracy) with those from the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic (degeneration, urban spaces, mutation). There is a diverse range of exciting critical work on these various incarnations of the Gothic: in addition to the previously mentioned anthologies, see, for example, *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Angela Wright, *Gothic Fiction: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Jarlath Killeen, *Gothic Literature, 1825-1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009); and *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

[41] Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 11.

[42] Of course, it remains difficult to quantify the Gothic solely in terms of its first-wave and late Victorian incarnations since, as several critics have demonstrated, Gothic themes and tropes often resurfaced in early and mid-nineteenth-century texts. Nonetheless, we can revise and expand the historical parameters of the Gothic without entirely disavowing its position in literary history. For an astute discussion of the Gothic's re-emergence in Victorian realist texts, see Peter K. Garrett, *Gothic Reflections: Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 141-224.

[43] Baldick (2009), p. xix.

[44] Baldick (2009), p. xi.

typically a Gothic tale will invoke the tyranny of the past (a family curse, the survival of archaic forms of despotism and of superstition) with such weight as to stifle the hopes of the present (the liberty of the heroine or hero) within the dead-end of physical incarceration (the dungeon, the locked room, or simply the confines of a family house closing in on itself).[45]

While Baldick's argument is relatively successful in characterising a notoriously slippery genre, it also reveals the difficulties of synthesising the ghost story into the Gothic tradition. Some ghost stories – such as those which feature malevolent spectres returning to wreak justice – fit Baldick's Gothic model of the ghastly re-emergence of the past,[46] but there are many in which the hauntings are sentimental, consolatory, mundane, or altogether morally and emotionally ambiguous.[47] Acknowledging these restrictions, *Haunted Matters* largely eschews the temptation to read the ghost story as an intrinsically Gothic medium,[48] instead championing it as a distinct literary genre in its own right.

The Gothic has, however, opened up useful avenues for the study of the female-authored ghost story: namely, in its focus on female materiality and women's lives. The literary gothic has been aligned with women since Ann Radcliffe's key role in establishing the genre,[49] and Ellen Moers's influential 1974 reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) as 'distinctly a *woman's* mythmaking on the subject of birth' brought the feminine focus to the critical fore.[50] In addition to exploring the genre's engagement with women's biological and psychological make-up, recent critical work has examined the form's condemnation of the potentially horrifying 'social relations and social institutions' through which women were oppressed.[51] Diane Long Hoeveler, for example, argues that the female

---

[45] Baldick (2009), p. xix.

[46] Examples of Victorian ghost stories which accord with Baldick's definition of the Gothic include Rosa Mulholland's 'The Haunted Organist of Hurly Burly' (1866), Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 'The Shadow in the Corner' (1879), Louisa Baldwin's 'The Weird of the Walfords' (1889), and Katharine Tynan's 'The Picture on the Wall' (1895). Many of M. R. James's supernatural tales also draw on the Gothic model of an ancient past emerging to stifle the present.

[47] Examples of ghost stories which diverge from Baldick's classification include Dinah Mulock Craik's 'The Last House in C– Street' (1856), Margaret Oliphant's 'The Lady's Walk' (1882-3), and Lanoe Falconer's 'Cecilia de Noël' (1891).

[48] The exception to this rule is the fourth chapter on Edith Nesbit, as her stories can be synthesised within the tradition of *fin de siècle* Gothic fiction.

[49] Although Walter Scott and many readers were highly appreciative of Radcliffe's works, some contemporary and modern critics were less enamoured. For a discussion of Radcliffe and the 'prejudicial interpretations' applied to her oeuvre, see Robert Miles, 'Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823)', in Mulvey-Roberts (2009), pp. 76-83.

[50] Ellen Moers, 'Female Gothic' (1974), in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, ed. by George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher (London: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 77-87 (p. 81).

[51] Eugenia C. DeLamotte argues that 'the Gothic vision has from the beginning been focused steadily on social relations and social institutions […] its simultaneous focus on the most private demons of the psyche

gothic, rather than being 'primarily concerned with depicting women's achievement of psychic maturity or socioeconomic inheritance,' can instead be read as 'a coded and veiled critique of all of those public institutions that have been erected to displace, contain, or commodify women.'[52] *Haunted Matters* applies a similar thesis to the Victorian ghost story, with emphasis on the generic and historical specificities of that mode as distinct from the structures of Gothic fiction. Not only were the genres different in tone and form,[53] but the very time-specific material production of the Victorian periodical press can be distinguished from the bourgeois roots of the Gothic novel. The accelerated development of literary production in the nineteenth century saw women increasingly turning to popular fiction forms such as the ghost story, many examples of which appeared in the burgeoning periodical press.

Haunted Matters focuses primarily on ghost stories by British female authors (defined as short stories in which a spectre appears or is otherwise implicated),[54] many of which were first published in nineteenth-century periodicals. Although most tales considered in this study were eventually compiled in single-author short fiction collections, a significant number first featured in publications such as *New Quarterly Magazine*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Fraser's Magazine*, and *Murray's Magazine*,[55] with others by the authors emerging in *London Society, Longman's Magazine,* and the *Argosy*.[56] The Victorian era's flourishing periodical press provided an outlet through which female writers could market their short works, in a society in which middle-class women's employment opportunities were limited by social convention. As Cox and Gilbert

can never be separated from this persistent preoccupation with the social realities from which those demons always, in some measure, take their shape.' Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. vii.

[52] Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), pp. xii-xiii.

[53] Although there are clearly exceptions, the eighteenth-century Gothic is primarily exemplified by novels, while nineteenth-century ghost stories are generally much shorter works. Similarly, as Cox argues, '[w]here Gothic fiction had been romantically remote in its settings and often flamboyantly atemporal, ghost stories anchored themselves firmly in the contemporary, or near contemporary, here and now.' Michael Cox, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century Ghost Stories*, ed. by Michael Cox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. xi-xix (p. xi).

[54] The term 'ghost stories' is sometimes used interchangeably with 'supernatural tales' in short-story anthologies, to cover a broad range of paranormal themes (e.g. vampirism, werewolves, telepathy, hypnotism). Though recognising the value of situating the ghost story within the broader genre of supernatural fiction, this thesis will primarily limit itself to spectral tales to maintain specificity.

[55] Margaret Oliphant's 'A Beleaguered City' (1879) appeared in *New Quarterly Magazine*, while the same author's 'The Portrait' (1885) and 'The Library Window' (1896) were published anonymously in *Blackwood's*. Vernon Lee's 'A Culture-Ghost' (1881) and 'Amour Dure' (1887) featured in *Fraser's Magazine* and *Murray's Magazine* respectively, and Edith Nesbit's 1893 collection *Grim Tales* opens with thanks to various periodicals' editors in allowing her to republish the stories (cited in Chapter Four).

[56] Charlotte Riddell's 'Sandy the Tinker' (1880) appeared in *London Society*, and Oliphant's 'The Lady's Walk' was published in two parts in *Longman's* in the winter of 1882-83. Nesbit's 'The Ebony Frame' appeared in the same publication in 1891, and her 'The Mass for the Dead' (1892) was printed in the *Argosy* the following year. See the bibliography for full publication details.

acknowledge, women's experiments with the ghost story had less to do with 'an inherent susceptibility to the supernatural […] than to the practical – often pressing – need of a certain type of educated woman to earn a living.'[57] Although their ghost stories might have appeared frivolous or even ephemeral to Victorian readers,[58] these tales' dual status as commodities and popular texts allowed women writers to stage coded criticisms of the male-orientated culture.

Women's involvement in the thriving literary arena of the nineteenth century granted them access to certain freedoms which might otherwise have remained unavailable. As 'a major public space for discourses about society, politics, culture, public order, and larger worlds of foreign and imperial affairs,'[59] the periodical press supplied a venue through which women could engage with popular cultural debates as a means to earn money. Alexis Easley explains that the policy of anonymous publication potentially allowed women writers to eschew the constraints imposed on them, insofar as it provided 'effective cover for exploring a variety of conventionally "masculine" social issues' while enabling them 'to evade essentialised notions of "feminine" voice and identity.'[60] Easley remains sensitive to the irony here: the periodical press, as well as affording means of empowerment, was also 'the primary medium concerned with constructing negative stereotypes of the female author,' and the practice of anonymity entailed a 'suppression of individual identity' which hardly seems conducive to the development of women's literature.[61] Nonetheless, it supplied a literary site through which female commentators could enter debates from 'a position less "contaminated" by gender definitions.'[62] Although it is difficult to establish the extent to which women writers in general practiced anonymity (especially in the case of lesser known authors), it is clear that all of my

---

[57] Cox and Gilbert (1992), p. xiv.

[58] Many nineteenth-century reviews of ghost story collections, as we will see throughout *Haunted Matters*, focussed on their capacity to scare and/or to entertain.

[59] Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell, 'Introduction: Encountering the Press', in *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 1-7 (p. 2).

[60] Alexis Easley, *First-Person Anonymous: Women Writers and Victorian Print Media, 1830-1870* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), p. 1.

[61] Easley (2004), p. 3. Intriguingly, many female-authored ghost stories employ a male narrator, further emphasising the suppression of female identity implied in anonymous or pseudonymous publication. While Jenny Uglow argues that this choice might have emerged from the fact that 'the experience of seeing a ghost pushes men into conventional female roles: timid, nervous, helpless,' this claim risks mapping an overly homogenous interpretation onto a widespread cultural practice. Uglow (1992), p. xvii. Women writers might have adopted male voices in order to experiment with reader's assumptions and expectations; to allow them to partially penetrate and explore male-orientated environments; to portray femininity from an outsider's perspective; to exploit opportunities created by anonymous publishing; to situate their own works within a tradition which (as demonstrated earlier) was often perceived to focus on men; or to engage with the 'Woman question' without experiencing reprisals from the press.

[62] Easley (2004), p. 3.

selected writers played with some aspect of gender-ambivalent identity in the periodical publication of their ghost stories.[63]

The importance of women's contributions to the Victorian periodical press – explored by critics such as Easley, Jennifer Phegley, and Kathryn Ledbetter[64] – forms an integral part of the diverse and exciting scholarship on the significance of periodicals to nineteenth-century literary and cultural studies. This field has developed considerably in the past thirty years, following the acknowledgment in the 1990s that 'the circulation of periodicals and newspapers was larger and more influential in the nineteenth century than [the] printed book, and served a more varied constituency in all walks of life.'[65] Much of this scholarship has a feminist impetus in highlighting the breadth and variety of women's contributions, and interrogating the periodical press's role in giving voice to (and thus helping to empower) female subjects. Women's diverse responsibilities as editors, writers, and readers, as Phegley argues, positioned them as 'participants in a cultural debate rather than subjects to be debated' in a literary context which enabled 'greater personal and professional opportunities for women.'[66]

This crucial feminist material on the nineteenth-century periodical has yet to be fully utilised in critical discussions of Victorian women's ghost stories, though studies of ghost fiction in the preceding century, by E. J. Clery and Sasha Handley, have persuasively linked it to emergent consumerism and the changing nature of print culture.[67] Warning against the assumption that the 'Age of Reason' was intrinsically hostile to the supernatural, Clery explores how paranormal fiction was influenced by and in conversation with the literary marketplace, in a society increasingly demanding entertainment. For Clery, the 'seriousness of scepticism and faith' in eighteenth-century Britain was countered

---

[63] Charlotte Riddell published non-supernatural work under the pseudonyms R. V. M. Sparling, Rainey Hawthorne, and F. G. Trafford – as well as under her real title of Mrs J. H. Riddell – and her supernatural tale 'Sandy the Tinker' (1880) appeared anonymously. Margaret Oliphant established a literary persona through her extensive contributions to *Blackwood's*, but the three of her tales considered in this study were all published anonymously. (Two of the three texts employ a male narrator, but it might be argued that Oliphant's subtitles about 'the seen and the unseen' compromise the stories' apparent anonymity.) Violet Paget adopted the male pseudonym 'Vernon Lee' explicitly to distance herself from the domain of women's writing, although this was something of an open secret. Many of Edith Nesbit's supernatural stories appeared under the gender-ambiguous 'E. Nesbit'.

[64] Jennifer Phegley, *Educating the Proper Woman Reader: Victorian Family Magazines and the Cultural Health of the Nation* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2004); Kathryn Ledbetter, *British Victorian Women's Periodicals: Beauty, Civilization, and Poetry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[65] J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society*, ed. by J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), pp. 3-8 (p. 3).

[66] Phegley (2004), p. 7.

[67] E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 [1995]); Sasha Handley, *Visions of an Unseen World: Ghost Beliefs and Ghost Stories in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007).

by 'complimentary forms of production and consumption positing a new object: the spectre as spectacle.'[68] Handley's historicist study foregrounds the significance of the developing printing industry, claiming that the ghost story's migration 'between traditional texts and new literary genres' in the eighteenth century privileges its 'persistent social relevance and flexibility.'[69] Both Clery and Handley draw extensively on literary contexts in expounding their arguments, a focus which would certainly benefit analyses of ghost stories from the following century.[70] This thesis will draw on the rich critical material on nineteenth-century periodicals in its exploration of Victorian women's spectral fiction, investigating how these contexts shaped their content while providing a lucrative arena for women writers. Despite the seemingly short, transient, elliptical, and conventional form of the ghost story, it provided potent means through which female authors could critique patriarchal institutions and reflect on their reduced social status. *Haunted Matters* thus seeks to interrogate the complicated relationship between supernatural writing and materialist cultures, an increasingly important concern in Victorian studies, but not always fully recognised in studies of the ghost story. It also takes a gendered approach to this field to offer new means through which the dynamics between supernaturalism and materialism can be negotiated.

Critical Contexts II: The Ghost Story as Object of Study

The Victorian ghost story remains enduringly popular in modern culture, but there are curiously few twentieth-century monograph-length accounts which focus exclusively on the genre.[71] Julia Briggs, in the preface to her classic study *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (1977), suggests that this is because it is 'an area at once vast, amorphous, and notoriously difficult to define,'[72] a view echoed by a number of later critics attempting to explain this neglect.[73] Briggs – along with Peter Penzoldt in *The Supernatural in Fiction* (1952) and Jack Sullivan in *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* (1978)[74] – pioneered the study of the ghost story

---

[68] Clery (1999), p. 25.
[69] Handley (2007), p. 12.
[70] Although seminal studies of the ghost story have been produced by critics such as Briggs, it seems that few of these pay close attention to the literary contexts in which these tales were published. More recent publications engage with this issue in places, but no full-length feminist study of the ghost story examines how women's contributions were shaped by the periodical venues in which they appeared.
[71] Essays or chapters on the Victorian ghost story are, however, often synthesised within critical collections or monographs considering the nineteenth-century supernatural or *fin-de-siècle* Gothic.
[72] Briggs (1977), p. 7.
[73] See Auerbach (2004) and Killeen (2010).
[74] Peter Penzoldt, *The Supernatural in Fiction* (London: P. Nevill, 1952); Jack Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978).

as an important literary genre,[75] challenging assumptions that its purpose to entertain and frighten undermined its cultural value.[76] These early studies were crucial in the development of the critical field, promoting discussions of the ghost story's alliance with nostalgia (Briggs), humour (Sullivan), and deep-rooted fears (Penzoldt) through analyses of its stylistic features. Briggs's study is especially notable for its enduring relevance, and is still referenced as one of the seminal texts on Victorian supernatural fiction.

While not denying that Briggs's monograph remains vital in assessing how the genre changed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *Haunted Matters* takes issue with some of its more outdated assumptions. I specifically challenge the claim that 'the symbolic meaning of the ghost story most consistently exploited was the most obvious one – its rejection of materialism,' and the idea that the form 'gave comforting proof that there *was* something beyond [the material world].'[77] Some tales might endorse a spiritualistic worldview and/or provide consolation,[78] but to read the genre primarily in these terms is extremely problematic. As I aim to demonstrate, the form's relationship with materialism was far more complex than Briggs's reading suggests, and discerning Victorian readers were unlikely to interpret fiction as 'proof' of a preternatural world. Instead, the ghost story's alliance with both ethereality and materialism enabled authors to interrogate a range of cultural issues, not merely those surrounding spirituality and religion.

Briggs acknowledged in her preface that *Night Visitors* was the first scholarly work on the English ghost story to be published in twenty-five years. Following its release, there was another extended critical silence, although interest in the social history of nineteenth-century Spiritualism and psychical research was revived in the 1980s with Janet Oppenheim's *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (1985) and Alex Owen's *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in*

---

[75] As a 2007 obituary for Briggs noted, at the time in which the 'wide-ranging, learned and invitingly-written' *Night Visitors* was published, 'Oxford [University] would not allow [the ghost story] as a doctoral subject.' William St Clair, 'Obituaries: Professor Julia Briggs, English scholar and biographer', *The Independent* (Fri 17th August 2007) <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/professor-julia-briggs-461881.html> [accessed 19/1/11].

[76] This attitude can also be connected to developments in literary criticism which sought to move away from traditional ideas about literary 'quality' and the canon, partially influenced by the rise of cultural materialism.

[77] Briggs (1977), p. 24.

[78] See, for example, Margaret Oliphant's 'Old Lady Mary' (1884), in which a woman who dies without making a formal will receives God's blessing to make restitution from beyond the grave, and Mary E. Wilkins [Freeman]'s 'The Lost Ghost' (1903), in which a disconsolate child spectre is united with a lonely spinster in a mutually-fulfilling substitute maternal relationship.

Late Victorian England (1989).[79] This interest has persisted into the twenty-first century, with critics such as Marlene Tromp, Tatiana Kontou, Jill Galvan, and Christine Ferguson investigating the nineteenth-century spiritualist movement, often through a gendered lens.[80] Scholarship on late Victorian occult science and psychical research also intersected with this critical material on spiritualism in later years, with monographs by Pamela Thurschwell, Roger Luckhurst, and Hilary Grimes discussing the extent to which *fin de siècle* mental science, technology, and psychical research overlapped.[81] In questioning the apparent antithesis between science and spiritualism, such studies, as Christine Ferguson acknowledges, importantly depict the 'relationship […] between spiritualism, science, and literature' as 'one of reciprocality and dynamic symbiosis rather than hostile opposition.'[82] During the 1990s and beyond, the publication of anthologies of ghost stories and the development of the Wordsworth Mystery and Supernatural series fuelled and responded to a surge in the popularity of Victorian and Edwardian weird tales among non-academic readers.[83] Scholarly work on nineteenth-century supernatural fiction, however, has largely remained limited to article- and chapter-length studies, or books on individual authors. Critical anthologies such as *The Haunted Mind: The Supernatural in Victorian Literature* (1999) and *The Victorian Supernatural* (2004) hinted tantalisingly at a reappraisal of the genre, but many of the included essays focussed on supernatural genres outwith the confines of the ghost story, or on the invasion of the otherworldly into realist texts.[84]

---

[79] Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004 [1989]). Diana Basham also discusses Spiritualism in her monograph on Victorian women and the supernatural; Diana Basham, *The Trial of Women: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

[80] Marlene Tromp, *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Tatiana Kontou, *Spiritualism and Women's Writing: From the Fin de Siècle to the Neo-Victorian* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Jill Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, the Occult, and Communication Technologies, 1859-1919* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); and Christine Ferguson, *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

[81] Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Hilary Grimes, *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny, and Scenes of Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

[82] Christine Ferguson, 'Recent Studies in Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism', *Literature Compass*, 9. 6 (2012), 431-40 (433). Ferguson is talking about the studies by Thurschwell and Luckhurst, but Grimes's monograph can also be synthesised within this tradition.

[83] The emergence of Valancourt Books in 2005 also contributed to the project of resurrecting lost or forgotten supernatural and Gothic works from the nineteenth century. The increasing popularity of e-readers such as the Kindle might also play a role, in that the absence of copyright restrictions means that Victorian texts can be purchased for pennies or often for free in electronic form.

[84] *The Haunted Mind: The Supernatural in Victorian Literature*, ed. by Elton E. Smith and Robert Haas (Kent: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1999); *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and

Ghost-seeing came to the critical fore in 2010, with detailed monographs by Shane McCorristine and Srdjan Smajic balancing fictional and non-fictional sources in signalling the fertility of the topic for further research.[85] Several recent literary studies which focus exclusively on the ghost story similarly capitalise on this fruitfulness.

The three twenty-first century monographs which discuss the Victorian ghost story at length – Andrew Smith's *The Ghost Story: A Cultural History, 1840-1920* (2010), Simon Hay's *A History of the Modern British Ghost Story* (2011), and Luke Thurston's *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism: The Haunting Interval* (2012) – synthesise it within a literary tradition which endured into the twentieth century. While Smith and Hay favour historicist accounts which remain sensitive to the genre's trajectory, Thurston's post-structuralist analysis utilises Deleuzean theory in reading the ghost as an emblem of narrative uncertainty. An examination of the three texts reveals the persistence of a restrictive masculinist tendency to primarily associate the nineteenth-century ghost story with male writers. The final two monographs also draw on, to varying extents, the current critical inclination to metaphorize the spectral.

Smith's historicist account resituates the genre within its Victorian economic contexts, delineating the ghost story's entanglements with financial debates, such as those on the role of the Stock Market, and on the controversy around charity and reform.[86] Despite his various disclaimers as to women's crucial involvement in the genre, Smith's study devotes only a single chapter to female writers, even though his astute close readings there reveal the diversity of their contributions and the inadequacy of a sole chapter in exploring them. My thesis aims to revise and expand upon Smith's claim that Victorian women's ghost stories 'share a concern about cultural visibility which is key to understanding their configurations of the spectral.'[87] Although women's apparent lack of cultural visibility contributed to their subjugation, they were also paradoxically framed as

---

Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). The earlier collection is heavily weighted towards male authors.

[85] While McCorristine's monograph interrogates ghost-seeing through a range of real, fictional, and scientific accounts, Smajic's, though also broad in scope, investigates how both ghost stories and detective fiction drew on scientific theories of vision. Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Smajic (2010).

[86] Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story, 1840-1920: A Cultural History* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010).

[87] Smith (2010), p. 93. While Smith links this cultural visibility to women's 'specific engagements with ideas about love and its associations with money (Riddell) and history (Lee and Sinclair),' I eschew the focus on love in favour of objects, bodies, and epistemology.

aesthetic objects worthy of appreciation, providing women writers with a potent motif through which to critique the gendered dynamics of visibility and vision.[88]

Simon Hay's excellent monograph *A History of the Modern British Ghost Story* (2011) pays more attention to women writers' contributions, but still its focus remains weighted towards men.[89] Hay's detailed study, which reads Riddell's 'The Open Door' (1882) as an 'exemplary' ghost story,[90] traces the genre's development through its relationship to other literary forms such as the historical novel, realism, and naturalism, as well as to empire and modernism. For Hay, the ghost story 'provides an alternative to the novel' in supplying a stage on which 'the same ideological battles are being fought out in different ways,' allowing it to both mirror and undermine traditional realism.[91] While this doubling effect can facilitate interrogations of the past or the unveiling of hidden truths in nineteenth-century spectral narratives, Hay argues that ghosts, in the twentieth century, break free of their generic trappings to function as metaphors for the modernist condition, figuring 'not the past returning to the present, but rather the present itself.'[92] Hay's analysis stages a valuable corrective to the ghost story's apparent opposition to realism, but the gendered aspects of these interchanges remain largely unexplored. *Haunted Matters* seeks to interrogate this neglected area, specifically countering Hay's claim that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ghost story 'became not an engagement with reality but a distraction from it.'[93]

The metaphorization of the spectral, acknowledged by Hay with regards to modernism, has proved extremely pervasive in studies of the supernatural. Critics such as Julian Wolfreys and Luke Thurston use haunting as an analogy for interpretational reading.[94] In *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (2002),

---

[88] In Chapter Two, I discuss how Margaret Oliphant's stories in particular destabilise the primacy of vision and the gendered dynamics of looking.

[89] Although Hay's wide-ranging study examines stories by Charlotte Riddell and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, his attention to male writers – such as Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, M. R. James, Rudyard Kipling, and Joseph Conrad – eclipses this focus. Hay's study also extends the ghost story beyond its generally accepted parameters in discussing modernist, postcolonial, and African-American magic realist texts.

[90] Hay (2011), p. 1.

[91] Hay (2011), p. 22.

[92] Hay (2011), p. 26. This claim about the inherent ghostliness of modernity partially echoes McCorristine's argument that 'ghost-seeing is contiguous with the idea of a mind that is haunted by itself and a subjectivity that is ghost-ridden' and his reading of 'the spectral self as the true ghost in the modern age.' McCorristine (2010), p. 7. While Hay interrogates this idea primarily through fiction, McCorristine's multifaceted study draws on fiction in conjunction with scientific sources, Victorian periodical articles, case studies by the Society of Psychical Research, spiritualist accounts, and anthropological texts.

[93] Hay (2011), p. 123.

[94] This tendency can be attributed to post-structuralist Jacques Derrida's highly influential *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, intro. by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (New York and London: Routledge, 1994 [1993]). Derrida's text, which interrogates how Marxist theories of global capitalism continue to 'haunt' the late twentieth-century

Wolfreys employs Derridean theory to argue that the uncanny is an effect of all fiction, examining the ways in which (primarily realist) texts employ ghostliness to negotiate themes such as the displacement of faith, the fragmentation of the city of London, impersonal memory, and (in)visibility.[95] Though intriguing, the monograph's central claim that 'all forms of narrative are spectral to some extent' undermines the cultural importance of the ghost.[96] Wolfreys' text seems symptomatic of the critical trend in which the Victorian ghost itself – which Peter Buse and Andrew Stott describe as an 'anachronistic' figure associated with 'spiritualists, mediums, […] séances, and [the] Society for Psychical Research'[97] – is superseded by the persistent 'trope of spectrality in culture.'[98] This trope also provides a framework for perhaps the most recent monograph on the ghost story.

Thurston's *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism: The Haunting Interval* (2012) is more concerned with literary ghost stories than Wolfreys' text, but it similarly risks collapsing the ghost's features and parameters. Thurston argues that the ghost is 'essential[ly] incompatibl[e] with the semiotic regime of discourse,'[99] in being 'an intrusive, illegible "guest" element at odds with a "host" structure of discursive legibility.'[100] Thurston's meticulous close readings use Deleuzean theory in tracing this idea, but to read the ghost's emergence as 'a haunting interval excluded by definition from the ordinarily temporal, representable ontology of worldly facts' neglects the many literary spectres who occupy a comprehensible place in the material world,[101] rectifying past

world, appears to have instigated a shift in thinking about the ghost, not as a pale ethereal being which haunts gloomy spaces, but as an evocative metaphor through which we can understand history and literature. Although I will not be using Derrida's 'hauntology' as a framework against which to situate my own analyses, its rehabilitation and revision of the ghost has proved so influential that McCorristine is perhaps right to argue that 'no critical research dealing with ghosts and ghost-seeing can afford to be unaware of [it].' McCorristine (2010), p. 5. For discussions of the persistence of Derrida's theorisation of spectrality, see *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), and Colin Davis, '*État Présent*: Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms', *French Studies*, 59. 3 (2005), 373-79.

[95] I did not include Wolfreys' monograph in the list of twenty-first-century studies of the ghost story as, despite its title, it pays very little attention to literary ghost stories, instead focussing on the use of haunting within realist texts.

[96] Wolfreys (2002), p. 2.

[97] Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, 'Introduction: A Future for Haunting', in Buse and Stott (1999), pp. 1-20 (p. 1).

[98] Buse and Stott (1999), p. 3. Christine Berthin also reiterates this point in virtually identical terms, in her study of the Gothic: 'While ghosts have been explained away, spectrality has become a major trope of our culture and our cultural discourses […] haunting is part of the processes of literature and textuality, and ghosts have become theoretical objects.' Her monograph aims to explain, 'through the Gothic tradition, this shift from the figure of the ghost as narrative device to spectrality as literary trope and critical tool.' Christine Berthin, *Gothic Hauntings: Melancholy Crypts and Textual Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 1.

[99] Luke Thurston, *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism: The Haunting Interval* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), p. 5.

[100] Thurston (2012), p. 6.

[101] Thurston (2012), p. 166.

wrongs, exposing illicit inheritors, or providing assistance to the living.[102] Victorian spectres are often more worldly than Thurston's monograph admits. While not denying the significant theoretical avenues opened up by both Wolfreys and Thurston, *Haunted Matters* favours a historicist interpretation which focuses on actual literary ghosts, exercising caution in employing spectrality as a metaphorical trope.[103] As Auerbach acknowledges in discussing *Victorian Hauntings*, aligning the ghost with 'opaque abstractions' can compromise 'the particularity' of analyses in detrimental ways.[104] Just as the Gothic's fluidity potentially dilutes its potency, so too does the ghost diminish in its ultimate transformation into metaphor. If the ghost becomes a mere symbol for anything disruptive, liminal, or uncertain, its cultural and historical resonances are threatened. Moreover, we risk underestimating its important connection to the material world, a relationship central to the current study.

Thurston's study, like those by Smith and Hay, also demonstrates a male bias: although he discusses twentieth-century writers May Sinclair and Elizabeth Bowen at length, the nineteenth-century ghost story is largely represented by the three male figures commonly associated with the form. This sense of partiality, suffusing modern interpretations of the ghost story for decades, has not passed unnoticed among modern critics. In 1989, Jessica Amanda Salmonson complained that the tradition of nineteenth- and twentieth-century women's supernatural writing remained 'unrecognised by most scholars.'[105] Though the intervening years have partially addressed this inattention, this critical revival must be sustained to comprehend the true scope and range of Victorian women's ghost stories. Contemporary studies of the genre continue to be dominated by the three male heavyweights: Henry James, M. R. James, and especially Charles Dickens. It is thus imperative to extend and revise theories of the ghost story to accommodate works by 'all those lesser or forgotten authors of stories published by the hundreds in periodicals.'[106] *Haunted Matters* supplies a timely introjection into the field in its discussion of some of these neglected tales. This thesis thus hopes to redress the gendered imbalance by

---

[102] Riddell's ghosts, in particular, seem to stage a challenge to Thurston's thesis.

[103] Of course, to say that the ghost should *never* be linked to metaphor would be highly unproductive and unrealistic. I contend, however, that the critical tendency to trope the spectral can have negative effects when pushed to its extreme, for example in veiling the ghost's historical status and its connections to the material world. *Haunted Matters* thus uses spectrality as metaphor only where specifically relevant, for example in discussing how Charlotte Riddell aligns the instability of the financial market with the intangibility of the ghost.

[104] Auerbach (2004), 278.

[105] Jessica Amanda Salmonson, 'Preface', in Salmonson (1989), pp. ix-xiv (p. ix).

[106] Jennifer Bann, reviewing Thurston's book, uses this term in complaining that the nineteenth-century ghost story is largely represented by Charles Dickens. Jennifer Bann, 'Review of *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism: The Haunting Interval*' [reviewed 8/2/13], *Review 19* <http://test.nbol-19.org/view_doc.php?index=266> [accessed 4/4/14].

focussing exclusively on female writers, utilising a range of critical studies to promote its central feminist-historicist argument. In doing so, it draws on the fascinating, but disappointingly sparse, scholarly field on female-authored supernatural tales.

Critical Contexts III: The Female Author of Supernatural Fiction

Smith, Hay, and Thurston crucially promote study of the nineteenth-century ghost story, but their attempts to offer an overview of such a varied literary form signal the need for further research, especially regarding women writers' contributions. While some critics have endeavoured to address this issue, most accounts, throughout the past thirty years, have largely been limited to article- or chapter-length discussions of particular tales or authors.[107] One of the earliest and only monographs on Victorian women writers' literary experiments with ghostliness, Vanessa D. Dickerson's *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (1996), has perhaps been the most influential. Often championed as the key feminist study of Victorian women's supernatural fiction,[108] Dickerson's account argues that women utilised the figure of the ghost to express their own liminal and partially invisible cultural status.

Victorian Ghosts explores how writers such as George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Charlotte and Emily Brontë employed spirits and hauntings in their fiction as a means to articulate nineteenth-century women's experience. For Dickerson, the Victorian woman, in being 'further and further removed from the power-wielding occupations of the world […] yet relegated to the higher realm of moral influence' found herself in a position 'equivocal, ambiguous, ghostly.'[109] *Haunted Matters* follows Dickerson in discussing women's peripheral status, but it argues that the author overstates women's designation as invisible,

---

[107] Examples include, but are not limited to: Penny Fielding, 'Other Worlds: Oliphant's Spectralization of the Modern', *Women's Writing*, 6. 2 (1999), 201-13; Clare Stewart, '"Weird Fascination": The Response to Victorian Women's Ghost Stories', in *Feminist Readings of Victorian Popular Texts: Divergent Femininities*, ed. by Emma Liggins and Daniel Duffy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 108-25; Patricia Pulham, 'The Castrato and the Cry in Vernon Lee's Wicked Voices', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 30. 2 (2002), 421-37; Alysia Kolentsis, 'Home Invasions: Masculinity and Domestic Power in the Supernatural Fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Rhoda Broughton', in *Ghosts, Stories, Histories: Ghost Stories and Alternative Histories*, ed. by Sladja Blazan (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), pp. 60-80; Alison Jaquet, 'The Disturbed Domestic: Supernatural Spaces in Ellen Wood's Fiction', *Women's Writing*, 15. 2 (Aug 2008), 244-58; Heather L. Braun, 'Idle Vampires and Decadent Maidens: Sensation, the Supernatural, and Mary E. Braddon's Disappointing Femmes Fatales', in *Antifeminism and the Victorian Novel: Rereading Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*, ed. by Tamara S. Wagner (Amherst: Cambria, 2009), pp. 235-54.

[108] Many articles which peripherally mention Victorian supernatural tales employ quotations from Dickerson's study in addressing women's contributions. Hilary Grimes's chapter on women's ghost stories – 'Ghostwomen, Ghostwriting' in *The Late Victorian Gothic* – appears to draw extensively on Dickerson's theory, although Grimes is perhaps more sensitive than Dickerson to both the significance of forgotten women writers and to the gendered nuances in the texts themselves. Grimes (2011), pp. 86-90.

[109] Dickerson (1996), p. 5.

powerless, and supernaturally-receptive, occasionally presenting these features as integral female traits rather than culturally-ascribed positions. *Victorian Ghosts* thereby risks consolidating nineteenth-century assumptions about femininity that the writers themselves sought to challenge.[110] Dickerson's claims, for example, that the Victorian woman was expected to 'fulfil' her role by 'becoming a ghost' and that female-authored supernatural fiction 'provided a counter to the scientism, scepticism, and materialism of the age,' devalues these writers' astute awareness of and contribution to debates about the material and empirical.[111]

Dickerson's insistence on reading women as 'ghosts' draws on Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's highly influential model of the 'Angel in the House' as outlined in their seminal feminist text *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979).[112] Dickerson's argument echoes Gilbert and Gubar's theory that the ideal Victorian woman's perceived alliance with 'submissiveness, modesty, self-lessness' and an assumed 'angelic' disposition rendered her 'in a sense already dead.'[113] Both studies share several of the same nineteenth-century literary subjects, such as the Brontës and George Eliot, and contend that literature offered a means through which Victorian women could transcend the grim realities of their subjugation. While both texts perform important cultural work in advocating the works of nineteenth-century female writers, the generalising tendency of such critical studies has been challenged by other feminist scholars, such as Nina Auerbach and Toril Moi.[114] These critics resist the essentialist ideology that appears in certain places in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, countering that its reading of Victorian women as victims is not necessarily a productive way of reinstating them into history.[115] Gilbert and Gubar sometimes appear to buy into the

---

[110] This controversial tendency to generalise about women's apparent alliance with ethereality and the supernatural also seems to infiltrate criticism on Victorian women's relationship with Spiritualism, as Christine Ferguson acknowledges. She argues that the inclination to adopt a 'narrow and overly-homogenous' reading of 'the chaotic mass of spiritualist political identifications' can occasionally work to 'reify the hoary cliché that, in the nineteenth century's various spiritualist scenes, the mediums and most committed believers were largely women, while the psychical investigators and sceptics were men.' This tendency not only misrepresents the movement, but also 'risk[s] reinscribing the gendered nature/culture dualism historically used to exclude women from the traditions and practices of rationalism.' Ferguson 'Recent Studies' (2012), 433.

[111] Dickerson (1996), pp. 4-5.

[112] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984 [1979]).

[113] Gilbert and Gubar (1984), pp. 23-24.

[114] Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1982); Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990 [1985]).

[115] *The Madwoman in the Attic* has also been critiqued for its limited range, insofar as a heterosexual, middle-class, white woman's experience cannot adequately represent *all* female experience. While *Haunted Matters* might be accused of embodying a similarly limited scope, it aims to avoid using its conclusions about this

myths they purport to explode, romanticising patriarchally-conditioned notions of femininity even as they claim to dispel them.[116] Their argument, for instance, that Victorian women must reach beyond certain 'feminine' tropes – specifically the 'grotesque and destructive images of "Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and sprite"'[117] – idealise the mythmaking processes surrounding femininity even as they mourn their subjugating effects.[118] A similar critique might be applied to Dickerson's study. *Victorian Ghosts* occasionally descends into contentious claims and essentialist assumptions, as in its brief nod to male writers working within the genre. Dickerson's argument that male-authored ghost stories are 'more diagnostic, clinical, journalistic, vested in mensuration' than women's, and that men and women 'write ghost stories […] in different voices' acts as a troubling generalisation which ignores the complexities and variations in both men and women's experiments in the genre.[119]

Dickerson's study concludes that the 'supernaturalism of the nineteenth-century British woman writer constitutes an interesting spiritual *bildungsroman* about woman's desire and struggle to come to terms with her invisibility and visibility, with her essential in-betweenness, with her condition as a ghost in the noontide.'[120] This claim sits rather uneasily alongside the decision to focus primarily on already-canonised female writers who achieved moderate fame and were involved in literary networks during their lifetimes.[121] *Victorian Ghosts* valuably signals the need to reconsider women's importance to the development of nineteenth-century supernatural fiction. Nonetheless, its insights are undermined by its occasionally reductive interpretations of both women's experience and their use of ghostly tropes. More practically, as Jarlath Killeen has acknowledged, Dickerson's central thesis seems to apply to only a small fraction of the plethora of nineteenth-century women's spectral tales in circulation.[122] Killeen questions the efficacy

---

group to generalise about all female experience (as Dickerson's does in referencing *Beloved*), or to draw contentious parallels between disparate women (as in Gilbert and Gubar's controversial reading of Bertha Mason as Jane's dark double in *Jane Eyre* [1847]).

[116] As Auerbach notes, their study opens 'by echoing Virginia Woolf's exhortation that we kill the male projections of angel and monster' but 'ends up half in love with its antagonist's images, weaving them into a rhapsodic and sibylline myth of its own.' Auerbach (1982), p. 12.

[117] Gilbert and Gubar (1984), p. 44.

[118] Similarly, their claim that Victorian girls must learn silence either as 'a silent image invented and defined by the magical looking glass of the male-authored text, or […] a silent dancer of her own woes' has a similar effect, in transforming the Victorian woman's experience into a kind of fairy tale. Gilbert and Gubar (1984), p. 43.

[119] Dickerson (1996), pp. 6-7.

[120] Dickerson (1996), p. 150.

[121] Although my chosen literary subjects also achieved moderate literary fame, *Haunted Matters* is more appreciative than Dickerson's study of how such women writers sought to *alter* their peripheral position through literature. Rather than merely embodying a vehicle for passive reflection on women's subjugation, the ghost story functioned as a medium for positive change.

[122] Killeen (2010).

of utilising Dickerson's 'interpretative model' as an 'over-arching explanation' of female-authored Victorian ghost stories, as these tales 'often concern male rather than female ghosts' while 'those being terrorised are as likely to be women as men.'[123] Dickerson's monograph highlights that future feminist approaches to this literary mode – while not denying the very real subordination of women in the nineteenth century – might benefit from moving beyond primarily identifying women as victims and/or ethereal creatures.[124] Countering Dickerson's focus on what Susan E. Schaper terms the 'familiar, rather sweeping consequences of patriarchal oppression such as invisibility, displacement, and deferral'[125] with discussions of women's intellectual and financial agency must enable more nuanced understandings of the ghost story.

Victorian Ghosts also exemplifies the difficulties inherent in applying *any* kind of 'over-arching explanation' to such an unruly genre: perhaps the tendency to generalise remains a necessary pitfall in critical attempts to provide a coherent argument about Victorian women's ghost stories. This tendency infiltrates various accounts of female-authored supernatural fiction. Modern, mass-market anthologies, for example, sometimes reiterate the type of simplified essentialist claims that the tales themselves seek to contest. Mike Ashley, in his introduction to a 2008 collection, *Unforgettable Ghost Stories by Women Writers*, contends that '[w]hereas men liked to create stories of vengeful ghosts and sinister hauntings, women tended to go for something more subtle.'[126] We might counter this claim by citing the sensational dead arms in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 'The Cold Embrace' (1860), the ghastly spectral groom in Edith Nesbit's 'John Charrington's Wedding' (1891), the sinister walking corpse in Violet Hunt's 'The Prayer' (1895), and the gory murder in May Sinclair's 'The Victim' (1922), none of which are remotely subtle. The introduction to a 2011 critical essay collection, *Women and the Victorian Occult*, relies on a similarly reductive generalisation. Tatiana Kontou's suggestion that '[w]omen's empathy, sensitivity and passivity intrinsically bound them to the occult and the esoteric' risks confirming the essentialist assumptions which can negatively impact on our perception of Victorian women's supernatural fiction.[127] These gendered expectations – that women's ghost stories are always more reticent, subtle, or emotional than men's, or

---

[123] Killeen (2010), p. 85.

[124] As we will see throughout this thesis, several of the chosen writers (particularly Nesbit) capitalised on the trope of female victimization, but used this as a medium for feminist critique.

[125] Susan E. Schaper, 'Review of *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural*', *Victorian Studies*, 42. 4 (1999), 677-79 (677).

[126] Ashley (2008), p. vi.

[127] Tatiana Kontou, 'Introduction', in Kontou (2011), pp. 1-7 (p. 3).

that they speak to women's inherently 'spiritual' nature – clearly require considerable revision.

Haunted Matters emphasises the empowering potential of ghost stories for women, but, rather than making women synonymous with ghosts, it interrogates how female control of the ghost story could take advantage of the correlation between women's own spectral and material status in Victorian culture. These stories do not so much consolidate prejudices about femininity – for example, the view that 'women are allegedly more sensitive to mood and atmosphere'[128] – as utilise them for their own ends. Women's apparent alliance with the supernatural might have contributed to their subjugation, but it also provided a potent tool through which they could analyse aspects of male-orientated Victorian society. Rather than merely presenting the ghost as a symbol for disenfranchised womanhood, the tales I study exploit the ghost story genre's complex interchanges between the material and the ethereal as a means to both contribute to and critique the materialist culture in which they were immersed.

Objects and Things

As indicated earlier, the women discussed in *Haunted Matters* depict ghostly encounters with material objects, bodies, and forms in their ghost stories, and therefore the status of material things demands attention. By supplementing a theoretical tool often associated with the Victorian supernatural – Marx's commodity fetishism – with a recognition of objects as Brownian *things,* this thesis acknowledges women writers' diversity in using material things to analyse their own limited social power. At the same time, the complex entanglements accreting around cultural constructions of femininity justify this thesis's focus *beyond* objects, to consider bodies and epistemology. Freud's uncanny and Kristeva's abjection are regularly employed as frameworks against which to understand the ghost story, further illuminating the supernaturalised aspects of things and bodies themselves. Here, I will introduce how these approaches demonstrate that the fissures between the material and the ethereal, generated by things, provided a fertile site for Victorian women writers of the supernatural.

One of the most stimulating developments in critical analyses of supernatural writing emerges from Marx's account of commodity fetishism. Objects, according to the nineteenth-century German philosopher and revolutionary socialist Karl Marx, are 'haunted' by the labour it took to produce them, as the capitalist processes by which the

---

[128] Gilbert (2009), p. 125.

object came into existence are thrust out of sight in a consumerist market. In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867), Marx discusses commodities in terms of their use-value ('the utility of a thing') and their exchange-value ('the proportion in which values of use of one sort are exchanged for this of another sort').[129] Marx explains that these two values do not necessarily relate, arguing that 'exchange-value appears to be something accidental and purely relative […] the exchange of commodities is evidently characterised by a total abstraction of use-value.'[130] Thus, commodities produced and exchanged within a capitalist society are apparently stripped of their worth in terms of the labour it took to make them, and assigned a new arbitrary value based on their relation to other commodities. As such, the intrinsic value of objects is rendered invisible as 'we put out of sight both the useful character of the various kinds of labour embodied in them, and the concrete forms of that labour.'[131]

Marx's theory of the commodity resonates with studies of the Victorian supernatural in numerous stimulating ways. His use of mystical and spectral language throughout *Capital* explicitly evokes comparisons with supernatural fiction: the product of labour assumes 'an enigmatical character'; 'a commodity is […] a mysterious thing'; and things in a capitalist market are enveloped in 'magic and necromancy'.[132] The fetishism of commodities, for Marx, is shrouded in mystery, and thus potentially ghostly. Consumerism was developing throughout the nineteenth century, and many ghost story writers drew on the mysteriousness of commodity culture and the economic system.[133] Writers themselves were aligned with occulted labour, insofar as they were able to exchange their stories for money, but the labour employed to produce them (writing) was veiled in the arbitrary cash-value assigned to these tales. Moreover, the intangible and elusive financial processes that were increasingly complicating Victorian wealth mirrored Marx's commodity fetishism, further establishing links between economics and ethereality. *Haunted Matters*, in its first chapter, draws on these concepts in charting how Charlotte Riddell's ghost stories present

---

[129] Karl Marx, 'Capital' (1867), in *Literary Theory: An Anthology (revised edition)*, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2001 [1998]), pp. 268-76 (pp. 268, 269).
[130] Marx (2001), p. 269.
[131] Marx (2001), p. 270.
[132] Marx (2001), pp. 270, 273.
[133] As I argue in Chapter One, Charlotte Riddell's ghost stories frequently invoke the insecurity of Victorian finance. The ghost story's focus on haunted objects also speaks to consumer culture as, for example, in Vernon Lee's spectral fiction, which features both modern commodities and historically-resonant relics. Other ghostly tales which evoke economics and/or commodity culture include (but are not limited to): Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843), George MacDonald's 'Uncle Cornelius His Story' (1869), the anonymously-published 'The Ghost in the Bank of England' (1879), and M. R. James's 'The Diary of Mr Poynter' (1919). James's article 'The Malice of Inanimate Objects' (1933) also deals with the uncanniness of things, and so too does Alison Lurie's modern ghost story 'The Highboy' (1990), in featuring a particularly nasty antique.

the financial market as inherently spectral, and potentially less comprehensible than haunting.

Marx's explicit reference to the Spiritualist practice of 'table-turning' has proved particularly suggestive to critics of the Victorian supernatural, such as Tricia Lootens, Gail Turley Houston, and Sarah A. Willburn.[134] Marx states that 'so soon as it [the table] steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent,' insofar as it 'evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than "table-turning" ever was.'[135] Houston, in an excellent study of Victorian financial panic and its effects on literature, investigates how Marx links 'demonic possession to economic possession,' citing his references to table-turning, vampires, spectres, and capitalism's implicit 'black magic that haunts, deceives, and seduces those who live under its sway.'[136] Willburn pinpoints the uncanny potential of Marx's reference to Spiritualist practice, arguing that the way in which he 'actually gives commodities dialogue to speak is symptomatic […] of the problem that just as subjects might become objectified, commodities might become subjectified.'[137] This type of doubling is especially relevant to Vernon Lee's ghost stories, in which objects are infused with the spirits of their former owners, while women are continually objectified by their male associates. Marx's ideas about the haunted quality of objects within a capitalist market thus provide a productive framework against which to read many women's spectral tales. Although *Haunted Matters* will draw on commodity fetishism only peripherally throughout the following chapters, Marxist theories – in resonating with nineteenth-century cultural debates about class, economics, consumerism, and visibility[138] – supply a fruitful context through which to appreciate Victorian women's ghost stories' relationship to materialism.

Haunted Matters also draws on another type of object relationship distinct from Marx's commodity fetishism: Bill Brown's discussion of the 'thing'. Brown crucially distinguishes objects – material and comprehensible presences which we barely notice in

---

[134] Tricia Lootens, 'Fear of Furniture: Commodity Gothicism and the Teaching of Victorian Literature', in *Approaches to Teaching Gothic Fiction: The British and American Traditions*, ed. by Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2003), pp. 148-58; Gail Turley Houston, *From Dickens to Dracula: Gothic, Economics, and Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Sarah A. Willburn, *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).
[135] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1 – Part 1, The Process of Capitalist Production*, ed. by Friedrich Engels (New York: Cosimo Inc., 2007 [1867]), p. 82.
[136] Houston (2005), p. 36.
[137] Willburn (2006), p. 100.
[138] As Smith acknowledges, '[m]aking visible what is invisible is an issue shared by the ghost story and Marxist praxis.' Smith (2010), p. 14.

our everyday lives – from less quantifiable and infinitely more mysterious *things*, charting the processes by which the former are converted into the latter. Brown states that:

> You could imagine things […] as what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects – their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems.[139]

'Thingness' thus refers to an enigmatic something both latent in objects and *beyond* them, 'at hand' and somewhere unidentifiable.[140] Following on from Heidegger, Brown argues that objects become things when we are forced to notice them, as when we break a piece of glassware, or begin to think about an item's history. The story of things is thus intimately related to the subject-object relation: the transformations by which objects become things are only facilitated by the human subject.

Brown's 'thing' can thus be viewed as a defetishized commodity: while Marx attributes the object's mysterious life or 'haunted' quality directly to the labour(er) that produced it, Brown's account instead connects 'things' to any person who might view or touch them. Both theories speak to the materialist concerns of this thesis. Marx's ideas illuminate Riddell's presentation of occulted labour as an entrenched aspect of Victorian culture, and Brown's thing theory is highly relevant to Vernon Lee's portrayals of haunted relics. In citing these two distinct (though connected) theories, *Haunted Matters* aims to demonstrate the diversity with which its chosen women writers thought about objects. At the same time, I pay tribute to the manifold nature of Victorian 'thing culture' which, according to Elaine Freedgood, continued to trouble commodity culture throughout the nineteenth century.[141] For Freedgood, commodification was 'less secure, less consistently triumphant' than twenty-first century commentators might assume,[142] and our Victorian predecessors, rather than being primarily commodity fetishists, 'may well have maintained a more complex relationship to the goods by which they were surrounded and intrigued.'[143] *Haunted Matters* thus remains sensitive to the multifaceted nature of things in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in their status as created commodities, personal treasures, historical relics, and apparent ephemera.

---

[139] Brown (2001), 5.
[140] Brown (2001), 5.
[141] Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
[142] Freedgood (2006), p. 157.
[143] Freedgood (2006), p. 142.

Of course, this complex nature of things was especially pertinent to Victorian women writers, who were both producers of commodities and 'things' themselves. Women in Western culture have always been subject to processes of objectification through which their bodies are 'sexualise[d] and commodifie[d],'[144] and the patriarchal marital laws of nineteenth-century Britain additionally compromised female agency. Prior to the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, which allowed women to retain their own money and assets after wedlock,[145] the doctrine of coverture dictated that a woman's 'legal personality was subsumed under that of her husband' upon marriage.[146] While some commentators 'persistently linked' the nineteenth-century marriage market to a form of slavery,[147] the idealised Victorian housewife was simultaneously expected to exemplify the '[e]ssence and ornament of a domestic sphere defined by its distance from the marketplace.'[148] Women were thus both commodities to be exchanged *and* admirable beings whose apparent goodness exempted them from the contaminating effects of the market. This impossible dichotomy was complicated even further by women's own role as consumers whose shopping habits could form 'the basis for their formation as active and resisting subjects within the Victorian marketplace,'[149] or alternatively reinforce the ideology which designated women as frivolous, 'vacillating' or passive dependents.[150] Women writers' contributions to the prospering literary marketplace also confused these gendered dynamics. As discussed in Chapter One, writing was one of the few socially-sanctioned occupations through which middle-class women could earn a living, yet some commentators insisted that such endeavours compromised feminine respectability.

This tension regarding nineteenth-century perceptions of femininity partially explains why *Haunted Matters* extends its focus beyond material things to consider bodies and epistemology in its analyses. Women's relationship with things was intimately bound

---

[144] Susan Bordo, 'Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body' (1993), in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, ed. by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 246-57 (p. 251).

[145] Earlier legislation such as the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878, paved the way for progress, but it was only in the 1880s that married women were granted the right to be viewed as separate legal entities distinct from their husbands. Of course, many of the stories discussed in this thesis were first published during or following this decade, but it is evident that gender inequalities continued to shadow Victorian culture for many years afterwards.

[146] Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 8.

[147] Jeff Nunokawa, *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 6. Nunokawa cites John Stuart Mill as one example, in that his 'compendium of women's subjection defines relations between men and women as an extension of those between master and slave.' Nunokawa (1994), p. 10.

[148] Nunokawa (1994), p. 6.

[149] Krista Lysack, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), p. 8.

[150] Lysack (2008), p. 4.

up with their dual role as subjects and objects in Victorian culture, a designation continually linked to their biological composition. The female body, as what Elizabeth Grosz terms 'the site of patriarchy's most entrenched investments,'[151] was frequently invoked to sanction women's inferior legal and social status in Victorian Britain. As demonstrated in Nesbit's fiction, however, it could also function as a powerful tool through which to satirise this problematic justification. Moreover, women's bodies were also the perceived medium through which 'female' forms of knowledge (such as intuition) were constructed and discredited. Women's apparent 'sensitivity or sympathy,' as Jill Galvan argues, was 'often imagined as the product of [their] delicate nervous systems.'[152] As before, this assumption negatively reinforced ideas about feminine weakness, but women could also capitalise on it for their own ends, both in reality (as with female mediums' exploitation of this 'trait' for financial gain) and in fiction (as in Margaret Oliphant's championing of 'feminine' epistemology). *Haunted Matters* therefore demonstrates how material things, bodies, and epistemology enabled Victorian women writers to destabilise cultural constructions of femininity, through a literary form which might initially appear to reinforce these dubious gendered dynamics.

Finally, any account of objects in ghost stories must address the influence of Freudian theories of the uncanny, and thus the uncanny object. It remains virtually impossible to talk about ghost stories and their critical heritage without paying tribute to Sigmund Freud's seminal essay 'The Uncanny' (1919), as illustrated by its frequent invocation by students of the genre, as well as by those examining supernatural and Gothic fiction.[153] In this text, itself a study of a supernatural tale, Freud attempts to pinpoint the source of the *unheimlich* ('unhomely'), the strange and disorientating feeling now termed 'uncanny.' Freud uses various texts and techniques – dictionary definitions from different languages, a psychoanalytic close reading of E. T. A. Hoffman's short story 'The Sand-Man' (1816), cultural superstitions, the unsettling sensations experienced in dreams – to distinguish what gives rise to the disturbing feeling which echoes *déjà vu*, and what constitutes its effects. Freud concludes that the uncanny is not generated by an encounter with something completely new or strange, but instead is instigated by something familiar which has somehow been rendered alien: 'What is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*.'[154] Freud links the uncanny feeling to early childhood experiences, incomplete

---

[151] Elizabeth Grosz, 'Psychoanalysis and the Body' (1992), in Price and Shildrick (1999), pp. 267-71 (p. 270).
[152] Galvan (2010), p. 12.
[153] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919), in Rivkin and Ryan (2001), pp. 154-67.
[154] Freud (2001), p. 156.

psychic repression, and the recurrence of an encounter which has been mentally suppressed, suggesting that: 'the uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign but something familiar and old – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression.'[155] The uncanny thus speaks to our responses in confronting the strange, the dream-like, and the tantalisingly or disturbingly familiar.

It is clear to see how the uncanny resonates with supernatural fiction. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle's identification of ten potential forms of the uncanny in literature – including animism, claustrophobia, silence, telepathy, and death – iterates various recurring features of the genre.[156] Understandably, then, critics of the Victorian paranormal, ghostly, and/or Gothic – including, but not limited to, Robert Mighall, Kelly Hurley, Patrick R. O'Malley, Srdjan Smajic, and Andrew Smith – have frequently used the Freudian uncanny as an interpretative framework.[157] Ghosts, corpses and vampires are uncanny in that they resemble the human body while simultaneously rendering it alien, and supernatural creatures of all kinds hover unsettlingly in the fissures between human/animal, life/death, subject/object, familiar/strange. As Smith explains, 'for Freud the ghost is both familiar, a "real" identifiable and knowable person, and completely unfamiliar, because in abstract terms the ghost is both dead and alive and so a kind of non-person.'[158] *Haunted Matters* will at times briefly draw on this idea of the ghost as uncanny, interrogating how gendered readings of the uncanny might illuminate the use of objects and bodies in my selected texts.

A gendered version of the uncanny already exists, however, in abjection, the highly influential psychoanalytic trope developed by Julia Kristeva, which lends itself well to discussions of the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic and its various monsters. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), Kristeva defines abjection as a feeling of revulsion instigated by the disturbance of boundaries:

---

[155] Freud (2001), p. 166. As Nicholas Royle has acknowledged, the psychoanalytic notion of the uncanny – as something familiar rendered peculiar, recognisable but unsettling – was officially theorised in 1919, but had been recognised in the nineteenth century in a more general way. Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. vii.

[156] The complete list (with abbreviated examples) includes: strange kinds of repetition; odd coincidences and the sense that things are fated to happen; animism; anthropomorphism; automatism; radical uncertainty about sexual identity, a fear of being buried alive (or experiences of claustrophobia of being stuck); silence; telepathy; and death. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory: Key Critical Concepts* (Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995), pp. 34-37.

[157] Mighall (2003); Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Patrick R. O'Malley, *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Smajic (2010); Smith (2010).

[158] Smith (2010), p. 22.

> It is not […] lack of cleanliness of health that causes abjection but what disturbs
> identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-
> between, the ambiguous, the composite […] immoral, sinister, scheming, and
> shady.[159]

The breakdown of apparent binaries – intimacy/privacy, internal/external – is crucial:
Kristeva argues that abjection is firmly entrenched in our own corporeality, in a nauseated
recognition of ourselves as encumbered with leaking bodies. For Kristeva, abjection is
rooted in early attempts to establish subjectivity by distancing oneself from the maternal:
'a violent, clumsy, breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of
a power as securing as it is stifling.'[160] The liminal thus triggers a traumatic recollection of
this crucial event, which in turn destabilises our conception of 'I'. Although she includes
corpses, food, vomit, and excrement as materials which might prompt this recollection,
Kristeva's focus on the mother's body as the primary site of abjection, as Imogen Tyler has
argued, 'risks reproducing histories of violent disgust towards maternal bodies.'[161] Tyler
takes particular issue with the misogynistic implications inherent in Kristeva's ideas about
matricide, as Kristeva claims that all forms of abjection have their roots in the successful
separation of the infant from its mother: 'For Kristeva, abjection is thus always a reminder
(and the irreducible remainder) of this primary repudiation of the maternal.'[162] Tyler also
critiques feminist critics' failure to challenge this implicit misogyny, instead adopting and
reiterating Kristeva's theories. According to Tyler, *Powers of Horror* does not merely
connote the maternal body as disgusting, but troublingly presents the mother as mute and
lacking agency, insofar as abjection 'is founded on the premise that the maternal *cannot be*,
cannot speak and *cannot take up a subject position.*'[163] Thus, feminist studies of
supernatural fiction must exercise caution in employing abjection: we need not accept its
occasional demonization of the female body. This study will, in its fourth chapter, draw
briefly on Kristeva's theory of abjection in discussing the treatment of the corpse in one of
Nesbit's ghost stories, but will look at how this work itself questions problematic
expectations regarding maternity. Nesbit's handling demonstrates that the corpse's alliance
with femininity constitutes a coded feminist assessment of patriarchal marriage, with her
subtle rejection of Kristeva's disturbingly silent maternal presence articulated through a
mother's (dead) body that speaks only to express its own desires.

---

[159] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York:
Columbia University Press, 1982 [1980]), p. 4.
[160] Kristeva (1982), p. 13.
[161] Imogen Tyler, 'Against Abjection', *Feminist Theory*, 10. 1 (2009), 77-98 (77-78).
[162] Tyler (2009), 80.
[163] Tyler (2009), 86, emphasis in original.

Chapter Outline

Haunted Matters takes a broad cultural studies approach in promoting its central feminist-historicist thesis. In demonstrating the importance of objects, bodies, and epistemological apparatus to Victorian women's ghost stories, I highlight the ways in which this popular literary genre offered a means through which women could critique various male-dominated institutions of the nineteenth-century (finance, science, object culture, marriage) and their attempts to disempower, objectify, or 'fix' women. The medium of the ghost story thus allowed women to challenge and exploit contradictory cultural perceptions of them as bodily and spiritual, sensitive and obtuse, material and ethereal.

Chapter One examines the fragility of economic independence for Victorian men and women in a selection of tales by Charlotte Riddell. Situating prolific author Riddell within the increasingly commercialised mid- to late-century literary marketplace, I argue that her discussions of the vagaries of her profession are paralleled by her recurring portrayals of the even shakier world of economics in general. Working or destitute, living or ghosts, all of her characters remain in thrall to highly unstable financial procedures with the power to crush subjects. Following on from critical work on the inherent instability of the Victorian financial system – and the often hysterical or Gothicized literary responses to it – this chapter outlines how the ghost, in Riddell's fiction, is conveyed as more ontologically stable than the shadowy financial processes underpinning the Victorian world. Moreover, Riddell's tales, in spite of their use of male narrators, are especially concerned about the doubly insecure position of women, whose economic identity is subsumed into that of their male counterparts. In articulating these anxieties, Riddell's ghost stories portray means through which women might establish limited forms of financial power. These issues are interrogated via readings of a selection of Riddell's spectral tales, in which hauntings are accompanied by a range of financial shocks, legal entanglements, and tragic events.

Chapter Two considers how Margaret Oliphant's sentimental ghost stories examine the insufficiency of vision as an epistemological apparatus, instead favouring 'feminine' forms of knowledge predicated on intuition, and querying woman's status as object of the male gaze. The author's narratives sometimes betray an indebtedness to traditional gender roles in reifying the distinction between masculine rationalism and feminine ethereality, and their valuation of non-material modes might seem to run counter to my central argument. I demonstrate, however, that even these tales betray an inherent reliance on

material forms in terms of the way we experience them. As well as favouring non-visual epistemologies as routes to superior knowledge, Oliphant's tales also portray the awesome physical power veiled within the unseen. This chapter thus explores how Oliphant's stories, in displacing vision as the primary means of knowing the world, contribute to cultural debates that were recasting seeing as an unreliable, fractured, and highly subjective process. At the same time, such tales subvert the gendered politics of looking through a focus on ghosts, thereby dismantling the gaze as a locus of male power.

The role of gendered objects and feminised fetishes in the ghostly tales of Vernon Lee constitutes the subject of Chapter Three. This chapter considers how Lee's fictional ghosts remain preoccupied by material things, as objects are crucial in facilitating hauntings. Drawing on Victorian anthropology and Brownian thing theory, I argue that the supernaturally-attenuated object's connection with the *femme fatale* enables Lee to explore cultural perceptions of 'woman' as a living enigma. While real women's needs and desires are sometimes obscured beneath this suggestive image, this potentially limiting motif also functions as a means of empowerment in contributing to women's post-death power. That these interrogations of femininity are mediated through things speaks to late Victorian culture's objectification and idealisation of women, though 'feminine' mysteriousness in Lee's tales can also be harnessed by men. As well as revealing *fin de siècle* culture's implicit alliance with primitive fetishism, Lee's haunted things resituate susceptibility to the supernatural into the masculine realm, insofar as various male percipients are enthralled by spectral (but not exclusively female) *femmes fatales*. Lee's ghost stories thus reiterate, consolidate, and subvert cultural assumptions which both idolised and degraded *fin de siècle* women.

Chapter Four examines the physical body, and particularly the corpse, in Edith Nesbit's supernatural tales. Despite their focus on death, earlier Victorian ghost stories seldom featured actual dead bodies, focussing instead on the less material aspects of mortality. The corpse began to appear more frequently with the development of late Victorian Gothic fiction, which often utilised the prostrate female body as a gratuitous image linked to a variety of *fin de siècle* cultural anxieties.[164] Nesbit employs the female corpse in her supernatural literature to speak to the unenviable social position of women during this period, and as an instrument of justice. I examine how this figure functions as a

---

[164] It has been suggested, for example, that this motif covertly placated threats to British culture posed by the New Woman; see Marie Mulvey-Roberts, 'Dracula and the Doctors: Bad Blood, Menstrual Taboo and the New Woman', in *Bram Stoker: History, Psychoanalysis and the Gothic*, ed. by William Hughes and Andrew Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), pp. 78-95.

covert condemnation of the unequal gender roles sanctioned by mid- to late-Victorian marriage. In presenting dead brides as the ultimate manifestation of the docile and subservient nineteenth-century woman, Nesbit uses her ghost stories as a vehicle for her suppressed feminism, a choice that situates her within a tradition of New Woman writing which charts the destructive effects of patriarchy on female identity.

This thesis concludes with a discussion of how an increased awareness of things, bodies and epistemologies in the female-authored ghost story might enable more nuanced or culturally-specific readings of the form. Rethinking the gendered aspects of the materialism/ethereality divide and the feminist potential of Victorian ghost stories illuminates new means through which to understand women writers' appropriations of the spectral, in nineteenth-century Britain and beyond. In considering how my study might be extended and revised outwith its chosen examples, this conclusion indicates productive avenues for future research.

By remaining alert to the correspondences and divergences in the work of these four authors, *Haunted Matters* aims to illustrate the disparate and vivid ways in which women writers used the medium of the ghost story to critique various aspects of Victorian material culture, through a focus on objects, bodies, and visual epistemology. Their suggestion that the ghost was continually structured by and in conversation with nineteenth-century material culture constitutes a wry comment on contradictory perceptions of women during this period, assumptions which were doubly challenged by these authors' ability to earn money through publishing such works. In 1990, Cox and Gilbert claimed that 'one of the great unasked critical questions' was why women writers 'took to the ghost story so successfully.'[165] Although some critics have attributed this abundance to the contentious alliance between women and the supernatural which could delegitimise female agency, *Haunted Matters* instead frames the ghost story as a means through which women writers could analyse, exploit, and critique material aspects of the male-dominated Victorian world. While it might never be feasible or indeed desirable to establish an overarching theory about women's ghost stories, this thesis aims to perform important cultural work in revising approaches to this area: revaluating women's crucial role in the genre, signalling the ghost story's dependence on materialism, acknowledging these tales as commodities in a literary marketplace, and challenging essentialist claims that can sometimes seep into critical appraisals of this field.

---

[165] Cox and Gilbert (1992), p. xiv.

Chapter One. Ethereal Materialism and Materialistic Spectres:
Gender and Economics in the Ghost Stories of Charlotte Riddell

In *Maxwell Drewitt*, a pseudonymously-published 1865 novel by Irish author Charlotte Riddell, the eponymous and mercenary protagonist meditates on his failing health, regretting the cruel actions he has committed in obtaining his prosperity:

> House to house, acre to acre, property to property! For this end – to be standing with the best part of his existence – health – taken away from him; thinking in solitude of that unknown world concerning which the clergy preached continually; the secrets of which not one of the departed had ever returned to reveal.
> The next world! There is something very terrible to a man like Maxwell Drewitt in the idea of leaving all he has most enjoyed, most coveted, most valued, and going away to the cold and silent grave.[1]

Drewitt trembles in the face of the undiscovered realm from which no traveller returns. He marks a distinction between the living world – in which he enjoys the acquired fruits of his morally-suspect actions – and the dreariness of the grave, bereft of these pleasures, expressing fear that he will be held accountable for his shady actions following his demise. If one's identity is predicated on material goods, this passage asks, what unsettling transformations must take place when death severs this worldly tie?

Several years later, Riddell began producing ghost stories that explored the effects of such materialistic preoccupations on the figure of the ghost. Not only do these tales challenge Drewitt's worldview in presenting images of spectres who return to the world of the living, they also imply that these visitations are indebted to or facilitated by the materialist concerns which drove the characters in life: Riddell's ghosts express the same anxieties as Drewitt in associating their selves with the transmission of material goods. Furthermore, the dark and threatening unknown realm is no longer the grave and/or afterlife as envisioned by Drewitt. Rather, the convoluted and highly unstable financial system in which both living and dead characters are immersed poses a far greater threat to human happiness.

---

[1] Mrs J. H. [Charlotte] Riddell, *Maxwell Drewitt* (London: Hutchinson and Co., date unknown [1865]), p. 399.

This chapter examines the insecurity of nineteenth-century financial institutions in a number of Riddell's ghost stories, tales that critique their dangerous aspects (especially for women) while also suggesting opportunities through which characters can achieve economic independence. Drawing on recent scholarship on Victorian finance and the author's own pecuniary struggles in an increasingly commercialised literary marketplace, I argue that Riddell's ghost stories utilise the figure of the spectre to express anxieties about nineteenth-century economics. The processes which underpin this system are largely depicted as less familiar, and more horrifyingly destructive, than the ghosts themselves. Through the figure of the ghost, who often remains mired in pecuniary matters beyond death, Riddell's supernatural stories interrogate the centrality of unstable finance to the Victorian world: these texts posit that *all* aspects of nineteenth-century economics – not merely speculation, but also earning, banking, and saving – were intrinsically risky. In outlining the effects of this riskiness on a range of Victorian subjects (aristocrats, working-class, middle-class; men and women; living and dead), these tales reveal the disturbing insidiousness of financial processes in everyday nineteenth-century Britain.

This economic background informs my reading of several ghost stories by Riddell – *The Uninhabited House* (1875), 'Nut Bush Farm' (1882), and 'Old Mrs Jones' (1882) – which feature a plethora of financial shocks, ruined subjects, and economically-driven spirits. In many of Riddell's tales, the ghosts seem somewhat mild and innocuous, insofar as they gesture rather than shriek, reiterate everyday actions, and occupy a comprehensible place in the material world.[2] They often depend on living characters to achieve their aims, and thus the ghost/percipient relationship, in Riddell's fiction, is frequently marked by a sense of sympathy or compassion.[3] Some readers have commented on Riddell's apparent failure to frighten,[4] but in rejecting the ghost as an object of terror they neglect the far greater danger shadowing Victorian subjects in her fiction. What hovers ominously on Riddell's narrative peripheries is not the vengeful spectre, but the altogether more

---

[2] That is, they often return to correct a past wrong and/or unearth legal documents which facilitate inheritance processes.

[3] See, for example, 'Walnut-Tree House', 'Nut Bush Farm', and 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk', in *Weird Stories*, by Mrs J. H. [Charlotte] Riddell (London: Chatto and Windus, 1885 [1882]), pp. 1-46, pp. 104-74; pp. 175-206.

[4] Jack Sullivan, for example, reiterates E. F. Bleiler's view that Riddell's tales remain inferior to those of Sheridan Le Fanu, insofar as they 'were "too constricted in technique and ideas" to produce anything like [Le Fanu's] customary shuddery effects.' Bleiler also believes that many other Victorian ghost story writers – such as Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Amelia B. Edwards, and Rhoda Broughton – share this quality. Sullivan terms Bleiler's judgment 'harsh but accurate.' E. F. Bleiler, 'Introduction', in *The Collected Ghost Stories of Mrs. J. H. Riddell* (New York: Dover, 1977), p. xvii, quoted in Sullivan (1978); pp. 67-68. Other readers have been more appreciative of Riddell's capacity to frighten. A nineteenth-century reviewer of Riddell's *Weird Stories* praised its 'decided air of weirdness,' claiming that the collection was 'well above the mark of the ordinary ghost story which turns up in Christmas numbers.'; Anonymous, 'Minor Notices', *Saturday Review*, 55. 1420 (Jan 13th 1883), 59-61 (59).

horrifying menace of financial insecurity. Although Riddell's ghosts provide the mystery around which her narratives revolve, these figures are far less threatening than the cruelty of a volatile economic structure which could (and often did) crush subjects in an instant. Moreover, women's particular vulnerability within this system is signalled throughout Riddell's fiction: even male ghosts, it is implied, wield more financial power than living women.

This chapter opens with an examination of Victorian Britain's changing literary marketplace, looking specifically at Riddell's own position within it. While the publishing industry is often presented as unstable, the world of business is even less reliable: Riddell's writing engages with both. An examination of the Victorian economy and literary responses to it segues into a discussion of the will, as both a marker of (legal) identity and a fragile entity vulnerable to exploitation. Riddell's 1875 novella *The Uninhabited House* frames these ideas through a court battle over a haunted residence. The spectre itself, a moneylender in life, remains entangled in the pecuniary system beyond death, while his living female relatives illustrate the struggles facing middle-class women expected to choose between destitution and a departure from the feminine role. These tensions between financial security and femininity take precedence in 'Nut Bush Farm', whose male protagonist is more terrified of the mannish working woman than of the rather innocuous ghost. In framing this discrepancy, this tale suggests various means through which women can position themselves within Victorian economic culture, as wives, dependents, housekeepers, and workers. It also remains sensitive to (and satirical of) the ways in which male commentators sometimes attached the idea of moral corruption to those women who maintained too healthy an independence. The chapter closes with an analysis of 'Old Mrs Jones', in which a terrifying female spectre drives a family from their rented home. The vengeful ghost was a woman murdered by her husband for her refusal to share her fortune, but her return to expose her killer almost destroys the reputation of a young living woman in the process. The tale condemns both miserliness and pecuniary recklessness, intimating the importance of wariness and saving in maintaining financial health in the Victorian world. At the same time, however, it illustrates that the code which dictates women's behaviour (moral and social) renders them especially defenceless to the caprices of the economic system.

Charlotte Riddell as Commercial Writer

Riddell's own history illustrates why financial concerns occupy such a central role in her ghostly fiction. Born to an English mother and an Irish father in 1832, Charlotte

Cowan's comfortable childhood was superseded by a difficult period following her father's death, during which she and her mother, as S. M. Ellis has recognised, were 'reduced from comfort, if not affluence, to very limited means.'[5] After relocating within Ireland, the two moved to London during the severely cold winter at the beginning of 1855, where Charlotte approached various publishers in an attempt to earn enough to support herself and her dying mother.[6] The young author experienced various rejections, and was eventually accepted by Thomas Cautley Newby, who agreed to publish *Zuriel's Grandchild* (1855-6). Following this, she achieved success with a more famous firm, listing her work under the pen name 'F. G. Trafford'. In the wake of her mother's death at the Christmas of 1856, Charlotte married civil engineer Joseph Hadley Riddell, who incurred various financial losses throughout their lives together.[7] Riddell produced work steadily over the next four decades, switching publishers in 1863 in an attempt to earn more money. In 1864 she published one of her most famous and successful novels, *George Geith of Fen Court* (1864), which revolves around an aristocratic gentleman who becomes a hardworking city accountant following an ill-advised marriage. He later discovers he has been cheated out of his rightful inheritance and experiences further loss of fortune after entrusting his considerable earnings to an apparently reputable bank. The novel's central and peripheral themes – financial loss, class mobility, illicit inheritance, female authorship, aristocratic economic ineptitude, and the shakiness of nineteenth-century financial processes – also recur throughout the author's ghost stories. In 1867 Riddell became editor of the *St James's Magazine*, but her moderate literary success was counterbalanced by her husband's struggles in business. Following his death in 1881, Charlotte strove to pay off the debts incurred among his relatives, and grew poorer as the popularity of her books declined. Riddell continued to publish at the approximate rate of a novel a year until the age of seventy, and became the first pensioner of the Society of Authors in 1901.[8] She died of cancer in 1906.

Although many of Riddell's novels first appeared in book form, she also had much of her work published (serialised novels, short stories, articles) in a selection of nineteenth-century periodicals, including *Temple Bar*, *London Society*, *Ludgate Monthly*, and

---

[5] S. M. Ellis, *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and Others* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1951 [1931]), p. 268.
[6] Ellis (1951), p. 271.
[7] 'Riddell, Charlotte', in *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. by Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy (London: B. T. Batsford, 1990), pp. 901-02 (p. 901).
[8] Blain et al (1990), p. 902.

Illustrated Review.[9] Riddell obtained a reputation as the 'novelist of the City' by focussing on business and finance,[10] which she often presented as frustratingly unstable. This economic focus sometimes manifested itself in depictions of the world of publishing and its vagaries, although this emphasis is less prominent in her ghost stories. Margaret Kelleher, in a perceptive exploration of Riddell's portrayal of authorship in one of her realist novels, argues that the author was 'an insightful observer' of trends in the publishing industry, and that her decline in popularity rendered '[h]er status in the 1900s […] curiously emblematic' in that she 'reminded other producers [of literature] of the vagaries and uncertainties of the market.'[11] Riddell's early experiences with London publishers, as recognised by Ellis and Kelleher, were often chronicled in her fiction. *A Struggle for Fame* (1883) revolves around a young woman's attempts to support her parents through writing, and *George Geith of Fen Court* features a successful visit to a publisher's office on a rainy day, which ironically results in a fatal attack of influenza which blights a budding young writer. Anticipating late nineteenth-century explorations of authorship and the commodification of literature in works such as George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891) and Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895), Riddell's work sometimes paradoxically depicts the act of literary production as a combination of transcendence and drudgery, the writer forced to activity by powers beyond his or her control. The act of literary creation itself is posited as dangerously arbitrary, in that the writer is unable to coerce him- or herself to produce adequate work, and even valid literary endeavours fail to guarantee any recompense.

In interrogating these issues, Riddell works, as Linda H. Peterson suggests, to rehabilitate the early Victorian image of the author as 'tortured genius' in line with the changing nineteenth-century commercial world and the professionalization of the writer:[12] the would-be author is enslaved to both art *and* financial imperatives. Riddell thus speaks to the developing late-century cultural anxiety about the position of the writer in the burgeoning literary marketplace. Many critics have acknowledged how changes in this increasingly commodified area – including the Education Acts of 1870-1 (which promoted widespread literacy), the repeals of tax on 'knowledge' and paper in 1855 and 1861

---

[9] Searching for 'J. H. Riddell' on the *British Periodicals Database* reveals the author's extensive publication in such venues.

[10] 'She was known as "the Novelist of the City" because of her use of London commerce as a theme in a fiction', 'Charlotte Riddell', *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Vol. 5: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. by Mary O'Dowd (New York: New York University Press, 2002), p. 975.

[11] Margaret Kelleher, 'Charlotte Riddell's *A Struggle for Fame*: The Field of Women's Literary Production', *Colby Quarterly*, 36. 2 (June 2000), 116-31 (130).

[12] Linda H. Peterson, *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

respectively, and the introduction of free libraries after 1850 – contributed to shifting cultural perceptions of writers and writing.[13] Ideas about genius, formerly linked to affluent masculinity, were displaced and recoded, as what Paul Delany terms the 'democratisation of the printed word' increasingly opened up opportunities for 'subordinate groups such as women, industrial workers, and the suburban lower middle classes' to try their hand at literature as a profession.[14] The developing demand for books and periodicals led to a dramatic rise in writers by the end of the century,[15] but these shifts also manifested themselves in the increasingly competitive and commercialized nature of the literary scene. As Dean Baldwin explains, Victorian authors were often expected to possess both 'the usual attributes of the artist, […] and those of the careful man or woman of business' in order to succeed in their career.[16] Jennifer Phegley expands on this idea, claiming that 'literature had become an industry, and the author, by extension, […] a producer of commodities.'[17] The late nineteenth-century writer therefore had to negotiate the often-conflicting demands of the muse and the marketplace, in attempting to produce 'high quality' but commercially saleable work.

These conflicts were compounded even further for women writers: some felt that the socially-sanctioned image of femininity was compromised by the author's potentially vulgarising links to the commercial market. Furthermore, as Valerie Sanders argues, the practicalities of women writers' negotiations with male publishers were often difficult, insofar as some were 'desperate to be taken seriously, but deeply conscious of their "outsider" status, […] unsure what tone to adopt in business negotiations […] and how to conduct the more personal side of the relationship.'[18] Peterson argues that Riddell was specifically involved in 'reinscrib[ing] the myths of authorship' promoted by Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) and other memoirs, insofar as she challenged assumptions about 'genius and vocation, […] domesticity and duty, […] solitude,

---

[13] See, for example, Paul Delany, *Literature, Money and the Marketplace: From Trollope to Amis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) and Bradley Deane, *The Making of the Victorian Novelist: Anxieties of Authorship in the Mass Market* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

[14] Delany (2002), p. 102.

[15] 'Certainly the increased demand for books and periodicals that resulted from a steadily increasing number of readers meant that writers had to produce more material and, in fact, that more writers were able to earn livings from their pens. Indeed, statistics from the nineteenth century bear witness to the fact that the number of writers increased dramatically over the course of the century.' Mary Ann Gillies, *The Professional Literary Agent in Britain, 1880-1920* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 16.

[16] Dean Baldwin, *Art and Commerce in the British Short Story, 1880-1950* (London and Vermont: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), p. 21.

[17] Phegley (2004), p. 15.

[18] Valerie Sanders, 'Women, fiction and the marketplace', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1800-1900*, ed. by Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 142-61 (p. 151).

loneliness, and tragedy.'[19] For Peterson, the Brontëan model of 'parallel streams' proved insufficient in mapping women writer's engagements with 'the commercialised literary market of the 1860s and 1870s, with an ever-increasing split between popular fiction and high art and with the increasing pressure of literary celebrity.'[20] Riddell, Peterson argues, intimates that 'the parallel currents – of the woman and the author, the domestic and the professional' are 'impossible, not just difficult, to reconcile.'[21] Various aspects of Riddell's career – her editorship of the *St James's Magazine*, her portrayals of the publishing industry, her reputation as 'novelist of the City' – situate her within the cultural dialogue about the status of the woman writer in the late nineteenth-century commercialised literary marketplace.

A preoccupation with the (woman) writer and the forces which drive her appear in one of Riddell's earliest surviving tales. *The Rich Husband* (1858) presents the image of the strained working author enchanted by the magical world of her own imagination:

> The clock had just chimed one quarter to eleven, but still the young aspirant for literary honours was sitting writing; she never dreamt of weariness. Night was the time when phantoms born half of reality and half of ideality in that mysterious world lying dimly in the brain of poets, authors, musicians, and painters came forth from their hiding-places, walked across the narrow apartment, talked, looked, moved, and felt as they might have done had they been natural personas, and not the mere dream-like memories of experience, the spectres of fancy, or the ghastly forms of that awful shadowy train lengthening at every step, which we all bear after us – the innumerable but never-forgotten departed.[22]

The young writer, almost vampire-like, finds her inspiration approach in the suggestive atmosphere of the witching hours. The night-time is aligned with both creativity and the unknown, as the ethereal emergence of imagined characters is both highly invigorating and redolent of death. Yet shadowing this romantic and potentially idealised image of creativity's magical influence is the mundane aspect of writing as *work*. We might read the reference to 'the narrow apartment' as indicative of relative poverty, while the desire for 'literary honours' evokes the hierarchical commodification system in which creative works are assigned a price by (usually male) publishers. The late-night setting may also have a

---

[19] Peterson (2009), p. 152.
[20] Peterson (2009), p. 8.
[21] Peterson (2009), p. 168.
[22] Charlotte Riddell, *The Rich Husband* [published anonymously] (London: Charles Skeet, 1858); quoted in Ellis (1951), p. 277. This scene also anticipates some of Vernon Lee's writing on the supernatural, discussed in Chapter Three.

practical, as well as a romantic, justification: perhaps the girl's conventional daylight hours were dedicated to household duties, thus limiting the available time she could spend writing. The romantic image of the literary aspirant, evoking Peterson's theory about the Brontëan myth, is thus undercut by coded references to writing as paid work.

These ideas about writers and their creative and financial impulses are explored more explicitly in an 1874 article, 'Literature as a Profession'. Here, Riddell attempts to correct public misperceptions about writers by refuting the idea that 'an author's life [is] one of ease, not to say idleness.'[23] She defends the sporadic and often unrewarding patterns of literary endeavour against critics who fail to understand how these processes differ from other forms of labour:

> "Good Heavens, sir, [says the critic,] if I had only the knack of writing, would I not get up each morning of my life at four o'clock and make ten guineas." As if a poor wretch could turn on the tap of his genius […] as if God had made his mind a mere machine that could be would up to go, like a musical box […] with the accuracy of a piece of mechanism.[24]

For Riddell, literary endeavour is not a faculty which can simply be switched on, but simultaneously cannot be switched *off*, as a writer is compelled to enact 'an existence of labour almost without intermission, since of the literary worker it may truly be said that he is always fishing or mending his net.'[25] Her reference to the writer's mind echoes Marx's visions of automatized workers under capitalism who become appendages to a larger machine. Rather unsettlingly, Riddell portrays the writer as inherently possessed by the process, unto the point of death or madness:

> When his hand refuses to work longer, his brain refuses to be quiet. He has brought this evil on himself, it may be, but he has done so unconsciously, and having once set the clock going, it is sometimes impossible to stop it – till the ticking has driven the man into a lunatic asylum, or his coffin.[26]

The Gothicization of the writing process transforms the author into a virtual monomaniac, enslaved to his or her art even when the body remains physically unable to produce any more work. Perhaps even more disturbing is the final inconclusiveness of the writer's

---

[23] Mrs J. H. [Charlotte] Riddell, 'Literature as a Profession', *Illustrated Review: A Fortnightly Journal of Literature, Science and Art*, 2. 132 (July 1874), 6-7 (6).
[24] Riddell (1874), 6
[25] Riddell (1874), 7.
[26] Riddell (1874), 7.

efforts, in that (s)he generally dies when 'the pattern was incomplete, the tapestry unfinished, the design still unaccomplished.'[27] Riddell's repetition of the masculine pronoun and the mention of fishing seem to posit literature as men's work; however this designation is threatened by the image of the tapestry, which covertly promotes the feminisation of writing. The article closes with a marginally reassuring comment that the would-be writer might avoid the 'mental fever' created by their art if (s)he remains realistic as to the effort and monetary rewards associated with the profession,[28] but the dark figure of the mentally exhausted yet apparently inexhaustible writer overshadows this mediating conclusion.

The world of publishing may not occupy a central feature in Riddell's ghost stories, but the author's recognition of its uncertainties posit her as an author who succeeded in capitalising on the literary marketplace while remaining wary of its fluctuations and complications. But despite the unstable nature of both creative production and commercial fiction, Riddell acknowledges that '[l]iterature in all its stages means work – honest, unflinching work'.[29] Its ability to generate money, though precarious, at least had its basis in authentic endeavour. Her husband's business transactions, however, lay on far shakier ground, in venturing into the shadowy world of finance and speculation in which money was rendered ephemeral. This world – with its dependence on risk, ruin, return, and recompense – provides a crucial backdrop to Riddell's ghost stories.

The Flimsiness of Victorian Economics: *The Uninhabited House* (1875)

As scholars such as Gail Turley Houston and Andrew Smith have suggested, money itself seemed to dematerialise from its traditional form during the nineteenth century, through changes such as the introduction of paper money and the rise of joint-stock banking. The move away from money in its material form (coins or gold) towards less tangible modes of capital (stocks, bonds, cheques) had the disorientating effect of making money less visible.[30] Moreover, the confusion created by the abundance of different monetary forms was compounded by the insecurity and potential corruption of Britain's banks, and the unreliable nature of the Stock Exchange: there was no guarantee

---

[27] Riddell (1874), 7.
[28] Riddell's reference to the ways in which the author might take this fever 'in only a mild or comparatively harmless form' seems to echo and/or satirise cultural debates about suitable reading material for women. Riddell (1874), 7.
[29] Riddell (1874), 7.
[30] As Houston explains: 'With the proliferation of complex forms of paper money – including, but not limited to, bills of exchange, checks, bones, stocks, consols, drafts, promissory notes, Exchequer Bills, Treasury bills – the gold in the gold standard gradually became obsolete.' Houston (2005), pp. 8-9.

that money entrusted to a bank would be safely restored to its rightful owner.[31] The failure of the City of Glasgow Bank in 1878, for instance, came as a shock to the public due to the bank's extensive practice of veiling fraud and misconduct.[32] As Paul Johnson acknowledges, 'the capacity of markets to flip from stability to collapse in a matter of days, though unexpectedly cruel to modern eyes, was disarmingly familiar to people of Victorian Britain.'[33] The threat of bankruptcy was thus a very real one for the Victorians.[34] Although nineteenth-century legislation was passed in an attempt to protect consumers, the situation remained insecure as banks were sometime prone to eschew their responsibility.[35] These developments had the effect of shrouding financial practice in mystery, and in positing money as a fragile, mutable, and highly unreliable entity. As Nicholas Shrimpton notes, '[i]f money [in nineteenth-century Britain] was a signifying system, it seemed a remarkably unstable signifier.'[36] This insecurity was further intensified for women, whose own economic welfare remained largely dependent on husbands or male relatives. Although they could invest their own money if they desired, women's exclusion from key sites in which they might obtain business knowledge left them vulnerable to exploitation. Thus, the corporate economy, according to George Robb, 'welcomed capital investments from women, [but] offered them little protection from unscrupulous promoters and managers.'[37]

The threatening sense of volatility and mystery surrounding banking encouraged Victorian commentators to speak about finance in hysterical or Gothicized terms. In *Little Dorrit* (1855-7), for example, Dickens continually likens the misplaced public confidence in wealthy Mr Merdle (which will result in ruin and bankruptcy for many) to an unsettlingly insidious epidemic: 'a moral infection' which 'will spread with the malignity

---

[31] *George Geith of Fen Court*'s eponymous protagonist suffers loss of fortune when he entrusts his considerable earnings to an apparently reputable bank.

[32] Houston (2005), p. 92.

[33] Paul Johnson, *Making the Market: Victorian Origins of Corporate Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 2.

[34] For further details, see V. Markham Lester, *Victorian Insolvency: Bankruptcy, Imprisonment for Debt, and Company Winding-Up in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

[35] James Foreman-Peck argues that 'Bank of England lending […] was published because the stability of the monetary system which the Bank supervised and, in particular, Bank conformity with the 1844 Banking Act, were matters of concern.' James Foreman-Peck, 'Quantitative Analysis of the Victorian Economy', in *New Perspectives on the Late Victorian Economy: Essays in Quantitative Economic History, 1860-1914*, ed. by James Foreman-Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 1-34 (p. 3).

[36] Nicholas Shrimpton, '"Even These Metallic Problems Have Their Melodramatic Side": Money in Victorian Literature', in *Victorian Literature and Finance*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 17-38 (p. 20).

[37] George Robb, 'Ladies of the Ticker: Women, Investment, and Fraud in England and America, 1850-1930', in *Victorian Investments: New Perspectives on Finance and Culture*, ed. by Nancy Henry and Cannon Schmitt (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 120-40 (p. 120).

and rapidity of the Plague.'[38] A pseudonymously-published 1875 novel – *Ye Vampyres! A Legend, or The National Betting-Ring, Showing What Became of It* – also emphasises the murky underbelly of Victorian finance, in being, according to Ranald C. Michie, an allegory for the London stock exchange, significantly authored by one termed 'the Spectre.'[39] The writer condemns what he or she perceives as the gambling instinct which drives the exchange, and the mystical recoding of different elements of this force – the observer as spectre, London as 'the city of the Undone', and the stock exchange as 'the Vortex'[40] – seems symptomatic of the rhetorical processes which were Gothicising financial practices during the nineteenth century.

For Nancy Henry, Riddell constitutes 'a lone voice protesting the failure of her contemporaries to represent business realistically.'[41] Henry views Riddell as disparate from many other Victorian authors, who often struggled 'to find the right language and images with which to represent a financial sector that had long being considered unsuited and inappropriate for fiction.'[42] According to Henry, Riddell's work seeks to demystify an economic world which other authors frequently conveyed as threatening, destructive, *other*. Riddell's work does indeed attempt verisimilitude in its depictions of Victorian economics, but it nonetheless suggests that the tangled, insecure, arbitrary nature of nineteenth-century financial processes encodes various threats.[43] This sense of unease is especially evident in Riddell's ghost stories, in which even the spectre remains at the mercy of a troublingly shaky financial system.

Victorian culture, as many critics have acknowledged,[44] found it difficult to distinguish between investment and gambling: although, as Martin Daunton explains, it was broadly acknowledged that the former was 'sound' and the latter 'unwise or greedy,' the varied forms of Victorian speculation rendered the line between the two 'blurred and contested.'[45] Further, the decreasing visibility of money meant that these speculative transactions often took place out of sight: mysterious, ambiguous, and ephemeral. Riddell's

---

[38] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (London: Vintage, 2008 [1855-7]), p. 571.

[39] 'The Spectre', *Ye Vampyres! A Legend, or The National Betting-Ring, Showing What Became of It* (London: Samuel Tinsley, 1875); quoted in Ranald C. Michie, *Guilty Money: The City of London in Victorian England and Edwardian Culture, 1815-1914* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), pp. 82-83.

[40] Michie (2009), p. 82.

[41] Nancy Henry, '"Rushing into Eternity": Suicide and Finance in Victorian Fiction', in Henry and Schmitt (2009), pp. 161-81 (p. 164).

[42] Henry (2009), p. 163.

[43] In this way, I would posit Riddell's fiction as *aligned with*, rather than disparate from, the other Victorian authors discussed in Henry's chapter, who often explored finance in their literature through the macabre figure of the dissolute and/or suicidal investor.

[44] Most of the contributors to *Victorian Investments* (2009) explore this concept to some extent.

[45] Martin Daunton, 'Afterword', in Henry and Schmitt (2009), pp. 202-19 (p. 203).

ghost stories capitalise on the ethereal aspect of investment and gambling insofar as they are saturated with characters who make bets on haunted houses, both figurative and real. One person in 'Old Mrs Jones' declares that they couldn't spend a night in an eerie residence 'if you paved the hall with golden guineas,' while another responds that they would face any spectres 'for a ten-pound note'.[46] Gambling on the ghost, in constituting an attempt to transform the ethereal into the material, covertly evokes the converse, as exemplified by the transient, unpredictable, intangible nature of the financial transactions so central to the Victorian world (in which material money becomes invisible, and is subsequently lost). The success of various youthful, gung-ho male protagonists who end up capitalising on the part-comic wagers to solve hauntings is similarly intriguing. The spectre becomes a reliable prospect insofar as its actions remain predictable, even comprehensible. If even the ghost can be made to turn a profit (as Riddell, with her literary ventures, was no doubt aware), perhaps it remains more ontologically stable than the increasingly flimsy processes in which nineteenth-century money was implicated.

Many of these enigmatic processes surround the apparently stable and material document of the will. Legal wills play an integral role in many of Riddell's ghost stories, which, drawing upon the Gothic tradition parodied in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817), often hinge upon the discovery of a lost legal document, the unveiling of an illicit inheritor, and/or the reinstatement of the rightful heir. Cathrine O. Frank, in an insightful discussion of how wills in Victorian fiction structure the individual's subjectivity, suggests that 'the written will became a means of making people legible as legal subjects […] as a document whose most obvious legal purpose is the orderly transmission of goods, the will aligns […] social identity with materialism.'[47] The will, then, *should* allow the deceased to fulfil their wishes through the transmission of goods: the Wills Act of 1837, passed in the same year in which Victoria became Queen, enabled nineteenth-century British subjects to transfer their material possessions to their loved ones after their death. But the fallibility of a system which allowed one's legacy (and implicitly one's identity) to be reduced to a single document is frequently exploited in Victorian fiction, which invokes the macabre and potentially mercenary aspects of the inheritance process through an abundance of grasping relatives, murder plots, illicit heirs, and misplaced legal texts.[48] The will's

---

[46] Mrs J. H. [Charlotte] Riddell, 'Old Mrs Jones', in Riddell (1885), pp. 230-314 (p. 273).

[47] Cathrine O. Frank, *Law, Literature, and the Transmission of Culture in England, 1837-1925* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), p. 4.

[48] Examples include, but are not limited to, the sinister post-death theft of Scrooge's household items in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843), the cruel inheritance plot in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859-60), and the vulture-like relatives who swarm around Mr Featherstone in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-2).

apparent promise of survival of bodily death through a material document is thus continually compromised and complicated.

Riddell's fiction also participates in the exercise of constructing identity through will-making, and in charting the vulnerability of inheritance laws. Her ghosts regularly display anxiety about the loss or misinterpretation of their legal documents: what is perceived as spiritual (the dead) can only transmit their wishes through a material entity (the will), but the regular failure of this system means that the dead must materialise as ghosts in order to challenge illicit inheritors. Many of Riddell's spectres return to oversee the desired transmission of their goods, challenging the idea of the ghost as antithetical to materialism. Instead of 'undermining the apparent predictability of the material world,'[49] these spirits demonstrate the persistence of worldly concerns even into the afterlife. Moreover, these links convey an uneasy alliance between identity and materialism especially problematic for Victorian women, whose legal and financial rights were often sublimated into their husbands' upon marriage. Somewhat ironically, the legal system staunchly refuses to recognise spectres, while the process of inheritance is presented as insecure and arbitrary, mirroring the ghost even as it refuses to acknowledge its existence. Riddell's tales – which often conflate spectres with their final wills, and feature haunting/haunted subjects in thrall to monetary concerns after death – doubly unsettle both the seemingly spiritual nature of the ghost and the material reality of the legal system. The spectre thus remains entangled in the financial system, while the law remains haunted by its former participants, its processes flimsier and less tangible than the ghosts themselves.

These ideas find a particular outlet in *The Uninhabited House*, which revolves around a legal wrangle regarding loss of earnings over an apparently haunted residence. Harry Patterson – clerk in Messrs. Craven and Son solicitors – narrates the story of River Hall, owned by the eccentric Miss Blake, and reputedly haunted by her brother-in-law Mr Elmsdale, a moneylender who is supposed to have committed suicide over a failed bet at Ascot. After a court battle between the firm and River Hall's latest tenant,[50] Miss Blake claims that she will pay fifty pounds to the man who lays the spectre to rest. Patterson – who has fallen in love with Elmsdale's daughter, Helena – accepts the challenge, and begins to suspect a local lame man, Harringford, of the moneylender's murder.[51] Patterson

---

[49] Briggs (1977), p. 24.
[50] This court-room setting echoes Charles Dickens's 'To Be Taken with a Grain of Salt' (1865).
[51] *The Uninhabited House* resembles another of Riddell's tales – 'The Open Door' (1882) – which also features a clerk who tries to solve the mystery of a haunted house for financial recompense. Both stories conflate two usually distinct traditions: the Radcliffean explained supernatural, in which the hauntings are

stages a showdown with Harringford, who collapses when Elmsdale's ghost appears. On his deathbed he reveals that he killed the man in a fit of passion over money, and generated the rumour about Elmsdale's gambling to veil the secret. Harringford leaves his considerable wealth to Helena, who determines to marry Patterson despite offers from richer suitors. The narrator's kindly employer ensures that the match will be suitable, by convincing Patterson's wealthy uncle to buy his nephew a partnership in the firm.

Most of the novella's first half centres on the court case to prove or disprove the haunting: the ghost is less an object of terror than a curious legal anomaly. As Patterson says:

> it must be an extremely difficult thing to prove, in a court of law, that a house, by reason solely of being haunted, is unsuitable for the residence of a gentleman of position […] we could find no precedent for ghosts being held as just pleas upon which to relinquish a tenancy[52]

For Patterson, then, the rational institutions which structure his world – for example, the legal system and the solicitors' firm with whom he is employed – are no place for spectres. Yet the text itself continually undermines this idea. Patterson's formal language, in a parody of legal obfuscation, encodes a covert acknowledgment of the ghost even while expounding its legal non-importance. Such passages therefore expose the fallibility of legal regulations which both deny the non-material while ironically remaining dependent on ambiguous rules. In failing to find a place for the ghost, the legal system thus reveals its insufficiency as an ontological apparatus. This crucial discrepancy also speaks to the difficulties inherent in utilising legal documents as markers of identity. As Frank acknowledges, texts such as wills offer a kind of survival of bodily death in terms of intention and the transmission of material goods, but they also worryingly privilege a narrow and potentially superficial form of legalised identity formation over any more nuanced mode.[53] This signification system crucially fails to acknowledge the ghost, but it also proves detrimental to the novella's women.

---

revealed to be illusions or human machinations, and the anti-rationalist form, in which the paranormal is never adequately rationalised. Henry James's 'The Ghostly Rental' (1876) also blends these two forms.
[52] Mrs J. H. [Charlotte] Riddell, *The Uninhabited House* (Marston Gate: Aeterna, 2010 [1875]), p. 45.
[53] Frank reads the will as 'a document survived the testator, one that preserved the goods with which he identified, whose resonance for Victorian culture especially rested in the uncertainty of what lay beyond the material world […] If one was what one had, then the individual could in a sense outlive himself as long as his pleasure continued to govern the goods comprising that identity.' She goes onto discuss how Victorian novels frequently and 'self-consciously' employ wills in interrogating 'the constructed nature of both meaning and identity, the role of desire and volition in that construction, and the extent to which identity and meaning (both individual and cultural) were negotiable.' Frank (2010), pp. 6-7.

Miss Blake and Helena illustrate the frustrating double-bind faced by middle-class women in straitened financial circumstances and lacking the support of male relatives: the question of how to obtain money without breaking with the socially-sanctioned feminine role. They should be able to earn rent from River Hall, but the ghost's continual appearance ironically works to keep them in poverty.[54] Miss Blake is a highly comic character who often coaxes money from Patterson and his colleagues, while presenting such a shabby appearance that she becomes an object of ridicule to the young men. Patterson admits that '[h]ad any other woman, dressed like Miss Blake, come to our office, I fear the clerks would not have been over-civil to her.'[55] But Miss Blake's bullying tactics, 'weather-beaten' visage, incongruous accent, 'crooked' bonnet, and 'wrinkled and haggard' gloves illustrate the importance of money in maintaining respectability for middle-class women.[56] Patterson describes Miss Blake as 'utterly destitute' of gratitude,[57] but the narrative suggests that she is literally destitute. Down on her luck, she has no choice but to either work (limited opportunities for work being available to middle-class women of Miss Blake's age) or to rely on male friends, as she chooses. That she fails to appreciate their support with the required decorum renders her unfeminine and eccentric in the eyes of the young clerks. As Robb acknowledges, there is '[c]onsiderable evidence […] that women were sought out as victims by frauds and embezzlers who well understood their vulnerability.'[58] Although Patterson is occasionally hurt by Miss Blake's distrust of their company, her suspicion signals canniness, rather than callousness. She is merely protecting her own interests in a realm which could be extremely destructive to overly trusting women.

Helena acts as a counter to her aunt Miss Blake, in that she wishes to work rather than to wheedle money from male friends; however, her inability to do so once again illustrates the constraints inhibiting middle-class women on the verge of destitution. Helena's comfortable, female-orientated, middle-class education has ill-prepared her for the world of work. Venturing out to become a governess, she ends up being knocked down in crossing the road: Patterson, as the heroic male rescuer, views her as an image of marred delicate femininity in being 'faint and frightened and draggled.'[59] Although she flaunts convention in her proposal to Patterson, Helena's change in fortune is crucially only

---

[54] As Tamara S. Wagner says of the tale, '[g]hosts become a commercial liability.' Tamara S. Wagner, *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction: Plotting Money and the Novel Genre, 1815-1901* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), p. 143.
[55] Riddell (2010), p. 24.
[56] Riddell (2010), p. 23.
[57] Riddell (2010), p. 5.
[58] Robb (2009), p. 126.
[59] Riddell (2010), p. 164.

facilitated through a man's intervention. Andrew Smith argues that the novella's 'movement of wealth into a female-orientated romance plot and away from a male revenge narrative is intended to exonerate the role of money as it supports female emotional development and grants a level of financial independence.'[60] Though persuasive, this reading glosses over the general lack of female agency throughout the tale. Women are forced to rely on men to manage their affairs, and in questioning their authority or striking out themselves are defeminised, undermined, ridiculed, or run down.

While the novella may be pessimistic about financial opportunities for women, it is not only Miss Blake and Helena who find themselves at the mercy of volatile economics, as the material effects of the haunting (i. e. the shortfall in the women's earnings) acts as just one example of ephemeral financial transactions leading to chaos and ruin. Money, within the text, is intangible and easily lost, but the results of its loss are all too palpable. Patterson's own backstory provides a classic Riddell example of the middle-class family fallen on hard times: 'My father had been dabbling in shares, and […] the natural consequence – ruin, utter ruin, came to our pretty country home.'[61] Less disturbing than the actual anecdote is Patterson's matter-of-fact rationalization of this process as completely normal: he states that '[w]hat followed was that which is usual enough in all such cases, with this difference – the loss of fortune killed my father.'[62] It is not, then, the ghost who poses threat to human life, but the potential destruction of hope instigated by financial speculation. The narrative itself supports the disturbing assertion that these disappointments are commonplace, in its presentation of a selection of mini-histories, all concerning loss of life and/or a descent into poverty. Patterson's charwoman, for example, finds herself transformed from 'a happy woman' to a struggling widow when her husband dies suddenly after a drunken accident: 'when a man goes,' she tells her employer, 'all goes. I have done my best, but still I have not been able to feed my children.'[63] Similarly, the two accounts of Elmsdale's death – fictitious suicide and real murder – are motivated by economic imperatives, shady and underhanded. Even the briefly-appearing night-watchman's wife, who emerges in court with a black eye, is at the mercy of this dependence on money, as when her violent husband leaves her, she and her children become 'chargeable to the parish.'[64] Viewed alongside Miss Blake and Helena, we might read these anecdotes as illustrating women's particular vulnerability. Like their male

---

[60] Smith (2010), pp. 72-73.
[61] Riddell (2010), p. 60.
[62] Patterson's father, unlike Helena's, does not return as a ghost. Riddell (2010), p. 60.
[63] Riddell (2010), pp. 76-77.
[64] Riddell (2010), p. 20. The theme of the family left destitute by the death or abandonment of the male head of the household also appears in Riddell's 'Nut Bush Farm' (1882).

counterparts, they are at the mercy of an unstable financial system, but their position is even more precarious insofar as their legal (and thus economic) identity remains dependent on men. The accumulation of these poignant peripheral anecdotes serves as a bleak counterpoint to the semi-comic ruminations on the legal status of the ghost.

The parallels between money and spectrality filter into the very texture of Patterson's narrative, as material things take on the characteristics of ghosts through their shaky links to financial recompense. River Hall, in its undesirability, is frequently described as 'haunting' the books and offices of Messrs. Craven and Son, as if its exclusion from the earning world is already rendering it indistinct.[65] Additionally, characters become almost vampiric in their financial transactions, either glutting themselves on others' money, or becoming vortexes into which cash invested is guaranteed no return. Mr Elmsdale – who often 'waited [for] the well-to-do builder's bankruptcy to enter into possession'[66] – feeds off of the ruin of his clients, and Miss Blake, in wheedling small amounts from Patterson and his colleagues, becomes a kind of abyss into which money poured (ostensibly 'loaned') instantly vanishes. For Patterson, '[n]ot a shilling of money would she ever, if she could help it, permit to pass through our hands […] What she did with it, Heaven only knows.'[67] The loss of money is always largely devastating, but this is no stringently-ordered universe in which the converse can be assumed to be true. Rather, even the accumulation of money remains fraught with difficulties and complications.

Many of these pecuniary issues converge around the moneylender/ghost Mr Elmsdale. When living, Mr Elmsdale was a hard businessman who obtained his wealth through the ruination of others, and spent lavishly to please his snobbish wife. Although he is eventually cleared of the gambling allegation, the text ironically reminds us that Elmsdale's very line of business is predicated on speculation as to who will fail, positioning him within a tradition of morally-suspect speculators in Victorian fiction. David C. Itzkowitz suggests that 'drawing the line between gambling and other forms of financial risk had particular urgency during the Victorian period' due to the increasing numbers of upper- and middle-class people who 'lived off dividends and interests from shares and other securities.'[68] Although *The Uninhabited House* appears to mark this distinction in the revelation that the Ascot rumour is false, it nonetheless remains highly

---

[65] Riddell (2010), pp. 1, 21.
[66] Riddell (2010), p. 13.
[67] Riddell (2010), p. 26.
[68] David C. Itzkowitz, 'Fair Enterprise or Extravagant Speculation: Investment, Speculation, and Gambling in Victorian England', in Henry and Schmitt (2009), pp. 98-119 (p. 98).

suspicious of moneylenders who capitalise on misfortune. Itzkowitz suggests that speculative trading, though largely 'purged' of its association with gambling by the 1860s, was thrown into doubt once again in the following decade by the emergence of a 'new breed of speculative brokers' who appeared, for some, to be 'turning the world of financial speculation into a new form of popular entertainment whose morality was ambiguous at best.'[69] This sense of ambivalent morality seeps into Riddell's novella, in Elmsdale's dual identity as loving husband and cruel lender, described as 'that swindling old vagabond' and 'a devil'.[70]

Elmsdale's preoccupation with wealth and credit extends even into the afterlife, as the ghost often appears in his library 'counting over bank-notes,' just as the final night of his lifetime was spent poring over 'deeds and notes, […] as a miser counts his gold.'[71] Crucially, Harringford is 'stricken down' by Elmsdale's spectre in the midst of 'his buying, and bargaining, and boasting,'[72] later stating of his former employer that: '[h]e thought a great deal of money, and he has come back for it. He can't rest, and he won't let me rest till I have paid him principal and interest – compound interest.'[73] The man who made his living through disreputable forms of money thus finds his own spiritual fate inextricably entangled in pecuniary concerns, as the economic phrases in Harringford's claims suggest that the murderer too will remain embroiled in this system after death. This macabre vision of the afterlife importantly highlights how finance and religion, specifically soteriology, disturbingly share a language of balance and return, reflecting what Nancy Henry and Cannon Schmitt term 'the inextricability of business and finance from the rest of Victorian society'.[74] Worryingly, both schemes seem slightly off-kilter, less stringent than nineteenth-century subjects might hope. Harringford's 'debt' is seemingly repaid in the meting out of poetic justice (the deaths of his family and ultimately himself, and his redemptive decision to leave his money to Helena). But the suffering endured by innocents in this process creates an impression of dissonance, which throws the fairness of both systems (moral/monetary) into question.

Crucially, it is not only Elmsdale and Harringford who are implicated in the financial/spiritual transactions of exchange. As mentioned, the deaths of Harringford's family are implicitly linked to Elmsdale's murder, and the ghost almost bankrupts his

---

[69] Itzkowitz (2009), p. 99.
[70] Riddell (2010), pp. 13, 118.
[71] Riddell (2010), pp. 33, 120.
[72] Riddell (2010), p. 115.
[73] Riddell (2010), p. 118.
[74] Nancy Henry and Cannon Schmitt, 'Introduction: Finance, Capital, Culture', in Henry and Schmitt (2009), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

offspring through attempts to expose his killer. As well as illustrating the troublingly male-dominated (and potentially self-interested) nature of Victorian finance and inheritance, this also speaks to the extent to which *all* nineteenth-century subjects remain at the mercy of the economic system: men, women, children, and ghosts. Furthermore, the concept of inadequate or unproductive labour which recurs throughout – the solicitors' failed attempts to rent the house, the near-fruitless court case, Helena's abortive mission to become a governess, Miss Blake's neglect of her pecuniary promise to Patterson – mirrors the unfairness of a monetary system in which hard work can go unrewarded while morally-suspect actions reap financial benefits. The spectre almost acts as a bailiff, in that his recurrent appearance (usually involving documents concerning money) works to drive River Hall's tenants from their rented home. The form of post-death work enacted by Elmsdale's ghost is futile labour drained of all sense of productivity and worth, perhaps functioning as a subtle comment on the type of 'work' performed by Elmsdale in life. Capitalising on ephemeral transactions constitutes a shadowy form of employment contributing to a fraught economic system in which the links between labour and recompense are increasingly blurred.

Houston suggests that the nineteenth century saw a transition in which 'money changes from being linked literally with physical entities like precious metals and instead becomes a dynamic, invisible energy or credit being exchanged between people.'[75] *The Uninhabited House*, with its complex networks of debts and exchanges, exemplifies this idea, especially as its evocations of the financial and the spectral continually converge. The murderer and his victim engage in a vexed battle to square the (soteriological and economic) accounts; Miss Blake's mediations on money convey strange disparities between shillings loaned and those accepted; and River Hall itself is both potentially lucrative but actually draining, desirable yet uninhabitable, haunt*ing* and haunt*ed*. At the end of the narrative, the house is razed to the ground, presumably eradicating Elmsdale's ghost.[76] But this apparent conclusion is shadowed by the continued existence of the ephemeral monetary processes which generated the trouble in the first place. While Patterson and Helena achieve their happy ending, the reader may be left wondering about the plethora of marginal characters displaced from the economic mainstream, victims of the ever-present and potentially horrifying financial system.

---

[75] Houston (2005), p. 84.

[76] The ghost might already be assumed to be at rest by the reader, insofar as Elmsdale was vindicated by Harringford's confession. In the traditional ghost story, this correction of a past wrong is usually enough to lay the ghost to rest (as happens in Riddell's 'Nut Bush Farm').

Abandoned Families and Independent Women: 'Nut Bush Farm' and 'Old Mrs Jones' (both 1882)

The Uninhabited House conveys the difficulties facing middle-class women attempting to find additional income, and criticises the convoluted, intangible legal and financial processes which were continually threatening the Victorian world. 'Nut Bush Farm' uses many of the same narrative devices in staging a similar critique: a rumour surrounding a financially-motivated murder proves detrimental to the victim's family, the ghost returns in attempts to reveal his killer, and the male protagonist ultimately facilitates this revelation. This later tale is, however, perhaps more optimistic in envisioning economic opportunities for women.

'Nut Bush Farm' is narrated by a convalescent man, Jack, who seeks tenancy of a farm in the hope that it will improve his own health and that of his frail wife and son. He eventually discovers Nut Bush Farm and rents it, following a comical negotiation with its shabby and mannish owner, Miss Gostock. The farm's previous tenant, Mr Hascot, is rumoured to have run away with a younger servant woman after withdrawing a substantial sum of money from the bank, leaving his family to the workhouse. Jack, however, begins to suspect that Hascot was murdered. He confides his suspicion to his delicate neighbour, Mrs Waite, after which Jack sees the spectre, realising it is requesting his help. On inquiry, Jack learns that the girl with whom Hascot supposedly eloped has obtained a service position elsewhere, and he begins to suspect Miss Gostock of murdering her tenant. Jack finally realises Mr Waite is the true killer when his wife faints at Jack's mention of digging up the nut tree in the woods. That night, a pocketful of banknotes (presumably Hascot's missing ones) is hurled through Jack's open window. The Waites flee to New Zealand, but their vessel is sunk on the journey.

As in *The Uninhabited House*, the suggestion of morally-dubious dealings on one character's behalf is revealed to be a carefully constructed fiction veiling his financially-motivated murder. The idea of pricing a life is foreshadowed from the outset, in Jack's descriptions of his accident and its compensation: he states that his employers 'rated [the accident] far too highly and recompensed it with a liberality [he] never can feel sufficiently grateful for,' and claims that his doctors 'would not give a year's purchase for [his] life'.[77] In such a context, even apparently innocuous phrases – 'father-in-law', Jack's claim to put the furniture 'to rights'[78] – seem economically-loaded, revealing the insidiousness of

---

[77] Mrs J. H. [Charlotte] Riddell, 'Nut Bush Farm', in Riddell (1885), pp. 104-74 (p. 105).
[78] Riddell (1885), p. 105.

financial transactions and rhetoric in Victorian life. If Jack is somewhat displaced from his formerly healthy relationship with work and monetary recompense, the ghost of his former tenant is even further removed. Hascot, like many of Riddell's other spectres, is doomed to wander around his former residence in a silent, post-death existence, one from which he is only freed by a living man's intervention. The male ghost thus articulates the problems of an inheritance system in which identity formation is predicated on something as flimsy and unreliable as money. If the will functions, as Frank claims, as an ostensibly 'unmediated statement of its author's desires […] and a negotiation between the self and social system,'[79] Hascot's ghost represents the self's potential dissolution when material markers of identity (legal documents and wealth) are lost. One's family and reputation cannot be protected by shaky legal processes, but remain intensely vulnerable to outside threats. Hascot's family, crucially, are seemingly left 'totally unprovided for' until Jack discovers the murderer.[80] Moreover, the community itself seems as unhelpful to struggling individuals as the financial system which structures it. When a neighbour comments that '[i]t is terrible to think of [Hascot's] wife and family being inmates of the Union,' Jack tartly replies that 'it is terrible to consider not a soul has tried to get them out of it.'[81]

If Hascot's destitute relatives highlight the vulnerability of abandoned families in a patriarchal system, the story also explores women's potential opportunities for financial agency in such a world. These opportunities are framed through three archetypes of Victorian femininity: the independent working woman (Jack's mannish landlady Miss Gostock); the insipid and potentially hysterical female dependent (his nervous and delicate wife Lucy); and the capable domestic housekeeper (Jack's sister Lolly).[82] While Miss Gostock and Lolly offer divergent visions of how nineteenth-century women can maintain financial independence and/or contribute to Victorian culture, Lucy's passive and parasitic femininity acts as a burden on her husband, and implicitly conveys moral corruption. But although these characters present routes through which women can enact disparate types of relationships with nineteenth-century capitalism, the male protagonist views the independent woman as an object of horror. His fear of her seems more intense than his dread of the ghost. Further, the spectre and his bereft family symbolise the potential hollowness and unreliability of the institution against which they frame themselves: regardless of their endeavours, Victorian subjects remain at its mercy. 'Nut Bush Farm'

---

[79] Frank (2010), p. 9.
[80] Riddell (1885), p. 29.
[81] Riddell (1885), p. 159.
[82] Lucy does not actually appear in the tale, but Jack frequently refers to her. Moreover, this absence might convey the invisibility and powerlessness of such women within patriarchal culture.

thereby offers both a critique of women's limited financial powers and an implicit indictment of Victorian economics, as a system through which both men and women can be destroyed. At the same time, it subtly lampoons a male-orientated culture appalled by the image of the working middle-class woman.

The eccentric Miss Gostock, Jack's landlady, is portrayed in terms of gender and class ambivalence, in her mannish dress and propensity for labour. She resembles Miss Blake insofar as she disparages traditional feminine decorum; however she crucially works for her money, in contrast to Miss Blake's method of extorting loans. Jack's first encounter with Miss Gostock is fraught with confusion. She exercises her superior position in initially refusing an exasperated Jack access to her house, and attempts to teach him how to haggle. Her financial canniness is further cemented by her immediate (and unasked for) completion of the repairs required to fix Nut Bush Farm, and her insistence on valuing her own physical labour at the same rate as that of the tradesmen:

> She painted the gates […], took off the locks, oiled and replaced them; she mowed the lawn, and offered to teach me how to mow; and lastly, she showed me a book where she charged herself and paid herself for every hour's work done.
> "I've made at least twenty pounds out of your place," she said triumphantly, "Higgs at Whittleby would not have charged a halfpenny less for the repairs. The tradesmen here won't give me a contract […], but I know that would have been about the figure."[83]

Jack views Miss Gostock with horror, and condemns her bare and unfurnished home as unkempt, unfeminine, and indicative of her relative poverty. Miss Gostock's domestic pleasures are more traditionally 'masculine' ones: eating, drinking, working, and making money. Miss Gostock consumes steak, mustard and beer for breakfast, taking pride in her self-sufficiency and scorning Jack for his refusal to drink brandy in the morning. Jack's unease around his landlady stems from her vitriolic resistance to gender stereotypes; moreover, this resistance throws Jack's own sense of masculinity into question. Martin A. Danahay, in his astute study of Victorian masculinity, suggests that women who performed hard physical labour could prove unsettling for middle- or upper-class men who did intellectual work within the domestic space. Danahay describes '[t]he division of the field of labour along class and gender lines' as 'deeply contradictory' insofar as 'the labour performed by working-class women could be conventionally "masculine" while [that]

---

[83] Riddell (1885), pp. 123-24.

performed by upper-class intellectual men placed them closer to the ideals of the "feminine".'[84] Although the narrative remains silent as to Jack's previous means of employment, Jack is now unable to work, and the image of Miss Gostock and her 'masculine strength'[85] performing all the odd jobs he cannot significantly troubles his masculine identity. The landlady frequently offers to teach Jack how to do a variety of traditional 'manly' things, and casually insults him at intervals.[86] This reversal of gender stereotypes is abhorrent to Jack, as he describes her as a 'monstrous figure,'[87] though the ghost is never condemned in similarly demonising terms.[88] Moreover, Jack's misguided suspicion that Miss Gostock has murdered Hascot associates the working woman with moral corruption. While the comically mannish Miss Gostock might anticipate the press caricatures of the late Victorian 'New Woman', her portrayal also subtly satirises the horrified men's failure to come to terms with economically-independent women. Jack's revulsion at his landlady, rather than the ghost, serves a double function: it illustrates both the spectre's mundane continued immersion in the material world, and the extent to which Victorian middle-class women are apparently defeminised through certain forms of work.

Despite his sense of horror, some of Jack's exclamations at his landlady's eccentricities are marked with a grudging sense of respect, contrasting positively against his mentions of his wife, Lucy, and unnamed male child. These references to his dependent family are tainted with weariness and exhaustion, as when Jack admits that he 'really felt at his wits' end' in considering how his 'very nervous, impressionable' wife and 'delicate weakling' of a son might react to the news that the house is haunted.[89] 'Nut Bush Farm' presents the type of weak, semi-invalid form of Victorian femininity exemplified by the absent Lucy as fatiguing and fruitless, and even potentially corrupt. Jack selects Mrs Waite as confidante, influenced by her resemblance to his wife in being a 'fair, delicate creature […] fading into the grave.'[90] Just as Miss Gostock is more terrifying than the ghost to Jack, Miss Waite and Lucy are more *deathly* than the ghost, illustrating the pessimistic connotations of the nineteenth-century 'Angel in the House.' Lucy exemplifies a passive,

---

[84] Martin A. Danahay, *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture: Literature, Art and Masculinity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 121.

[85] Riddell (1885), p. 161.

[86] She tries to teach Jack how to negotiate rent on a property and mow the lawn, and she tells him that he 'won't make a good farmer' and will 'never be good for much' until he takes to living on 'good old English fare' like herself. Riddell (1885), pp. 119, 154.

[87] Riddell (1885), p. 120.

[88] Jack is slightly dismayed when he realises he has seen a ghost, but during his first encounter with it he mistakes it for a living trespasser.

[89] Jack also later hints at his wife's melancholic and potentially hysterical nature later on, when he references his familiarity with women's 'occasional fits of temper or depression.' Riddell (1885), pp. 104, 128.

[90] Riddell (1885), p. 162.

sickly and parasitic form of femininity that bears no healthy fruits and acts as a continual drain on her husband's emotional and financial resources. The fact that their weakling son acts as the prime heir to the inheritance drama implied by Jack's purchase of the farm invokes what Allan Hepburn terms the central gothic doubt about 'the legitimacy of […] inheritance as a natural right.'[91] Once again, the ghost's apparent break with ontological certainty is overshadowed by a troubled ambivalence about legal processes and those who benefit from them.

Lolly, Jack's sister, represents healthy and productive domestic femininity, at a distance from the vapid and sickly Lucy. With her hands 'never idle […] for ever busy with […] something her housewifely eyes thought of making and mending,'[92] Lolly is constantly at work. In this she perhaps resembles Riddell herself, who, in addition to being a prolific novelist, was a self-sufficient and canny Victorian housekeeper. In an 1874 article, for example, she promotes keeping poultry and growing produce, claiming that women were best suited to the job.[93] As well as being domestically industrious, Lolly is also able to exert control over her male relatives, as when Jack references her 'favourite habit' of taking hold of a man by his buttonhole 'when she wanted anything from one of the males in her family.'[94] Shouldering the duties of housekeeping that invalid Lucy is unable to fulfil, Lolly subtly undermines Jack's control over the domestic space. Of course, Lolly's power is severely limited and conservative when compared with Miss Gostock's economic independence, but she nonetheless illustrates how Victorian women might exercise partial influence without breaking with the feminine role assigned to them.

Despite these semi-positive portrayals of opportunities for women, the narrative nonetheless remains suspicious of the economic system against which they position themselves. The fate of Hascot's family illustrates the susceptibility of women and children to economic adversity in a patriarchal world. Moreover, 'Nut Bush Farm' implicitly links women's financial ruin to sexual transgression. Sally Powner, the servant girl rumoured to have run away with Hascot, is described by Miss Gostock as a 'little

---

[91] This weakling son also resembles the kind of insipid male inheritors who feature in Gothic texts such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839). Allan Hepburn, 'Introduction: Inheritance and Disinheritance in the Novel', in *Troubled Legacies: Narrative and Inheritance*, ed. by Allan Hepburn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 3-25 (p. 9).

[92] Riddell (1885), p. 128.

[93] She argues that it is imperative that 'the mistress of the house of her female servants take entire control of the fowl and chicken yard' as 'men and boys have no conscience at all about appropriating eggs.' Mrs J. H. Riddell, 'About Poultry and Peas', *Illustrated Review*, 1. 129 (June 1874), 371-72 (371).

[94] Riddell (1885), p. 129.

hussey.'[95] Although Jack discovers that the gossip is false and that Sally has merely obtained a service position elsewhere, in the eyes of the town she remains degraded. 'Nut Bush Farm' thus counters its positive portrayals of women's economic opportunities with a pessimistic acknowledgement of threats facing them: the abandonment of the male head of the household (as with Hascot's wife and children), the rumour of sexual transgression (Sally Powner), or the defeminisation that was sometimes perceived to accompany female economic independence engendered by taking on 'men's work' (Miss Gostock).

Miss Gostock's vitriolic condemnation of Sally may seem slightly surprising: the reader might assume that the older lady, as the character most resistant to gender convention, would be more sympathetic to the sexual double standard that pathologised or demonised sexuality in women while implicitly sanctioning male desires. Yet Riddell's universe, as mentioned earlier, is no comprehensible one in which moral, soteriological, legal, and financial transactions are balanced and fair. While some characters make efforts to provide help (for example the various male protagonists who attempt to lay ghosts to rest), others lack both the tools and the inclination to rescue their contemporaries from a cruel financial system which could just as easily crush their own selves. These ideas about unfairness and self-interest find further outlet in 'Old Mrs Jones', in which the spectre of a murdered wife haunts the house she formerly inhabited. Although the residing family are innocent of the crime, the ghost's frequent invasions succeed in driving them from their home.

'Old Mrs Jones' revolves around Richard Tippens, a cabman, and his somewhat spendthrift wife and children, who obtain tenancy of a house formerly occupied by a Doctor Jones. Richard and his wife Lucy learn that the house is rumoured to be haunted by 'Old Mrs Jones', a miserly woman assumed to have been murdered by her doctor husband, a dissolute man who married for monetary gain. The lodgers and the Tippens children see the spectre – perhaps the most frightening to appear in Riddell's fiction – wandering through the house, and when a cousin, Anne Jane, comes to stay, she frequently sleepwalks, also complaining that she sees the ghost. Finally, the police discover Anne Jane sleepwalking outside the house of an apparently German doctor, having been led there by the ghost of Mrs Jones. A suspicious policeman arrests the doctor (who dies quietly immediately afterwards), and a woman's remains are unearthed in his laboratory. The Tippens family's former home is burned to the ground, seemingly with the ghost inside.

---

[95] Riddell (1885), p. 117.

The family, having failed to save any money from their more prosperous period, are driven into poverty.

'Old Mrs Jones' simultaneously derides overconsumption (through the Tippens family) and underspending (through the ghost), implying that both avenues lead to ruin in a society in which wealth is so precarious. But even the financially-canny Anne Jane is made to suffer between these two poles. The story's narrator is explicitly condemnatory of Mrs Tippens, insofar as her prolific domestic skills are nullified by her inability to handle money:

> [I]n the teeth of public opinion, I do not think she was a good manager, for she spent up to the hilt of her income […] She was always considering how to increase her "gettings", but she never gave thought as to how she might save them […] Your true economist, your excellent manager, is a labourer at a given weekly wage, a clerk on starvation salary, the lady left with the poorest of limited incomes.[96]

Mrs Tippens, then, is clearly signposted as vulnerable to the caprices of Victorian finance. Ill-equipped for a rainy day, her spendthrift habits ensure that all her family's luxurious possessions were 'destined eventually to find their way to the pawnbroker as surely and infallibly as the sparks fly upwards'.[97] Mrs Jones, contrastingly, seems overly miserly, insofar as she refuses to pay servants to maintain a respectable home, and (perhaps understandably) furtively hides her diamonds from her husband. Yet it is clear that this canniness counts for little in a world in which a woman's property is sublimated into that of her husband's on marriage. More vindictive than Riddell's other spectres, Old Mrs Jones, as Jennifer Bann argues, is an 'actively malicious figure' whose agency is figured through her 'claw-like hands'.[98] In a macabre revision of the dead hands of inheritance reaching beyond the grave, the spectre's ultimately successful attempts to sabotage the Tippenses' lavishly domesticated home highlight both the precariousness of wealth in nineteenth-century Britain and the potential self-interest of people within that system.

Lara Baker Whelan identifies both the family and the ghost as unwelcome inhabitants intruding on a respectable neighbourhood in decline, arguing that the latter eventually 'makes amends for her intrusion by warding off the prospect of suburban

---

[96] Charlotte Riddell, 'Old Mrs Jones', in Riddell (1885), pp. 230-314 (pp. 241-242). This image might remind readers of Riddell's own status as a working writer struggling to pay off debts incurred by her husband and his relatives.
[97] Riddell (1885), p. 234.
[98] Jennifer Bann, 'Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency: The Changing Figure of the Nineteenth-Century Spectre', *Victorian Studies*, 51. 4 (2009), 663-86 (674).

degeneration.'[99] To fully accept this reading, however, risks ignoring Mrs Jones's power and malevolence. It is not merely the ambitious and spendthrift Tippenses who are victimised, but the hardworking Anne Jane, as the spectre entices her into morally-suspect nocturnal ventures in her attempts to reveal her killer. As with Sally in 'Nut Bush Farm', we might read this as a comment on how the sexual double standard intensifies women's vulnerability to the vagaries of the Victorian financial system. Whether lavish, miserly, or conscientious, all remain at its mercy, especially when threatened by rumours of sexual transgression.

Mrs Jones, who bears more than a passing resemblance to furious Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847),[100] constitutes a departure from Riddell's largely innocuous male ghosts. Rather than being bound to economic imperatives even in death, she enacts a vitriolic rebellion against a system which robs women of their personal wealth. That she crushes other women in this process is merely symptomatic of the unfairness which characterises nineteenth-century moral and legal transactions. Mrs Jones's rage might thus be partially attributed to her legal non-existence. While Riddell's male spectres return to unearth hidden documents that ensure the desired transmission of their goods, Mrs Jones can only materialise as a furious entity seeking her murderer. Lacking the materials with which she might make restitution, she harasses another woman in a selfish attempt to achieve justice. Many of Riddell's male ghost/male percipient relationships are marked with a kind of gentlemanly sympathy: the male protagonists in 'The Open Door' and 'Walnut-Tree House' (both 1882) express desire to help their attendant spectres. That the disenfranchised Mrs Jones can only unveil her killer through a morally-suspect form of possession that risks another woman's reputation hints at the lack of female solidarity provoked by a world in which women's financial stability was doubly at risk.

Both Riddell's male and female ghosts remain immersed in the financial system beyond death, but in highly disparate ways. While male spectres such as Elmsdale and Hascot symbolise the ambiguous and potentially constraining nature of the will in terms of the post-death existence of a living subject, female ghosts such as Mrs Jones present the

---

[99] Lara Baker Whelan, *Class, Culture and Suburban Anxieties in the Victorian Era* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), p. 93.

[100] Both women are implicitly othered through their race, with Bertha as Creole and Mrs Jones with her 'exceedingly brown' visage the same hue as 'mahogany chairs'. The story also meditates on the apparent undesirability of introducing 'foreigners of no respected colour into the bosom of British families.' Riddell (1885), pp. 267, 266. Both Bertha and Mrs Jones express anger at their respective husbands' attempts to control them, and are eventually destroyed by fire. Emma Liggins acknowledges the parallel between the two women in her introduction to a 2009 edition of *Weird Stories* (p. v).

inarticulate horror engendered by their status as legal nonentities.[101] These narratives explore the vulnerability of living subjects – particularly women – in an intensely unstable financial system in which money was often rendered intangible. At the same time, these tales' comic portrayals of financially dependent and independent women (Miss Blake and Miss Gostock) both satirise and contribute to a patriarchal culture suspicious of any women who broke with their assigned (yet often contradictory and constraining) 'feminine' role.

Conclusion

In George MacDonald's 'Uncle Cornelius His Story' (1869), the eponymous narrator recalls a ghostly incident from his youth, during which, while staying at the house of a friend, he witnessed the spectral figure of an old lady bending 'over an account-book.'[102] Although Cornelius had originally been attracted to one of the daughters of the house – the eldest, Laetitia – the image of the housekeeping ghost perplexed by 'beggarly pence' causes him to look at his financially-astute lover with new eyes.[103] He eventually breaks off the attachment when he finds Laetitia in place of the ghost on Christmas Day, painstakingly balancing the accounts. 'I thought how awful it was, if she too, like the ancestral ghost, should have to do an age-long penance of haunting that bureau and those horrid figures,' Cornelius claims.[104] His blunt conclusion – that '[i]f [he] had lost a wife at all, it was a stingy one' of whom he 'should have been ashamed' his whole life[105] – implies an inherent incongruity between thriftiness and femininity.

MacDonald's storyteller might voice revulsion at the woman whose preoccupation with finance even infiltrates the afterlife, but Riddell's fiction instead suggests that *all* Victorian subjects potentially face this fate. Although some modern readers have expressed disappointment at Riddell's seemingly lacklustre ghosts, the horror they evoke arises, not from their challenge to the boundaries between the living and the dead, but through their continued immersion in a highly unstable economic climate. Riddell's spectres, in emerging to correct a past wrong, are familiar, even potentially plausible entities. Their fictional Victorian percipients might be shocked by their appearance, but readers can

---

[101] A later story, 'A Terrible Vengeance' (1889), also fits this pattern, in that a murdered female lover returns to take revenge on her killer, rather than to oversee the transmission of material goods. The female ghost in Riddell's 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk' (1882) is more akin to Riddell's male ghosts, in being, as Andrew Smith has acknowledged, similar to Scrooge in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843). Smith (2010), p. 73.
[102] George MacDonald, 'Uncle Cornelius His Story' (1869), in Cox and Gilbert (1992), pp. 130-49 (p. 145).
[103] MacDonald (1992), p. 145.
[104] MacDonald (1992), p. 148.
[105] MacDonald (1992), p. 148.

acknowledge them as largely mild and interpretable instruments through which moral order is often restored. Instead, Riddell's narratives intimate that the real threat in the stories transpires from the caprices of nineteenth-century finance, which could ruin, crush, starve, and even kill its dependent subjects. This economic system – with its invisible money, shadowy transactions, and sheer unpredictability – was thus more terrifying and less explicable than the ghost.

While Riddell's somewhat innocuous spectres act as a critique of the potentially horrifying nineteenth-century financial world, hers were not the only Victorian ghost stories in which the spirits fail to scare. Scottish author Margaret Oliphant, like Riddell, was driven to write by financial imperatives, and the hauntings conveyed in her ghost stories are often sentimental and meditative rather than frightening and sensational, her spectres more inclined to melancholy than revenge. While Oliphant's spectral stories seem to support Briggs's assertion that the genre 'provided reassurance' in its 'rejection of materialism' and suggestion of 'something beyond,'[106] we will see that even these apparently anti-materialist narratives can be synthesised into my central thesis about Victorian women's ghost stories, through their preoccupation with (and challenge to) visual epistemology. Crucially, the ghosts in Oliphant's fiction, though not always visible, exert a powerful force over the material world.

---

[106] Briggs (1977), p. 24.

Chapter Two. 'What is Seeing? It is but a Vulgar Sense, it is Not All':
Women and Vision in Margaret Oliphant's Stories of the Seen and the Unseen

'M. le Maire has seen – what there is outside?' […]

'I have seen nothing,' I said […] "There is nothing to be seen.'

Margaret Oliphant, *A Beleaguered City* (1879)[1]

The nineteenth century saw a significant reconfiguration of vision in science and culture, one which radically altered the ways in which Victorians thought about visual experience. Although sight had formerly been perceived as a reliable and relatively straightforward means through which one could interpret the world, nineteenth-century scientific theories increasingly presented vision as variable, disjointed and subjective,[2] complicated further by new hypotheses regarding hallucination and the mind. As Shane McCorristine notes, at stake was the issue of whether 'seeing is believing' could be a valid claim 'in the context of a rapidly fragmenting epistemological field in which the boundaries between imagination and reality, and sanity and insanity, were becoming ever more fluid and uncertain.'[3] Of course, the Victorian ghost story had long been preoccupied with the question of whether spectres were real or imaginary, and frequently drew on visual language in interrogating this question.[4] The above exchange from *A Beleaguered City,* an 1879 novella by Scottish writer Margaret Oliphant (1828-97), provides one such example. Here, the pig-headedly rationalist male narrator denies the presence of an unseen crowd because he has been unable to perceive them with his eyes. This man anxiously adheres to his misguided belief that only visible things have a material existence and, of

---

[1] Margaret Oliphant, 'A Beleaguered City' [published anonymously], *New Quarterly Magazine*, 11. 22 (Jan 1879), 73-149 (139-40).

[2] For Jonathan Crary, early- to mid-nineteenth-century developments in visual science saw 'the privileging of the body as a visual producer beg[in] to collapse the distinction between inner and outer,' and thus 'subjective vision [was] found to be distinctly temporal, an unfolding of processes within the body, thus undoing notions of a direct correspondence between perception and object.' Therefore, a 'notion of vision' developed 'that was fundamentally quantitative, in which the terms constituting the relation between perception and object became abstract, interchangeable, and nonvisual.' Jonathan Crary, 'Modernising Vision', in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. by Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), pp. 29-44 (pp. 35-37).

[3] McCorristine (2010), p. 76.

[4] This concern was sometimes shaped through references to vision, delusion, hallucination, binocular disparity, premonitions, invisible but perceptible spectres, and visually-indebted rationalists. See, for example, Rhoda Broughton's ghost stories, which invoke the relationship between seeing, knowledge, and hallucination through titles such as 'The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth' (1868), 'Behold it was a Dream' (1872), 'What It Meant' (1881), and 'Betty's Visions' (1886). Ellen Wood's 'Reality or Delusion?' (1868) and Amelia B. Edwards' 'Was it an Illusion?: A Parson's Story' (1881) also engage with this issue.

course, he is proved wrong. Moreover, as the narrator soon learns, a force's invisibility will not necessarily inhibit its influence over matter.

This chapter interrogates vision in Oliphant's ghost stories, arguing that they question its privileged epistemological status to promote 'feminine' means of perception, predicated instead on intuition and emotion. The focus on ineffable modes might appear to run counter to my central thesis that Victorian women's ghost stories are mired in materialism, preoccupied with objects and bodies. I demonstrate, however, that this author remains relevant in her discussion of 'feminine' epistemology as an alternative to rationalism. Oliphant's championing of intuitive and non-rational epistemological models over visual experience, in certain spectral tales, relies on an astute awareness of the scientific developments that were recoding vision at that time, thus betraying a reliance on materialism running concurrent to the claims to refute it. This chapter therefore examines how Oliphant's ghostly fiction continually promotes non-material forms through envisioning, exploring, and articulating the invisible. In their portrayals of the seen and the unseen, these ghost stories, like those of Riddell, Lee, and Nesbit, exploit the ambiguities surrounding hauntings as a means to critique the patriarchal culture which continually undermined women's ability and intelligence. While Oliphant sometimes seems to adhere to some of the gender stereotypes which were contributing to women's subjugation, she nonetheless revises such stereotypes so that traditionally feminine attributes become instruments of power.

In addition to endorsing 'feminine' forms of knowledge, these stories present the invisible as a robust source of strength, complicating attempts to read Oliphant's fiction in terms of a straightforward 'rejection of materialism.'[5] This discrepancy makes her especially relevant to *Haunted Matters*. Oliphant's unseen spectres are not weak and insipid creatures, but determined ghosts who wield potent physical force in the material world. Although Oliphant's spectral fiction appears to constitute 'in part a reaction against rational and materialist doctrines,'[6] its portrayal of invisible but intensely powerful ghosts frustrates readings of such tales as entirely anti-materialist narratives. This chapter therefore aims to demonstrate, via Oliphant, that even Victorian women's ghost stories which express wariness about materialism's authority necessarily remain bound to the material world. The ghost stories considered in this chapter stage nuanced interchanges

---

[5] As the reader might remember from the introduction, Briggs, here, is not speaking about Oliphant exclusively, but about the ghost story in general. Briggs (1977), p. 24.
[6] Briggs (1977), p. 52.

between physical and ethereal forms through a focus on vision, in narratives which both adhere to and unsettle conventional Victorian gender roles.

As critics such as Gillian Beer and Srdjan Smajic have shown,[7] some forms of Victorian fiction expressed anxieties about how the insecurity of vision might impact on empiricism and materialism. The displacement of visual epistemology, however, also opened up opportunities for alternative modes of subjectivity: sensitive, non-rationalist, and implicitly 'feminine'. Oliphant's nineteenth-century ghost stories – many of which were subtitled tales 'of the seen and the unseen'[8] – fall into this latter category, insofar as they promote and celebrate (rather than fear) a complexly fractured mode of semi-spiritual knowing which is significantly distanced from the apparently cumbersome, mundane, and undependable sense of sight. Oliphant's ghostly stories also crucially bolster one type of conservative ideology (women as intuitive) in order to explode another (women as object of the gaze). Ghost-seeing, which was typically linked to femininity, and sometimes negatively written as the product of hysteria or excessive emotion, is presented as a means through which women could subvert the gendered ideology of looking, and develop a specifically 'feminine' subjectivity. This type of essentialist gender binary might rightly be perceived as contentious by modern critics, but this tension makes Oliphant important to *Haunted Matters.* In aligning women with spectrality, Oliphant's tales occasionally reiterate the essentialist assumptions which could justify female subjugation, with the conclusions to some ghost stories appearing to close down the progressive possibilities engendered by the tales themselves. This apparent conservatism is, however, countered by crucial images of 'feminine' modes as means of empowerment: as productive alternatives to rationalism, as routes to superior knowledge and acceptance, as tools in facilitating female subjectivity, and as mediums through which to destabilise the gendered ideology of looking.

This chapter will argue that Oliphant's spectral fiction performs two major acts with regards to vision. Firstly, in depicting vision as often tenuous and unreliable, it privileges a (feminine) epistemology which is significantly detached from both scientific materialism and sight. Secondly, that it suggests that certain forms of non-rationalist

---

[7] Gillian Beer, '"Authentic Tidings of Invisible Things": Vision and the Invisible in the Late Nineteenth Century', in *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, ed. by Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 83-98; Smajic (2010).
[8] Stories which employ this tagline, or variants of it, include 'Earthbound: A Story of the Seen and the Unseen' (1880), 'A Little Pilgrim: In the Unseen' (1882), 'The Lady's Walk: A Story of the Seen and Unseen' (1882-3), 'Old Lady Mary: A Story of the Seen and the Unseen' (1884), 'The Portrait: A Story of the Seen and the Unseen' (1885), and 'The Library Window: A Story of the Seen and the Unseen' (1896). See this study's bibliography for full publication details.

'seeing' (e.g. ghost-seeing and intuition) may provide opportunities through which women can subvert what Laura Mulvey terms their '*to-be-looked-at-ness*' and thus develop a sense of subjectivity outwith the confines of the male gaze.[9] This process potentially enables women to exert a form of authority otherwise unavailable (not only visual, but sexual, creative, and/or emotional). Significantly, nonetheless, the attempts made by Oliphant's fictional women to champion their specific modes of knowing are not always successful. Female characters are often relegated to the peripheries of the narratives, and encounters between the living and the dead (largely facilitated by women) remain frustratingly transient and unsatisfactory. The tales therefore retain an astute awareness of the *limitations* of feminine epistemology within Victorian culture, even as they highlight its restorative and empowering effects. The non-realist forms of Oliphant's spectral stories – fragmented, suggestive, ultimately ambiguous – mirror the promotion of this type of epistemology, even partially evoking its (pleasurable but frustrating) experience for the reader. Oliphant's peripheral fictional women might not always succeed in improving their social status, but their access to certain epistemologies engenders opportunities for creative and emotional development. Furthermore, the uncanny power enshrined in Oliphant's unseen implies that these non-material modes might eventually wield influence over the physical world.

We will first explore Oliphant's biography and critical reception, discussing how her anxieties about the returning dead are often mediated through references to sight. Her 1879 novella, *A Beleaguered City*, challenges the primacy of visual experience while simultaneously implying its importance, insofar as characters must employ the inadequate rhetoric of empirical vision to (partially) articulate their spectral encounters. Crucially, it is the women within the story who are first able to perceive the dead and identify their aims: these female characters' peripheral and subservient position within the narrative masks the fact that the text implicitly promotes their non-visual epistemology. The second part of this chapter focusses on the male protagonist in 'The Portrait' (1885), investigating how his attempt to exercise authority through the male gaze is severely undermined when a female spectre takes possession of his person. Here, Oliphant playfully toys with vision and its associated gender assumptions, especially the assumed links between looking and ownership. The ghost's challenge to sight is concurrent with the growth of her authority, and the integration of her (female) familial representative into the male-orientated household creates an ambivalent conclusion which champions female power. The final

---

[9] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), in *Feminism and Film*, ed. by E. Ann Kaplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [2000]), pp. 34-47 (p. 40).

section of this chapter interrogates how an even later short story, 'The Library Window' (1896), portrays how ghost-seeing enables women to access certain types of knowledge and subjectivity, even though their experience in developing such subjectivities might be constraining and painful. The tale's dreamy female protagonist, in her position as spectator, is indebted to an empiricist understanding of vision when she is in reality witnessing a spectre. Although 'The Library Window' might at times confirm traditional gender roles regarding romance, I demonstrate how the story's seemingly melancholy conclusion destabilises such conventions, particularly the sexual dynamics of looking. In reiterating one claim associated with nineteenth-century gender conservatism (women as spiritual) in order to undermine another (women as powerless objects of the gaze), this narrative remains sensitive to different modes of 'seeing' and their limitations. Oliphant's supernatural fiction thereby utilises the vexed nature of vision to interrogate the complexities of nineteenth-century gender politics.

Margaret Oliphant: 'I Feel Still that I am but a Spectator'

Popular in the Victorian period but falling out of fashion in the twentieth century, the work of Margaret Oliphant has deservedly experienced a critical revival in the past thirty years, driven by a new recognition of the writer's prolific and varied output. The conservative tone of several of her articles and her denigration of the New Woman writing of the 1890s led some feminist critics to label Oliphant an 'antifeminist.'[10] Recently, however, others have recognised that the twentieth-century critical tendency to 'label women novelists as feminist or antifeminist' is overly simplistic, insofar as female-authored novels 'tend to be melting-pots of ideological conflict and exploration of attitudes toward women's nature and role.'[11] Contemporary scholarly appraisals of Oliphant have attempted to foreground this diversity (and thus query her 'antifeminist' designation) by interrogating the author's varied engagements with Victorian gender politics, citing her extensive use of strong female characters and her adoption of different literary personas. As Kathy Alexis Psomiades notes, the author 'seems to offer a fresh, funny, clear-eyed

---

[10] Not many recent critics reiterate this designation without investigating its problems. Scholarly works which examine the assumption that Oliphant was an 'antifeminist' include Ann Heilmann, 'Mrs Grundy's Rebellion: Margaret Oliphant Between Orthodoxy and New Woman', *Women's Writing*, 6. 2 (1999), 215-37; and Amy J. Robinson, 'An "original and unlooked-for ending"? Irony, the Marriage Plot, and the Antifeminism Debate in Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks*', in Wagner (2009), pp. 159-76.

[11] Nicola Diane Thompson, 'Responding to the woman questions: rethinking noncanonical Victorian women novelists', in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. by Nicola Diane Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1-23 (pp. 3-4).

take on the domestic novel and a healthy scepticism about the ideologies of feminine moral superiority, self-sacrifice, and self-deprecation that she herself often embraced.'[12]

Though Oliphant is 'closely associated' with the conservative publication *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,*[13] her writings appeared in a wide range of other periodicals,[14] many of which supplied sites for competing opinions. Solveig C. Robinson argues that:

> Oliphant's consistent support of anonymous publishing practices, especially as they pertained to criticism, strongly suggests that she found these practices useful, and her regular assumption of a masculine mask in her criticism – even when she and her editors knew that her true identity had been penetrated – calls attention to the very vexed question of gender and critical authority in the Victorian era.[15]

The author adopted a range of literary personas in line with different publication venues, and her use of anonymity and pseudonyms pervades her huge output, including serialised novels, articles, and supernatural fiction.[16] Oliphant's apparently conflicting stances on women's nature and social role can be partially attributed to this multiplicity, and to the fact that her literary career spanned several decades during which her feelings on such topics seemingly evolved. The 1880s, as an entry in a feminist literary anthology notes, was a period in which Oliphant's 'writing grew more acerbic' as the author 'took a stronger stance on the right to a full professional life.'[17] As we will see throughout this chapter, these tensions about gender also recur throughout the author's ghost stories. Oliphant's lengthy career, immersion in the literary marketplace, and ambivalent

---

[12] Kathy Alexis Psomiades, 'Margaret Oliphant', in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of British Literature, Vol. 4*, ed. by David Scott Kastan (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 139-42 (p. 142).

[13] Helen Sutherland notes that 'Oliphant's involvement with *Blackwood's* was more sustained that it was with other publishers, lasting for almost fifty years.' Helen Sutherland, 'Margaret Oliphant and the Periodical Press', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 84-93 (p. 84).

[14] In addition to her extensive publication with *Blackwood's*, Oliphant also published her ghost stories and articles in *Fraser's Magazine*, *Macmillan's Magazine*, *Longman's Magazine*, and *New Quarterly Magazine*. See bibliography for full details.

[15] Solveig C. Robinson, 'Expanding a "Limited Orbit": Margaret Oliphant, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and the Development of a Critical Voice', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 38. 2 (Summer 2005), 199-220 (199).

[16] Although all of the tales discussed in this chapter are ghost stories, Oliphant also wrote various narratives which envisioned the afterlife, such as 'Old Lady Mary' (1884) and 'The Land of Darkness' (1887), both published in *Blackwood's*. While the former (echoing those by Charles Dickens and Charlotte Riddell) uses the familiar trope of a relative attempting to make financial restitution from beyond the grave, the latter is a somewhat disturbing story in which a recently-deceased male narrator must navigate several hostile spectral cities. Oliphant's 'Little Pilgrim' tales, published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1882, also explore the afterlife in a more reassuring way.

[17] 'Oliphant, Margaret', in Blain et al (1990), pp. 812-13 (p. 813).

association with feminism make her particularly relevant to *Haunted Matters*, especially as her spectral tales betray a vexed relationship to materialism.

Beginning her literary career while young, Oliphant's life was overshadowed by sorrow and misfortune, as she suffered in watching all of her children die and various relatives (her sons, her brothers) fail to reach their full potential. After marrying her cousin Frank in 1852 and bearing several children, Oliphant and her family moved to Italy, where her husband died of tuberculosis in 1859, leaving the writer pregnant, in debt, and with two young children.[18] Supporting her family through literary endeavour and returning to Britain the following year, Oliphant also endured the death of her daughter Maggie on a later venture to Rome in 1864, and took on responsibility for her brother and his three children when they were bankrupted a few years later.[19] Adopting his children as her own upon her brother's death, Oliphant continued to work ceaselessly when her two grown sons failed to live up to their earlier promise. She suffered more heartache when these last of her offspring died in 1890 and 1894 respectively.[20]

Some of her contemporaries and later readers believed that Oliphant's huge literary output undermined her considerable talent, and many of her works, in falling out of publication,[21] remain unread by modern readers. Like Riddell, Oliphant was driven to write by financial constraints, producing a vast body of literature but seldom having the luxury of additional time to perfect her work.[22] An anonymous *Academy* article published soon after her death in 1897 claimed that 'if she had only written the *Chronicles of Carlingford*, *The Beleaguered City*, and *The Life of Edward Irving* she would have taken her place among the best writers of the century.'[23] Over forty years later, Virginia Woolf's rather more famous and inflammatory comment was that Oliphant had 'sold her brain, her very admirable brain, prostituted her culture and enslaved her intellectual liberty in order that

---

[18] Elisabeth Jay, 'Introduction', in *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant*, ed. by Elisabeth Jay (Ontario: Broadview, 2002 [1899]), pp. 7-28 (p. 9).

[19] Jay (2002), pp. 26-27.

[20] Jay (2002), p. 20.

[21] 'Like the work of many prolific nineteenth-century women novelists, Oliphant's novels went out of print in the first half of the twentieth century […] the revival of interest in the work of women novelists occasioned by feminist literary criticism has renewed attention to Oliphant's work in the last quarter of the twentieth century.' Psomiades in Kastan (2006), p. 142.

[22] Critical studies of Oliphant frequently reference this issue. As biographer Elisabeth Jay argues, however, we should not allow the 'strong autobiographical impulse in much of her fiction' to dominate our thinking to the extent that Oliphant's fiction becomes 'mainly […] illustrative material for [her] life.' Elisabeth Jay, *Mrs Oliphant: "A Fiction to Herself" – A Literary Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 2.

[23] Anonymous, 'Mrs Oliphant: By One Who Knew Her', *Academy*, 52. 1313 (July 3rd 1897), 15-16 (15).

she might earn her living and educate her children.'[24] Oliphant herself anticipates Woolf's analysis in citing her own awareness of her limitations. She muses, in her autobiography, about the value of her work and the efficacy of her choice to support her extended family through writing. Voicing doubt as to whether she should have prioritised pecuniary motives over the pursuit of literary quality, she also expresses a wish to *dematerialize* her output, in her claim that she would 'rather like to forget it all, to wipe out all the books.'[25]

Despite this self-deprecating perception of her literary legacy, Oliphant believed some of her supernatural tales to be her finest work.[26] These narratives portray a deep ambivalence about the returning dead, in that characters both yearn for and fear contact from lost loved ones, and spectral encounters are experienced through a variety of bodily senses. Her ghost stories therefore reiterate some of the anxieties Oliphant voices in the grief-stricken portions of her autobiography. Moreover, these tales also feature some of the inconsistencies about gender roles which have made her literary output somewhat problematic for feminist critics (namely, in aligning women with intuition and seemingly confirming their subjugated status). In framing these issues through a concern with visual science, Oliphant's fiction contributed to debates within Victorian culture which were continually revising what it meant to see.

Ways of Seeing: Victorian Visuality and Ghost-Seeing

In the mid- to late-nineteenth-century period in which Oliphant was writing, important changes occurred in the ways in which British people observed the world, as a result of new technologies enabling new forms of sight. Colette Colligan and Margaret Linley, in discussing nineteenth-century media, cite the 'massive proliferation of a wide variety of popular mechanical devices' which were altering traditional means of seeing, knowing, and communicating,[27] and Susan R. Horton acknowledges the 'Victorians' increasing uncertainty of the visual as a grounding for truth.'[28] Jonathan Crary argues that the decades immediately preceding Victoria's reign saw a 'profound shift in the way in

---

[24] Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1938), pp. 91-92; cited in Elizabeth Langland, 'Introduction' (2002), in *Phoebe Junior*, by Margaret Oliphant (Ontario: Broadview, 2002 [1876]), pp. 7-27 (p. 14).

[25] Oliphant (2002), p. 49.

[26] 'That the author herself held it [*A Beleaguered City*] in unusual regard is attested by several letters to John Blackwood', Robert Colby and Vineta Colby, '*A Beleaguered City*: A Fable for the Victorian Age', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 16. 4 (Mar 1962), 283-301 (284).

[27] Colette Colligan and Margaret Linley, 'Introduction: The Nineteenth-Century Invention of Media', in *Media, Technology, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century: Image, Sound, Touch*, ed. by Colette Colligan and Margaret Linley (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 1-22 (p. 2).

[28] Susan R. Horton, 'Were They Having Fun Yet? Victorian Optical Gadgetry, Modernist Selves', in *Victorian Literature and the Visual Imagination*, ed. by Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Berkley, L. A. and London: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 1-26 (p. 8).

which an observer is described, figured, and posited in science, philosophy, and in new techniques and practices of vision.'[29] While earlier approaches were, according to Crary, predicated on attempts to provide 'a purely objective view of the world,' developments in scientific theories saw 'the insertion of a new term into discourses and practices of vision: the human body.'[30] This new paradigm of vision – which Crary relates to Goethe's *Theory of Colours* (1810) – radically posited the visual experience as subjective, redefining vision in terms of 'a capacity for being affected by sensations that have no necessary link to a referent, [and] thus threatening any coherent system of meaning.'[31] Vision's inextricability with individual, unreliable human bodies – increasingly acknowledged by nineteenth-century science – thereby undercut the visual sense's apparent dependability. Crary terms this new approach 'potentially […] nihilistic,'[32] and Smajic acknowledges that theories of vision which 'resisted [its] reduction' to 'physiological terms' necessarily remained 'entangle[d] in corporeality.'[33] These new developments opened up the study of vision to a variety of intriguing subjective experiences, such as retinal after-images and binocular disparity. More importantly for this study, the invasion of the body into theories of visuality undermined the perceived relationship between seeing and truth, a tension explored in both nineteenth-century realist fiction and the ghost story.[34]

The Victorian realist novel was sometimes perceived to appease some of the destabilising effects of new theories of vision; however, its troubled and often highly self-conscious endeavours to present a true reflection of the material world instead revealed the limitations of the visual sense as an epistemological apparatus, and the incongruity between sight and language. Nineteenth-century realism, as Peter Brooks argues, 'makes sight paramount – makes it the dominant sense in our understanding of and relation to the world.'[35] This visual preoccupation is borne out by the proliferation of scenes which involve looking in realist fiction. Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866), for instance, plays on the privileged position of the visual to comic effect, when the protagonist returns to her home village after an absence. 'When Lucilla went […] to see her future home,' the narrator states, 'the sight of the village at Marchbank was sweet to her eyes. That it was not by any means sweet to any other sense did but enhance Miss Marjoribanks's

---

[29] Crary (1988), p. 31.
[30] Crary (1988), pp. 32-3.
[31] Crary (1988), p. 40.
[32] Crary (1988), p. 40.
[33] Smajic (2010), p. 45.
[34] As Smajic has recognised, these developments led to a widespread use of the 'optical illusion' theory to explain spectral experiences in Victorian ghost stories. Smajic (2010), p. 47.
[35] Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 3.

satisfaction.'[36] But sight's premier status in realist fiction was undercut by an intense sensitivity about vision's constraints, and of language's inadequacy in articulating visual experience. John Rignall warns against the assumption that the realist novelists were unselfconsciously seeking to convey everyday life:

> the practice of realism is a good deal more sophisticated than its ostensible premises, and in that practice those premises may be critically questioned by ironic implication. The privileged status of vision, the equating of seeing with knowing, is one such premise.[37]

Rather than being invested in an inevitably doomed project, the genre instead remains highly sensitive to the complications inherent in attempting to provide an objective visual picture through the medium of language. Words, as linguistic signifiers, are codes which partially distort the object described, and explanatory passages in prose works are always mediated by the unseen figure of the narrator. As Jennifer Green-Lewis claims, Victorian authors were 'sensitive to the ironies of writing realism, […] the inherent and literal limitations of human vision, and the concomitant difficulties of recording satisfactorily empirical data.'[38] Thus, the reader of realist fiction, as Brooks claims, is ever trying 'to come to terms with the real within the constraints of language,' a process in which (s)he encounters 'the limits of realism, and the limits to representation itself.'[39] Oliphant remained highly aware of such limitations, exploring them in her domestic realist fiction and her ghost stories. For Simon Hay, both realist and supernatural fiction endeavour to 'to *make visible* for us the otherwise-invisible structural truth that underlies the everyday experience of a society.'[40] That Oliphant's ghost stories perform such work through complex disavowals of visual experience situate them as important texts in the mid- to late-Victorian cultural discussions about vision's vexed relation to knowledge.

The figure of the ghost understandably provided one site over which these debates about vision and knowledge were fought. Crucially, the question of whether ghosts were real or imaginary was more complicated and multi-faceted than its most simplistic manifestation might imply, as the following example illustrates. McCorristine, discussing Schopenhauer's theory of ghost-seeing, argues that percipients were believed to

---

[36] Margaret Oliphant, *Miss Marjoribanks: A Novel* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1867 [1866]), p. 181.
[37] John Rignall, *Realist Fiction and the Strolling Spectator* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 2.
[38] Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 29.
[39] Brooks (2005), p. 228.
[40] As he goes on to explain, these two genres perform such work in disparate ways. Hay (2011), p. 24, my emphasis.

'objectively perceive the world through the dream-organ through which they actually dream the real.'[41] But this apparent action is 'fundamentally a hallucinatory process in that the ghost-seer merely perceives the eidolon of the deceased person, a picture image or representation that originates organically in the dream-organ.'[42] As McCorristine acknowledges, Schopenhauer's argument maintains 'strong parallels' with the SPR's late-century telepathic theory;[43] moreover, its evocation of 'a person who is dreaming while awake' illustrates 'the acute dissonance with which the concept of hallucination was approached in the nineteenth century.'[44] Hallucination was both seeing and dreaming, a fantasy and a 'veridical event,'[45] a liminal process which extended and remoulded traditional definitions of what it meant to see.[46] At issue in these debates, according to McCorristine, was 'the extent to which the visual world could be trusted.'[47]

On one hand, the introduction of subjectivity into theories of vision provided a convincing avenue through which rational commentators could debunk theories of ghost-seeing, in that 'the eye was demonstrably an unreliable informant, a sleepy sentinel';[48] on the other, the recodification of vison's unreliability, in signalling the depths of the invisible natural realm that science was continually discovering and classifying,[49] implied that the supernatural might eventually be synthesised within scientific discourse.[50] That is, developments in visual science could be employed in supporting interpretations of ghosts as *both* products of the mind and/or external phenomena.[51] Although commentators had

---

[41] McCorristine (2010), p. 73.

[42] McCorristine (2010), p. 73.

[43] This telepathic theory provides another example of the complications inherent in the 'real or illusory?' question concerning ghosts. As McCorristine notes, the comprehensive SPR study *Phantasms of the Living* (1886) emphasised crisis-apparitions, or ghosts/hallucinations which appeared to their loved ones at the person's moment of death, even at a great distance. The study read such 'phantasms of the dying and the just-dead' as 'primarily mental phenomena, thus dragging [apparitions] away from popular spiritualist beliefs and into the realm of scientific possibility.' While the idea of long-dead subjects communicating with the living might appear too far-fetched to some, the concept that telepathy enabled some form of emotional communication at the traumatic moment of death could be synthesised more easily within the realms of scientific naturalism. McCorristine (2010), pp. 139-40.

[44] McCorristine (2010), p. 75.

[45] McCorristine (2010), p. 75.

[46] Theories of ghost-seeing, in addition to referencing hallucination, also drew on 'areas of psychological importance from psychopathology to dream-theory.' For McCorristine, these developments culminate in the idea of 'a spectral self – a subjectivity that was conflicted, hemispheric and liable to hallucinations at any given moment.' McCorristine (2010), p. 3.

[47] McCorristine (2010), p. 76.

[48] Smajic (2010), p. 30.

[49] Victorian scientific investigators were continually discovering aspects of the world that could not be seen by the human eye, as, for example, in James Clerk Maxwell's mid-Victorian developments of electro-magnetic theory.

[50] For later ghost stories which draw extensively on scientific, pseudo-scientific, and psychical material, see Algernon Blackwood's John Silence tales (1908/1917) and William Hope Hodgson's Carnacki the Ghost-Finder narratives (1913).

[51] The SPR's telepathic theory of crisis-apparitions, discussed in Footnote 43, seems to fall somewhere in between the reading of the ghost as hallucination / the ghost as external phenomenon.

formerly called on religious experience, gastronomic overindulgence, or mental dysfunction in their attempted explications of spectral encounters,[52] the inherent unreliability of vision transformed the ghost into a democratic figure, in being a form of earthly hallucination that could be experienced by anyone. At the same time, many believed that scientific developments would eventually explain ghostly phenomena as a comprehensible, external part of the natural world. The boundaries of Victorian 'science' were constantly shifting to accommodate new discoveries and inventions, and thus the field was more receptive to occult thought than its more stringent modern-day equivalent.[53] The relationship between science, spiritualism, and psychical research, as discussed briefly in the introduction, was a complex and entangled one (rather than one of direct hostility), in which people from all across the belief spectrum drew on empirical testing as a means of investigating the supernatural.

Nevertheless, these interchanges failed to conceal the fact that the Victorian scientific realm was dominated by a relatively small, privileged, and largely male faction; moreover, the fissures within this party allowed marginal groups to develop alternate forms of subjectivities based on different sets of signifiers.[54] As Daniel Cottom argues in relation to the rise of spiritualism in the nineteenth century, the establishment of such anti-rational models highlighted the unsettling extent to which empiricism was, for most Victorians, based on second-hand evidence from an elite group.[55] Although Oliphant herself was unconvinced by the spiritualist movement, her ghost stories, in their critique of vision, can be situated within the body of literature wary of empiricist epistemology. Critics sometimes discuss what was happening to vision in the nineteenth century in terms of

---

[52] The most famous of these is Scrooge's comic challenge to Marley's ghost: 'a little thing affects [the senses]. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!' Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (London: Vintage, 2009 [1843]), p. 21.

[53] It is worth noting that the word 'science' as we understand it today did not come into circulation until the 1830s. As various critics have recognised, Victorian science was a far more 'fluid, less differentiated body of knowledge' than it is today (Otis p. xxvii), and nineteenth-century scientists often staged empirically-conscious investigations into supernatural occurrences (as evidenced, for example, by the number of intellectuals involved in the SPR). For a discussion of Victorian science's complexities, see Laura Otis, 'Introduction', to *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology,* ed. by Laura Otis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [2002]), pp. xvii-xxviii; for analyses of the intersections and similarities between technological developments and psychical research, see Thurschwell (2001).

[54] As Peter Lamont notes, scientists came to 'mixed conclusions' in considering the work of the medium Daniel Dunglas Home, illustrating that 'scientific knowledge and authority could be negotiated in the mid-Victorian period when challenged by a problematic anomaly.' For Lamont, these disagreements suggest that nineteenth-century spiritualistic phenomena were 'less the result of a crisis of faith than the cause of a crisis of evidence.' Peter Lamont, 'Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence', *The Historical Journal*, 47. 4 (2004), 897-920 (909, 897).

[55] 'By provoking reason to defend its dignity while refusing to characterise its own position as that of irrationality, ignorance, or common sense, spiritualism drove reason to face the frustrating weakness of its discourse and thus the embarrassing complicity of its power with social privilege.' Daniel Cottom, 'On the Dignity of Tables', *Critical Inquiry*, 14. 4 (Summer 1988), 765-83 (778).

crisis, anxiety, or loss,[56] but the displacement of vision's authority was not necessarily wholly negative. It also supplied opportunities for different forms of knowledge potentially excluded from rationalism, especially in terms of epistemologies coded as 'feminine'.

Peripheral Women and Unseen Forces in *A Beleaguered City* (1879)

Though sceptical of spiritualism,[57] Oliphant understood the yearning for some form of visual or tactile communication from lost loved ones, a desire frequently invoked in some of the most harrowing sections of her autobiography in which she mourns the death of her children. At the same time, she expresses perplexity at the implications of such contact: she dislikes the idea that her deceased son 'lingers about us' as 'that would be unnatural,'[58] and emphasises that she does not 'wish him to be hanging about us in our dreary human way.'[59] Oliphant also hints at the inefficacy of visual experience as a means of gleaning knowledge or exerting authority when she claims that: 'I feel still that I am but a spectator, that I had so secondary a place, that God and he [her son] had to settle the question and there was no other way.'[60] This sense of powerlessness with regards to vision also influences Oliphant's meditations on how the dead might feel if they had to watch their loved ones attempting to cope without them: 'Some people say [that the dead are around us, still *seeing* […]; but that is an idea I cannot entertain either. It would not be happiness but pain to be beside those we love yet unable to communicate with them.'[61] Vision is, then, not only vexed and subjective for Oliphant, but also potentially painful and unrewarding, particularly with regards to loss. These ideas play a crucial role in a relatively lengthy short story of Oliphant's originally intended for *Blackwood's*, but instead published anonymously in *New Quarterly Magazine* at the beginning of 1879. Taking more pains over the work than usual, Oliphant later revised and published *A Beleaguered*

---

[56] 'Müller's theory was potentially so nihilistic, that it was no wonder that Helmholtz and others, who accepted its empirical premises, were impelled to invent theories of cognition and signification which concealed its uncompromising cultural implications.' Crary (1988), p. 40.

[57] Oliphant's hope that the dead are given work with which to keep themselves busy in the afterlife links her with some nineteenth-century Spiritualist beliefs: see, for example, Jesse Gostick's *The Employment of the Dead* (1862) and Mary Theresa Shelhamer's *Life and Labor in the Spirit World* (1885). Oliphant also claims, in her autobiography, to have experienced 'some very curious incidents' with regards to table-rapping (p. 175); however she also condemns the authenticity of Spiritualist practices at one point, terming the work of an art-medium 'scribble-scrabbles' (p. 78).

[58] Oliphant (2002), p. 100.

[59] Oliphant (2002), p. 86.

[60] Oliphant (2002), p. 90.

[61] Oliphant (2002), p. 39, my emphasis.

City as a novella early the following year, supplementing it with additional narrative material.[62]

Oliphant's *A Beleaguered City* (1879) conveys the inadequacy of visual experience, instead privileging a more nuanced mode of spiritual and intuitive knowledge which is seemingly more readily available to women. This section traces how the narrative explores gender politics with reference to sight, arguing that it is only by eschewing visual epistemology that one can truly come to terms with the dead. I interrogate *A Beleaguered City*'s apparent adherence to traditional gender stereotypes regarding the dead's intervention, discussing how the spectralisation of living characters impacts on these constructs. The significance of the male spiritual character, Paul Lecamus, is also explored, particularly in terms of his use of visual metaphors. These metaphors serve a double function, in highlighting the insufficiency of visual epistemology, and in depicting its integral status in the townspeople's worldviews. While Lecamus is shattered by his spectral experience, an encounter with the dead has a contrastingly restorative effect on a central female character, Agnes. This section therefore also examines the novella's women and their work of narration within the tale, with reference to the two different published versions. The longer novella further emphasises the centrality of 'feminine', non-visual modes to the story's ethos.

Narrated, for the most part, by the town's mayor, Martin Dupin, and encompassing several supplementary narratives (including those written by Dupin's wife and mother),[63] *A Beleaguered City* revolves around a series of uncanny events which occur in a French town during one summer. The deceased inhabitants of the town of Semur (spirits who are largely unseen, but felt) eject the living townspeople, forcing them to live a somewhat nomadic existence on the city's peripheries until they are permitted to return. The narrative implies that the living people have brought about this dispossession of their material things through their lack of respect for God, as various characters are seen to hail money as their '*bon Dieu*' immediately prior to their expulsion.[64] Several female inhabitants express disgust at this materialistic attitude, proleptically mourning that it is 'enough to make the dead rise out of their graves!'[65] It seems, however, that the dead return primarily to communicate messages of love: framed through both visual and tactile experience, these endeavours are

---

[62] Some of the existing narratives within the text are lengthened, and an additional account, by Madame Veuve Dupin (Dupin's mother), is added. For full publication details of the text, see Colby and Colby (1962), 283-84.

[63] As mentioned in the previous footnote, Dupin's mother's narrative only appears in the longer version of the tale.

[64] Oliphant (1879), 75.

[65] Oliphant (1879), 75.

only partially successful and remain fraught with pain and misunderstanding. After the
town is plunged into unseasonal darkness and a *summation* (summons) appears on the
cathedral door, Dupin, his wife, and the rest of the inhabitants are forced outside the city
walls by an unseen presence. Many of the women relocate to a more distant setting after
realising Semur is in the possession of their lost loved ones, but most of the male citizens,
including Dupin and the town's priest, remain unable to see or hear these spectral
communications. Paul Lecamus, who has stayed within the city walls, succeeds in
interacting with the dead, first through touch and eventually through sound and sight.[66]
This experience leaves him so shattered and exhausted that he dies soon afterwards upon
exiting the town, following which the mayor and the priest walk into Semur to discover it
free of the spectral presence. The living residents return to the town, and forget about the
dramatic experience after a few short months.

So why do the dead return to Semur if their presence has no conversionist effect?
The apparent explanation – which Katherine Malon describes as the fact that 'the people
[…] had made a god of money and neglected their religious responsibilities'[67] – is evoked
and supported in the story's opening; however this account loses credence as the narrative
progresses.[68] Other explanations prove similarly lacking,[69] and even the most likely one
(that the dead return in order to transmit messages of solace) fails to account for the
relatively violent forced evacuation on behalf of the unseen. Perhaps any attempt to
provide an overarching and entirely satisfactory theory of why the dead return is to fall into
the same trap as many of the townspeople: that is, in courting only rational, cause-and-
effect theories we are effectively blinding ourselves to the fractured, nuanced, and
potentially inexplicable nature of the events. Esther H. Schor argues that Oliphant's
spectral fiction features 'apparitions which stubbornly resist definitive interpretation,' as
many of the author's 'haunted interpreters enact our tasks as readers by confronting an
uninterpreted text.'[70] Perhaps such endeavours, by both percipients and readers, are
necessarily doomed to frustration and failure, with comprehension secondary to

---

[66] It seems that the women, before Lecamus, understand what the dead are attempting to tell them, but Dupin
will only listen to his male contemporaries on this matter.
[67] Katherine Malon, 'Beleaguered City, A', in *The Facts on File Companion to the British Short Story*, ed. by
Andrew Maunder (New York: Infobase, 2007), p. 33.
[68] Moreover, the conclusion sees the majority of the living inhabitants return to their materialistic ways. If we
adopt Malon's reading, the spectral intervention is thus rendered futile.
[69] The townspeople themselves believe that they have angered God through their refusal to accommodate a
group of nuns, but the false faith the townspeople establish as a result of this belief remains short-lived.
Moreover, an oblique reference to God's non-involvement in the evacuation (spoken by the dead and
overheard by Lecamus) tantalises rather than explains, further frustrating the idea that the invasion was a
religious punishment.
[70] Esther H. Schor, 'The Haunted Interpreter in Margaret Oliphant's Supernatural Fiction', *Women's Studies*,
22. 3 (1993), 371-88 (372).

acceptance. *A Beleaguered City*, as I demonstrate, implicitly links comprehension to men and acceptance to women in order to twist conventional gender roles. The spiritual, religious women in the tale – intuiting and largely accepting – become the representatives of knowledge and work, while the materialist, war-like men – hungrily seeking explanations and confrontation – are increasingly spectralised. That these revisions are continually framed thorough the medium of sight implies that it is only through recognising the fractured and inefficient nature of visual experience (and the language used to describe it) that one can truly understand the ineffable. Even then, such knowledge is necessarily partial and elusive. This experience is crucially linked to the novella's women, who tacitly acknowledge their apparent ignorance and favour non-visual, non-lingual modes.

The sense of partiality and indeterminacy importantly infuses the tale's form: as with the realist fiction discussed earlier in this chapter, the novella continually invokes the limitations of the written and spoken word. Dupin's primary narrative, which displays its own shortcomings in its use of inappropriately precise and rational language, is supplemented by a variety of other competing accounts, which subvert the apparent purpose of speech to convey or reveal. The inadequacy of both sight and language is signalled by the first significant spectral communication to the people of Semur, in the form of a written sign which appears intermittently on the door of the cathedral:

> one moment the whole seems black as the wind sweeps over it, the next it springs into life again; and thus you go on, by turns losing and discovering the device formed by the lights. Thus from moment to moment there appeared before us, in letters that seemed to blaze and flicker, something that looked like a great official placard. "Sommation!" – that was how it was headed […] It was a summons to the people of Semur by name […] to yield their places […] to those who knew the meaning of life, being dead. NOUS AUTRES MORTS – these were the words which blazed out oftenest of all […] And "Go! […] leave this place to us who know the true signification of life."[71]

The townspeople quickly attempt to dismiss the sign as an optical illusion, but Oliphant's decision to portray the text in its original French (*sommation*, *nous autres morts*) provides an uncanny moment for the reader, who has perhaps forgotten that they are reading an

---

[71] Oliphant (1879), 89-90. Jenni Calder translates 'Nous autres morts' as 'we other dead.' Jenni Calder, 'Notes', in *A Beleaguered City and Other Tales of the Seen and the Unseen*, by Margaret Oliphant, ed. by Jenni Calder (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000), pp. 405-11 (p. 406).

apparent translation. As Schor acknowledges, it is not just the sign's appearance but the words themselves which are bizarrely elusive: doubly strange in its French form, 'the text's instability becomes politically ominous' in that its 'enigmatic "meaning" […] is that none of its readers are able to interpret it.'[72] Although both Dupin and Oliphant's editor Jenni Calder read the sign as a 'summons', sommation can also be translated into English as demand, summation, or reminder, reflecting the townspeople's disparate opinions and questioning the assumption that the sign (perhaps like the story and/or the dead) can ever be entirely comprehensible. Furthermore, the defensive, commanding, and ominous tone of the notice is bizarrely at odds with the later revelations about the ghosts' apparent intentions to impart messages of love. The self-descriptive term employed – 'we other dead' – is troublingly ambivalent, insofar as it posits the (present and unseen) 'other' dead in opposition to some undefined 'original' dead.[73] The use of foreign terms also reminds us that Anglophone readers are encountering a translation from one language into another: not merely from French to English, but the partial encoding of spectral experience into the language of the known. The troublesome and fragmented nature of this conversion can be perceived in the unsettling fissures which appear in Dupin's rationalist narrative, and in the more nuanced account of the visionary Paul Lecamus.

Semur's benevolent but rather pompous mayor, Martin Dupin, narrates the majority of the story, but his self-congratulatory claim that 'no-one else could have more complete knowledge of the facts' signals his own misguided attempts to provide a clean explanation of the spectral encounter.[74] *A Beleaguered City* is not a story of facts, but one of suggestion, in which the narrative itself subverts Dupin's apparent authority by rendering the events obscure. Dupin's means of gleaning and recording information (through sight and the work of narration) is ineffectual, and his designation of himself as official narrator soon unravels when it becomes clear that he, unlike his wife and Lecamus, is generally blind and deaf to the spectral communications. The mayor's diction, which connotes exactitude, anticipates his failure to comprehend the nuanced or liminal,[75] and his claim that it has been his duty 'to arrange and edit the different accounts of the mystery, as to

---

[72] Schor (1993), 378-79.

[73] The 'original' dead may or may not be the town's living inhabitants. If so, the sign disturbingly 'others' the living (they are not what they believe themselves to be) while also registering the difficulty of fully distinguishing the living from the dead (bolstered by the topsy-turvy claim that only the dead can understand life). If not, that opens up a baffling and largely unexplained hierarchy of the deceased which might partially explain some other puzzles within the narrative (e.g. Lecamus's claims that the spectres are 'not the dead' but 'the immortal' [115]). As mentioned, attempts to fully explain these perplexing and labyrinthine avenues are perhaps fruitless: they all play into Oliphant's privileging of partial, non-visual epistemology.

[74] Oliphant (1879), 73.

[75] Near the beginning of the story, he uses the terms 'facts', 'perfect', 'calculated', and 'the dead are very dead'. Oliphant (1879), 73, 76.

present one coherent and trustworthy chronicle to the world' implies a sense of synthesis and resolution ultimately lacking in the disjointed reports.[76]

Dupin's misguided attempts to map a rationalistic reading onto the spectral events, exemplified by his stolid narration, are also articulated through his references to visual epistemology. Dupin and Lecamus, just prior to the expulsion, venture outside the town walls, and both feel the stultifying presence of a great mass of people: 'This was the sensation that overwhelmed me here – a crowd: yet nothing to be seen by the darkness.'[77] The challenge to Dupin's optocentric worldview bewilders and appals him, but he soon reverts back to language and rationalism as a means of appeasing his terror. His double insistence that 'I have seen nothing' and that '[t]here is nothing to be seen' belies the significance of the presence that transcends the visual.[78] The longer version of the text, Oliphant's revised 1880 novella, features additional material which further illustrates Dupin's desperate attempts to rewrite sight and perception as synonyms, and he almost succeeds in convincing himself that the absence of visual signifiers means that there is truly nothing there. Taking a panicked refuge in technicalities, Dupin states: 'There was nothing – nothing to be seen; in one sense, this was the thing of all others which overwhelmed my mind […] There was nothing, and I had seen nothing. What I had said was the truth.'[79] The vexed relationship between seeing and truth is evoked and unsettled, as the non-threatening 'nothing' as absence becomes a terrifying '(no)*thing,*' an invisible object with which he cannot come to terms. The rational Dupin can only credit the reality of an encounter if it is experienced through sight (despite his intuitive acknowledgement of the unseen crowd), anticipating his later inability to 'see' the dead in any sensitive, non-visual way. Instead, it is Lecamus and the spiritually-inclined women in the tale who are linked with this epistemology.

Lecamus's narrative, which outlines his experiences in Semur when all other living inhabitants have been forced from it, condemns the inefficacy of visual experience while unwittingly betraying its author's indebtedness to it through the use of visual metaphors. Although he can apparently 'see' beyond sight, the frequency of his lapses into visual imagery conveys the potential impossibility of developing a suitable mode of language with which to describe the unseen. Lecamus asks the question which provides this

---

[76] Oliphant (1879), 78.
[77] Oliphant (1879), 83.
[78] Oliphant (1879), 85.
[79] Margaret Oliphant, 'A Beleaguered City' (1880), in Oliphant (2000), pp. 1-105 (p. 15).

chapter's title: 'What is seeing? It is but a vulgar sense, it is not all.'[80] He casts further doubt on the primacy of sight in describing himself as someone who is 'not supposed to be trustworthy witness,'[81] and it is perhaps this detachment from the visual which enables him (only eventually and partially) to understand the dead. Nevertheless, his claims to transcend sight are repeatedly undermined by his reliance on optocentric language which illuminates the limitations of both visual reality and representation itself.

This dependence on visuality emerges when Lecamus comes into contact with his lost sweetheart, insofar as he resorts to rhetorical devices which invoke the sense of sight even as they claim to reject it.[82] Lecamus originally struggles with the linguistic attempt to represent the unseen and inexplicable: 'I cannot describe it,' he states, 'for I neither heard nor saw, but felt […] It was beyond speech.'[83] Both sight and language fail to accommodate the spiritual presence as Lecamus enjoys a sublime union with his lost loved one, in which his sense of pleasure and gratification is undermined by an anxiety regarding the dissolution of traditional modes of knowing. The reiteration of visual, aural, tactile, and verbal language ('saw', 'heard', 'speech', 'touch', 'see', 'words'[84]) highlights the ontological gap in which this ghost resides: if we are not able to experience the spectral encounter through sight, touch, and sound, what other modes are available, and how can we describe such a communion in lingual terms?[85] Significantly, Lecamus's grief and pain when the ghost leaves him is conveyed in terms of a *loss* of sight, with a triple repetition of variations on the term 'blind.'[86] The 'visionary' thus remains entangled in the visual even as he attempts to transcend it. Lecamus's narrative thereby occupies a paradoxical position in which vision is only a partial mode, but one whose rhetorical influence infiltrates all forms of perception.

Although Lecamus is fatally exhausted by his ghostly encounter, Dupin's wife Agnes is instead invigorated and inspired by her contact with the dead. Agnes represents the women's capability in handling the event in contrast to the frustrated, bumbling men.

---

[80] Oliphant (1879), 139-40.

[81] Oliphant (1879), 81.

[82] This dependence can also be seen in his brief description of his previous life, when he states that: 'I know not what I *looked* for – but something I *looked* for that should change the world.' Oliphant (1879), 118, my emphasis.

[83] Oliphant (1879), 119.

[84] Oliphant (1879), 119.

[85] Consequently, ideas about the ineffable are evoked, specifically the question of how the ineffable can exist in a literary work if it resists the devices employed to encode it. Vernon Lee's discussion of the incongruence between the supernatural and representation, examined in Chapter Three, engages with similar issues.

[86] He states that he 'rose up staggering with blindness and woe' and 'went out blindly following after her.' He also muses that 'those affections which are the foundations of our lives preoccupy us, and blind the soul.' Oliphant (1879), 120.

The town's women first realise the significance of the expulsion, but they are pushed to the peripheries of the action – and of the novella itself – as the men attempt to wreak control. As Calder claims, 'Oliphant's quiet irony comes into play as we see the female characters dealing with the situation, going about their tasks, sensitive to human need.'[87] Intriguingly, both genders are spectralised through the text's language in their ejection from Semur, but while the male group headed by Dupin frequently compare their predicament to a war,[88] the women (with no clear leader, but guided by Agnes and Dupin's mother) are likened to angels administering care. The men's nomadic vigil outside the city walls transforms them into fatigued spectral subjects: 'a procession of ghosts,' a 'haggard, worn-eyed company' 'pale and look[ing] on,' with a 'gaunt and worn' leader in the form of Dupin.[89] The women, especially Agnes, are contrastingly benevolent and productive. Though Agnes is 'pale and thin as a shadow,' she continually aids the needy, and retains, for Dupin, 'a soothing which always diffuses itself from her presence,' 'gliding out straight and softly like one of the saints.'[90] Of course, the image of women as angels has become something of a cliché with regards to readings of Victorian literature, with feminist critics arguing variously that the model of the 'Angel in the House' can be stultifying or empowering, deathly or productive.[91] Oliphant's use of this imagery might convey gender conservatism, in that her fictional women exercise a domesticated 'feminine' form of power accordant with their socially-ascribed status. But in intermittently signalling the women's crucial but peripheral position, *A Beleaguered City* performs its critique of male authority through form. Like the inhabitants of Semur, who must eschew their primary mode of knowing (sight) and search for meaning in the unseen, the reader too must interrogate the gaps and fissures in the novella to perceive its implicit valuation of (feminine) spiritual forms of knowledge.

An important facet of this feminine, ethereal knowledge might, paradoxically, be an acknowledgement of one's own ignorance. The very slimness of Agnes's narrative attests to the women's lack of a commanding narrative voice within the male-dominated world of Semur, but perhaps this reticence is the very point. Agnes wryly acknowledges that women are 'not trusted' with regards to spiritual matters as their encounters could be attributed to

---

[87] Jenni Calder, 'Introduction', in Oliphant (2000), pp. vii-xviii (p. x).
[88] He describes the group of men as 'like an army suddenly formed, but without arms, […] without being able to see our enemy,' and he berates Agnes for her desire to enter the city, claiming that: 'You would desert your husband. You would go over to our enemies!' Oliphant (1879), 101, 108.
[89] Oliphant (2000), p. 41; Oliphant (1879), 111, 100, 108.
[90] Oliphant (1879), 108, 95.
[91] See, in particular, Gilbert and Gubar (1984).

'a delusion, an attack of the nerves.'[92] Significantly, this reference to the cultural tendency to pathologise and thus delegitimise female behaviour is paralleled in the men's attempts to analyse, categorise, and thereby explain the spectral encounter. While Dupin and (to a certain extent) Lecamus strive and ultimately fail to comprehend the event in terms of the visual (epistemology and metaphor), Agnes instead recognises that such experiences are intensely personal, ineffable, and ultimately indescribable.

This challenge to linguistic and visual representation is further developed in the longer version of the text, in which Agnes's mother-in-law, Madame Veuve Dupin, also contributes her narrative.[93] Leila Walker argues that Oliphant uses her ghost stories 'to explore a more nuanced political position than what she expresses in her overtly political essays,'[94] and it seems that such complexities are at work here. The additional material in Madame Veuve Dupin's account implies that many of the women suffer from the same materialistic bias as the men, particularly in one woman's attention-seeking claim that she has experienced a vision of an angel decked out in 'beautiful jewels' and 'robes whiter than those of any bride.'[95] This account thereby, as Schor argues, 'undermine[s] powerfully Dupin's complacent relegation of women to "the devout sex".'[96] Moreover, the two women who supply their narratives maintain a sympathetic friendship which starkly contrasts against the bickering and desertion which takes place among the men. Significantly, both women make humble claims about their inability to tell the story, with Agnes valuing herself as less worthy than her husband in having 'follies in [her] heart, every kind of folly' and Madame Veuve Dupin apologising that she has 'not the aptitude for expressing myself in writing.'[97] This very humility portrays their inherent wisdom, in recognising the inadequacy of language and indeed human understanding in divulging the point and results of the spectral encounter. While Dupin struggles in vain to fix the event according to his empiricist worldview, the women instead acknowledge that it is, as Lecamus claims, 'beyond knowledge and speech.'[98]

---

[92] Oliphant (1879), 138.

[93] Unlike Agnes, Madame Veuve Dupin remains unable to see the ghost, and subscribes to the belief that the invasion was a punishment from God.

[94] Leila Walker, 'Ghosts in the House: Margaret Oliphant's Uncanny Response to Feminist Success', in Wagner (2009), pp. 177-95 (p. 178).

[95] Oliphant (2000), p. 91.

[96] Schor (1993), 381.

[97] Oliphant (1879), 138; Oliphant (2000), p. 80. These self-deprecating claims appear to echo or anticipate those of Oliphant herself, who often expressed a lack of faith in herself and her literary abilities in her autobiography.

[98] Oliphant (1879), 119.

A Beleaguered City thus challenges the primacy of visual and linguistic experience through the return of the dead, employing a male-dominated narrative which covertly privileges feminine epistemology. Although the main work of narration is performed by the men, the women accomplish more important labour of care and support on the novella's peripheries. Furthermore, the women's spirituality, humility, and refusal of optocentrism enable them to best understand the story's uncanny events, or rather to acknowledge that any comprehension must necessarily remain fractured and incomplete. It might seem strange that Oliphant gifts the male visionary Lecamus with sustained contact with the ghosts: despite his recourse to visual language, he acts as messenger between the living and the dead, and is given the kind of prolonged supernatural experience for which Agnes painfully yearns. The fact that the female characters are consigned to their subservient positions in the life of Semur might seem a somewhat disheartening ending to a narrative in which women play such a crucial, though marginal, role. But this double relegation – both in terms of narrative and in the town itself – mirrors the displacement of visual authority which takes place during the spectral encounter. We must look beyond sight, or read between the lines, to understand the import of 'feminine' epistemology: intuitive, spiritual, and fragmented.

Significantly, just as the women's secondary position belies their crucial exercise of labour and superior 'feminine' epistemology, so too does A Beleaguered City champion the latent physical power veiled within the unseen. Although the novella's spirits devalue vision, they remain capable of repossessing property. Distinct from Riddell's economically-conscious and visible spectres, who influence the living through their intermittent appearance, the dead of Semur instead exert material force in their ejection of the living townspeople. This force is fairly violent at its extreme, as exemplified by Dupin's description of one defiant man during the expulsion:

> No one was near him, nobody touching him, and yet it was only necessary to look at the man to perceive that he was being forced along against his will. Every limb was in resistance; his feet were planted widely yet firmly upon the pavement […] Jacques resisted with passion, […] still he was driven on.[99]

A Beleaguered City does not, then, only privilege anti-materialist epistemologies; its denigration of visual authority also points to the invisible as a formerly-unrecognised source of material power. This recognition might counter the melancholy closing image in

---

[99] Oliphant (1879), 94-95. Dupin's claim that 'it was only necessary to look at the man' to understand what was happening once again illustrates his optocentric worldview.

which Semur's women return to their subjugated status. If the novella's invisible ghosts can exert potent influence over physical forms and bodies, so too might the non-visual 'feminine' epistemologies eventually become a source of power and resistance in the material world.

Oliphant exploration of the physical capability enshrouded within the unseen is treated somewhat differently in a later work narrated by a male ghost-'seer'. In this text, visual experience is drastically reconfigured to accommodate the desires of a female spectre. In contrast to *A Beleaguered City*, in which women remain (at least superficially) marginal, the female ghost in 'The Portrait' ultimately succeeds in wielding control over a formerly male-orientated domestic space. The fact that she achieves this goal through the possession of a man and the rescue of a woman (from her humble social position) constitutes a robust challenge to the gendered politics of the gaze.

'The Gravity and Silence of a House without Women': Questioning the Male Gaze in 'The Portrait' (1885)

The previous section argued that ghost-seeing provides a link through which Oliphant can privilege 'feminine' epistemology, but it remains important that male ghost-seers are also prevalent in the author's fiction. From the distressed father and sceptic scientist in the much-anthologised 'The Open Door' (1882) to the male outsider allowed a glimpse of a guardian-angel-esque spectre in 'The Lady's Walk' (1882-3), the experience of witnessing a ghost in Oliphant's fiction is not exclusively the privilege of women. Thus, while Oliphant signals the importance of 'feminine' epistemology in coming to terms with the ineffable, she by no means suggests that this type of experience remains forbidden to men. I investigate the role of the male ghost-'seer' in Oliphant's 'The Portrait', focussing specifically on its presentation of gendered modes of looking. Although the male protagonist occupies a liminal position between traditionally masculine and feminine attributes, his spectral experience stems partly from his indebtedness to the traditional male gaze, and the female ghost's intervention severely undermines his attempts to read women solely in aesthetic terms. The female ghost exerts physical power in dismantling the male gaze as a locus of authority, thereby reinstating female authority to the heart of the household and subjugating the formerly authoritative patriarch. Like *A Beleaguered City*, 'The Portrait' posits vision as an incomplete interpretative apparatus. Rather than using this revelation to promote intuitive modes, however, this later story interrogates the power play coded in the act of looking to challenge the assumption that women can be understood or controlled solely through visual means.

'The Portrait' is narrated by Philip Canning, who, after a disheartening sojourn in a 'semi-diplomatic position' in India,[100] returns home to his father as an injured and disappointed man. He has never known his deceased mother, and his father, a stolid and reticent Victorian gentleman, has quarrelled with the maternal side of his son's family for reasons which are only partially explained. Frustrated to find that his father has strict rules about his tenants and their payment of rent, Philip attempts to help a peasant couple financially, thereby vexing his sole parent. When Philip asks his father if he can become the agent in charge of collecting rent, he responds that Philip has become a little like his lost mother. Mr Canning then shows his son a portrait of an attractive young woman, and perplexes him with the revelation that she is his lost wife (Philip's mother), the painting having been obtained from a recently deceased relative who had refused Mr Canning's plea for a copy. Soon afterwards, Philip is driven by a spectral force into his father's private room for no apparent reason. This experience is repeated twice, and on the third and final occasion Philip realises that his mother's spirit is using him as an instrument to persuade her former husband to look kindly upon her young female cousin, who is facing destitution. This revelation emerges when this female relative is in the house with her guardian pleading the case, and Mr Canning suffers a bad shock when he acknowledges the spectral intervention. Philip ends up marrying the girl, who bears a striking resemblance to his mother's portrait. His father, subdued by the trauma, is transformed into a more benevolent figure.

Critical approaches to the story have cited its unresolved class and gender conflicts, and the significance of the mother's portrait in terms of the male gaze. Barbara Onslow, in discussing the function of portraiture in the work of British women novelists, argues that the portrait in literature generally 'became the locus wherein the competing desires and perceptions of artist and patron, sitter and seer, were cited.'[101] For Onslow, the 'treatment of the female model in the eye of the male viewer […] expose[d] and implicitly question[ed] the male creation of women's role.'[102] Focussing on Oliphant's story, Onslow suggests that it 'invokes the paranormal to create a conventional happy reconciliation, yet […] also resists the sentimental consolation of the picture as recreator of what is lost.'[103] Philip never, after all, gets to know his mother any better through gazing at her portrait, and the problematic assignment of the new wife's identity onto the mother's picture

---

[100] Margaret Oliphant, 'The Portrait' [published anonymously], *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 137. 831 (Jan 1885), 1-28 (3).
[101] Barbara Onslow, 'Deceiving Images, Revealing Images: The Portrait in Victorian Women's Writing', *Victorian Poetry*, 33. 3-4 (Autumn-Winter 1995), 450-75 (450).
[102] Onslow (1995), 462.
[103] Onslow (1995), 456.

(people assume that the picture portrays Philip's wife, and he fails to correct them) infuses the conclusion with a strange Freudian tension for modern readers.[104] Penny Fielding also picks up on the text's unsettling narrative displacements, stating that the 'domestic bliss of the [story's] ending' is problematized by its use of doubles which 'disturb its apparent piety.'[105] Fielding argues that the ghost 'act[s] as [a] transition between a perceived tradition and an intimated modernity' in that the narrative 'dwell[s] on the problems of reconciling the axes of class and gender.'[106] Fielding's analysis is especially astute in acknowledging the story's breakdown of language, and its 'position in the power structures it explores.'[107] I draw on aspects of both critical accounts – Onslow on the male gaze and portraiture, and Fielding on the text's gendered power struggles – in arguing that 'The Portrait', like *A Beleaguered City*, destabilises assumptions about what it means to 'see'. But while the earlier novella subtly privileges 'feminine' epistemology by revealing vision as partial, this later tale dramatically queries the gendered politics of looking.

Philip is simultaneously aligned with and distanced from the practical form of masculine authority represented by his father; if the latter concerns himself with business, facts, and money, Philip is more inclined towards compassion, emotion, and imagination. Philip moves in male-orientated circles and expresses a sense of discomfort around women,[108] but he also implicitly invokes the traditional feminine role, through his invalid status, lack of occupation, links to the domestic space, and preference for village gossip over invigorating country walks. The blend of masculine and feminine attributes in Philip's character seeps into his approach to vision, specifically his meditations on the furniture which decorates the domestic space. Subscribing to the empiricist idea that visual experience acts as a means of gaining knowledge, Philip cannot resist indulging in romantic dreams as to how the house's cheerless, 'deadly-orderly' quality might have been transformed by a feminine influence.[109] Thus his lugubrious recognition of the dullness of both the house and its inhabitants is supplemented by an emotional and imaginative spark which attempts to infuse objects with mystery or significance. Philip feels under 'some pleasantly ridiculous spell' and remains 'a little [in] awe' of the drawing room,[110] emotional responses which are sharply countered by his father's stoically rational response

---

[104] Of course, the Oedipus complex was not introduced and developed by Freud until the early twentieth century, but the story's suggestion of Philip's attraction towards his mother anticipates this theory.
[105] Fielding (1999), 207.
[106] Fielding (1999), 203, 207.
[107] Fielding (1999), 208.
[108] Philip states: 'my society lay almost entirely among men […] the idea of connecting [women] at all with my own home never entered my head.' Oliphant (1885), 2.
[109] Oliphant (1885), 2.
[110] Oliphant (1885), 3, 8.

of 'That should not be. There is no reason for that.'[111] Moreover, Philip's vague

expectation of magic is doubly confounded by the furniture's refusal to divulge the kind of

revelation for which he appears to be waiting. The feminine objects at which he gazes –

'the needlework on the chairs, the screens, the looking-glasses' – remain depressingly

mute.[112] The mirrors 'which never reflected any living face' signal the deathly

mundaneness of the long-forgotten possessions, but also subtly anticipate the invasion of

the non-living into Philip's sombre world.[113] Philip's abortive attempts to infuse these

possessions with specific resonances thus challenge the adequacy of visual epistemology

as a means of interpretation. At the same time, the protagonist's susceptibility to

imaginative impression (generated by the household objects) precludes his subsequent

possession by his mother's spirit.

If the opening section of Philip's narrative conveys his modes of looking as a

curious blend of what Oliphant views as masculine and feminine attributes, his later

encounters with his mother's portrait highlight his adherence to the male gaze, soon to be

contested by the materially-powerful ghost. While *A Beleaguered City* privileged fractured

forms of intuition over the unreliable and partial nature of sight, 'The Portrait' instead

challenges the assumption that looking embodies a form of possession. Feminist film critic

Laura Mulvey states that: '[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking

has been split between active/male and passive/female,' which in turn leads to the

'determining male gaze project[ing] its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled

accordingly.'[114] Although Mulvey connects these ideas to twentieth-century narrative

cinema, similar gendered dynamics infiltrate Philip's first viewing of his mother's portrait.

Here, Philip references a plethora of traditional Victorian feminine constructs such as

beauty, purity, and modesty, all of which are significantly undermined by later events. To

borrow Laurence Talairach-Vielmas's phrase, his 'monitoring male gaze' transforms his

mother's body into a 'text' which he then (mis)reads as an embodiment of passive

femininity.[115] The focus is on the mysterious woman's apparent innocence as Philip

attempts to secure the meaning of her smile. He claims that 'the face had an expression of

youth, candour, and simplicity […] invit[ing] love and confidence,'[116] but the revelation

that the woman is his mother unsettles his endeavours to comprehend her through visual

---

[111] Oliphant (1885), 8.

[112] Oliphant (1885), 2.

[113] Oliphant (1885), 2.

[114] Mulvey (2000), pp. 39-40.

[115] Talairach-Vielmas uses this phrase to describe the gaze of Inspector Bucket in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-3). Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 120.

[116] Oliphant (1885), 9.

means. She is not, then, the virginal girl he assumes her to be, and the potential possession embodied in his look is thwarted insofar as she is triply unavailable in her revealed identity (as father's wife, mother, and corpse). Philip's gaze is thus emasculated and matched by the portrait's mysterious look back at him: 'What did she ask, looking at me with those eyes?'[117] But masculine authority, in this story, is troubled by more than just the picture's scrutiny. The fact that the ghost's intervention comes in a form which is distinctly *non-visual* unsettles the apparent links between possession and the male gaze, to embody a very different form of (physical) 'possession' which reclaims feminine power but destabilises the traits assumed to underpin it.

The violence of Philip's 'possession' by his mother's ghost severely undermines the sense of frailty and purity which the son attempted to attribute to the woman in the picture. Acknowledging his awareness of 'the confusion of the metaphor,'[118] Philip accumulates a range of images and comparisons in his endeavours to convey his sensations: 'this wild excited mechanism,' 'like a wild beast,' 'like a mechanism deranged,' 'like those horrible wheels which from time to time catch a helpless human in them and tear them to pieces,' 'like a maddened living creature.'[119] The conflation of feral and automatic imagery, here, implies that the spectre ruptures the boundaries of sight, language, and known sensation. Crucially, it also transforms the apparently youthful and innocent girl in the portrait into an animalistic, indomitable, and materially powerful ghost, who (as the reader later learns) is determined to shatter the insular patriarchal household to accommodate her female relative. Philip's descriptions of his loss of supremacy and dominance thus function as a form of poetic justice linked to his earlier attempts to fix his mother's impenetrable meaning.[120] Fielding reads the ghost's (non-) appearance and lack of speech as an expression of women's limited authority, in stating that the mother-spectre's 'power is entirely dependent on the surrogacy of a male' and that her son's response to the portrait 'emphasises her immaturity and thus her powerlessness.'[121] I argue instead that the ghost's possession of Philip acts as a reappraisal of feminine authority, a response to patriarchal attempts to reduce women to aesthetic ideals. We should not accept Philip's reading of his mother as immature and lacking agency, but rather acknowledge his own immaturity in attempting to 'read' women, with the ghostly intervention acting as a corrective to his narrative attempts to patronise her. Her non-materialisation thereby

---

[117] Oliphant (1885), 10.
[118] Oliphant (1885), 17.
[119] Oliphant (1885), 16-17.
[120] He talks of having a 'certain command' of himself, though he fails to 'master the commotion within' him. He also states that he was 'gradually losing all power over' himself. Oliphant (1885), 17.
[121] Fielding (1999), 208.

exemplifies an empowering break away from aesthetics, in countering Philip's indebtedness to visual epistemology and exploding the apparently masculine, dull, materialist, unimaginative tone of the domestic space. Philip's subsequent reference to himself as 'a spectator of my own agitation' implies that his imagined power in the act of looking has been effectively dispelled by the spectral encounter.[122] 'The Portrait' thus complicates the hierarchical dynamics embedded in 'woman as image; man as bearer of the look,'[123] in its portrayal of an intensely authoritative and invisible female spectre.

Although the story's conclusion effectively synthesizes the female relative into the male-dominated household, critics are right to acknowledge that many issues remain unresolved. Philip's earlier questions regarding his father's poverty-stricken tenants – 'There must be something wrong somewhere – but where? There must be some change for the better to be made – but how?'[124] – go unanswered, as if the rescue of a single poor individual could make up for the others.[125] Moreover, the gendered politics of looking have not been entirely dispelled by the ghost's actions. Philip's later looks at his mother's portrait, though increasingly paying tribute to her agency, again slip into problematic conventions about female beauty. Similarly, Philip's future wife's appealing gaze towards him seems to epitomise the unresolved tensions regarding vision. The narrator's statement that 'in the eyes there was a pathetic question, a line of anxiety in the lids, an innocent appeal in the looks' both reinforces and undermines the gendered links between looking and possession.[126] The girl apparently exerts power over Philip through her gaze, but her look cannot be read as an appropriation of the *male* gaze as it remains indebted (at least in Philip's mind) to stereotypically feminine qualities such as frailty and purity.

While we might read these discrepancies as an expression of Oliphant's somewhat limited 'feminist' outlook,[127] they might instead be attributed to the story's publication in a conservative magazine such as *Blackwood's*. As the *Wellesley Index* notes, *Blackwood's* was a staunchly Tory publication whose authors often 'fiercely lamented any defection

---

[122] Oliphant (1885), 18.
[123] Mulvey (2000), p. 39.
[124] Oliphant (1885), 15.
[125] It seems to be implied that the woman's influence – and Philip's father's illness – enables a more lenient treatment of the tenants, but this development is never fully articulated. Also, the story opens on the demolition of the old house to 'make room' for accommodation better suited to the less affluent; however Philip's description of the planned residences as 'mean little houses, – the kind of thing […] which perhaps the neighbourhood requires' echoes the story's general ambivalence over the fate of the poor. Oliphant (1885), 1.
[126] Oliphant (1885), 27.
[127] As mentioned earlier, it remains difficult to categorise Victorian woman authors as 'feminist' or 'antifeminist' in recognition of the range of their work and its disparate cultural context.

from their own narrow brand of conservatism.'[128] Yet its 'consistent policy of anonymity' often 'drew eminent contributors who did not care to jeopardize their worldly positions by signing articles.'[129] The strange unresolved gendered tensions in 'The Portrait' might thus be understood in terms of Oliphant's conflicting responsibilities, in maintaining *Blackwood's* conservative tone without unreservedly buttressing stereotypes detrimental to Victorian women. The story performs this balancing act through the fact that Philip's new wife (to the protagonist, at least) embodies several of the traditionally 'feminine' attributes that had formerly been sabotaged by the ghost.

The conclusion of 'The Portrait' might reinstate the conventional domestic family; more importantly, the female ghost's desires are fulfilled through the denigration of the male gaze (Philip's) and the ultimate subjugation of a formerly-powerful patriarch (Philip's father). Philip's new wife, with her 'peaceful domestic throne established under the picture,'[130] acts as a queenly authority controlling her male subjects, a radical reconfiguration of the male-orientated household which was only made possible by the female spectre. Although Fielding suggests that 'the female ghost's presence in the symbolic order of this all-male household is severely curtailed,'[131] this reading fails to recognise the success of the mother-ghost's endeavours to revise the Canning home. The destabilisation of the all-male domestic space acts as a mirror to the dismantling of visual authority which takes place within the story. The apparent power coded into the male gaze is at least partially dispelled by the ghost's break away from visual epistemology, in a narrative which compellingly queries the gendered links between looking and possession.

The power politics of the gaze are also explored in a short story of Oliphant's published eleven years later: the famous and frequently-anthologised 'The Library Window.' While 'The Portrait' undermines the male gaze through a female spectre, the later text reverses the roles in revolving around a young female's preoccupation with watching a man, whom she does not realise is a ghost. This trajectory enables Oliphant to explore both the gendered politics of looking and the development of female subjectivity. As in the two previously-discussed stories, the spectral experience and its results are mediated through a complicated blend of conservatism and progressivism regarding women's nature and social role.

---

[128] '*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 1824-1900', *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900* (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2005) [accessed 4/9/14].
[129] *Wellesley* (2005).
[130] Oliphant (1885), 28.
[131] Fielding (1999), 208.

Second Sight and the Gendered Gaze in 'The Library Window' (1896)

Peter Brooks argues that: '[w]indows are always important in realist fiction, as in realist painting.'[132] Windows are objects through which one can observe and/or be observed, and the way in which they frame certain scenes (like the framing device of narration in literature) establishes the illusion of verisimilitude when in fact the spectator is only witnessing a distorted fragment. The ambivalence of this architectural feature – alternately opaque and transparent, a tool through which one can watch others or unknowingly be watched – is wryly acknowledged throughout Margaret Oliphant's 'The Library Window' (1896). Revising the convention of woman as object of the gaze, Oliphant constructs her female narrator as a spectator indebted to (masculine) empiricist modes of knowledge as she mistakes her (feminine) tendency to ghost-see for a superior quality of optical experience. This mode of second sight masquerading as first sight provides a singular opportunity for the girl to gaze freely at a male subject. Soon afterwards, she experiences painful disillusionment upon the disclosure of the truth, resulting in the loss of the spiritual sensitivity which enabled her to witness the male spectre. The pessimism inherent in these revelations – that spectral encounters are distressing and transitory, and that female appropriation of the gaze engenders loss – is undercut by the protagonist's development from intellectual passivity to a more nuanced subjectivity, which learns to value the intangible, feminine epistemology she formerly rejected. Though the story might seem to reconsolidate the gendered politics of the gaze it formerly questioned, its conclusion sees looking rewritten as an act of affinity and inclusion. Ghost-seeing thus provides a means through which the female protagonist can establish forms of subjectivity beyond the confines of the male gaze.

'The Library Window' is narrated by a woman reflecting on her youth when she briefly resided with her aunt. Although fond of her Aunt Mary, the girl would spend much of her time daydreaming or reading in a window recess in the drawing room, acknowledging the passing people and the play of light during the evenings.[133] Some elderly friends of her aunt point out a window in the Library Hall opposite, and declare that they are unsure as to whether it is 'a real window with glass in it, or if it is merely painted, or if it once was a window, and has been built up.'[134] The girl stares at it, soon beginning to

---

[132] Brooks (2005), p. 56.
[133] It would not be entirely accurate to say she 'watched' these, as she states: 'I did see all sorts of things, though often for a whole half-hour I might never lift my eyes.' This sense of non-visual intuition anticipates the story's revelation. Margaret Oliphant, 'The Library Window' [published anonymously], *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 159. 963 (Jan 1896), 1-30 (3).
[134] Oliphant (1896), 3.

make out particular articles of furniture through it at certain times of day: 'certainly there was a feeling of space behind the panes […], eyes that could see could make it out in a minute.'[135] She is pleased to eventually see a man writing at an escritoire within. Preferring this activity of gazing to any form of society, the girl becomes reclusive. Aunt Mary and her friends begin to worry, and insist she accompanies them to a party at the Library Hall. After dressing up in the hopes of meeting the man at whom she has been staring, she is shocked and pained to discover that the window which she has obsessively watched is in fact a sham, yet when she returns to her aunt's house she finds she can still see the man and his furniture through the apparently false window. Pleading for him to listen, the girl sees the man come to the window, open it, and raise his hand in an ambiguous salute: 'He looked at me first, with a little wave of his hand, as if it were a salutation – yet not exactly that either, for I thought he waved me away.'[136] Aunt Mary and her friends believe her to be ill, but a baker boy confirms that the fake library window had indeed stood open for several minutes. Following this encounter, Aunt Mary informs her young niece that she too once possessed this form of second sight, telling her the man she has watched was a scholar who was killed because an apparently 'light woman' pursued him,[137] and the woman's brothers found out. The girl is surprised and upset to discover that subsequent glances at the window reveal only an opaque object. Her mother comes to collect her soon afterwards, and the narrator, glossing over the majority of her life, reveals that she only saw the spectral scholar's face once again many years later, upon returning to Britain from India as a widow with children.

Critics have interpreted 'The Library Window' as an exploration of adolescent insanity,[138] women's heightened perception,[139] and female creativity.[140] Jenni Calder claims that the story 'suggests that perception comes from within, the result of an internalized energy which may be intensified by confinement.'[141] She posits that its playfulness with issues of fantasy and reality, and light and dark, speaks to women's 'empathy […,] suffering, […] otherness, [and] exclusion.'[142] Heller, who also discusses

---

[135] Oliphant (1896), 6.
[136] Oliphant (1896), 25.
[137] The story heavily implies that Aunt Mary's friend, Lady Carnbee, is the culprit. The protagonist is terrified by Lady Carnbee's macabre diamond ring, but this woman, like Aunt Mary, expresses concern for the girl's emotional welfare. Oliphant (1896), 28.
[138] Simon Cooke, 'Margaret Oliphant's "The Library Window" and the Idea of "Adolescent Insanity"', *Victorians Institute Journal*, 34 (2006), 243-57.
[139] Jenni Calder, 'Through Mrs Oliphant's Library Window', *Women's Writing*, 10. 3 (2003), 485-502.
[140] Tamar Heller, 'Textual Seductions: Women's Reading and Writing in Margaret Oliphant's "The Library Window"', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 25. 1 (1997), 23-37.
[141] Calder (2003), 489.
[142] Calder (2003), 485.

female exclusion and isolation within the text, persuasively argues that 'The Library Window' is 'haunted by images of reading and writing,'[143] and that 'the overwhelming sense of secondariness which haunts Oliphant's *Autobiography*' also influences the female narrator's marginalisation from the world of literature.[144] Heller contends that the male scholar's solitary, uninterrupted literary production exemplifies the life which Oliphant, as working mother, was never able to enjoy, and interprets the girl narrator's experiences as a romance plot in which the love interest is figured as literary creativity. Heller also crucially outlines the tale's complex gender politics, insofar as 'masculine' and 'feminine' attributes are continually destabilised and reconfigured throughout the protagonist's emotional journey. Although the production of literature within the story is largely coded as masculine, Heller rightly claims that the tale's segregation of 'the male realm of literary authority' and 'the feminine sphere' is complicated by 'important images of boundary crossing and the dissolution of categories.'[145]

I share Heller's view that reading and writing play a central role in 'The Library Window', but I contrast their priority with the text's exploration of vision. While Heller interrogates the story's literary tropes, I am concerned with how the narrative itself increasingly conveys the protagonist's own developing subjectivity through her preoccupation with sight. She effectively turns detective when faced with the visual experience of witnessing the spectre, a role which allows her to articulate both the quality of the incident and her own emotional and intellectual reactions to it. Although we might read 'The Library Window' in terms of a disillusionment of romantic hopes and youthful innocence, I argue that the shift from empiricist (masculine) vision to spiritual or intuitive (feminine) epistemology is accompanied by a crucial creative maturing process, which eventually facilitates her freedom from the formerly constraining male gaze.

The complexity of visual experience is signalled from the beginning, as the narrative contrasts the concept of empiricist vision with supernatural or preternatural forms of 'seeing', i. e. ghost-seeing and second sight. The female protagonist playfully comments that she had 'learned' from others that she was 'fantastic and fanciful and dreamy, and all the other words with which a girl who [is] fond of thinking, is so often made uncomfortable.'[146] This statement posits dreaminess as a culturally-conditioned (rather than an inherent) feminine characteristic, used to explain and thus appease any socially

---

[143] Heller (1997), 23.
[144] Heller (1997), 24.
[145] Heller (1997), 24.
[146] Oliphant (1896), 2.

troubling aspects of her pensiveness. The protagonist also confesses that she possesses 'a sort of second-sight.'[147] Although this term is commonly understood to refer to the phenomenon of premonition (perhaps connected to her Scottish ancestry),[148] the girl describes it instead as her ability to 'do two or indeed three things at once – both read and listen, and see.'[149] Just as her thoughtfulness is assumed to stem from her 'fanciful' disposition, so too is her multi-faceted capacity to concentrate apparently rooted in 'feminine' sensitivity. Although these claims subtly satirise the cultural tendency to link women's intellectual and creative capabilities to their supposedly otherworldly temperament, this 'feminine' sensitivity is importantly validated in the tale's denouement. The girl's implicit association with an older, regional form of supernaturalism initially seems to be countered by her adherence to more modern empiricist modes of seeing and understanding: what she sees, she believes to have material reality. But this scientific and straightforward mode of seeing is accompanied by youthful ignorance, and even arrogance. When her aunt's friends debate the status of the window, the girl docilely states 'I have no opinion,'[150] but her later assessment implies a feeling of superiority over her elderly acquaintances: 'How silly! When eyes that could see could make it out in a minute.'[151] Though she inadvertently subscribes to the increasingly contentious principle that the act of seeing is ontologically stable, the advance and eventual unravelling of this belief precludes her development of female subjectivity outwith the confines of empiricism.

This development takes shape through the girl's consistent gaze at the library window, and specifically her attempts to analyse visual clues. She effectively turns detective, as signalled by the passages in which she muses over the window's ambiguous status:

> I should be very unwilling indeed to leave until I had quite cleared up […] the mystery of that window which changed so strangely and appeared quite a different thing, not only to different people, but to the same eyes at different times. Of course I said to myself that it must simply be an effect of the light. And yet I did not quite like that explanation either […] I rather wanted, I believe, to think that there was some particular insight which gave clearness to my sight – which was a most

---

[147] Oliphant (1896), 1.
[148] Second sight was often connected to the Scottish Highlands. See, for example, Elizabeth Sutherland, *Ravens and Black Rain: The story of Highland second sight, including a new collection of the prophecies of the Brahan seer* (London: Corgi, 1987 [1985]).
[149] Oliphant (1896), 3.
[150] Oliphant (1896), 5.
[151] Oliphant (1896), 6.

impertinent assumption, but really did not mean half the harm it seems to mean when I put it down here in black and white.[152]

A sense of self-confidence is accompanied by a troubled recognition of her growing agency and independence, and she remains uncomfortably aware of how her non-modest behaviour might subvert ideas of feminine decorum.[153] Although she strives after a certain 'clearness [of] sight,' her sense of dissatisfaction over the ambivalent window anticipates the split between empiricist vision and supernatural 'seeing'. Isobel Armstrong aptly suggests that the narrator is in 'hermeneutic agony' and that the window may function as 'an aperture into the unseen or a misreading of the incompatibility of the seen and the unseen.'[154] But the experience of this agony is perhaps less important than its results: the narrator's frustrated attempts to read visual clues provide the key to her own empowerment. A nuanced form of epistemology increasingly dubious of the visual thus replaces her former visually-indebted worldview. Like the women in *A Beleaguered City*, she refuses to limit herself to a singular, clean explanation, instead citing her awareness of the constraints of the visual. Her references to 'the superiority of young eyes over old' in her efforts to 'clear […] up […] the mystery' are thus supplemented by a continual reiteration that these explanations 'are not quite enough to satisfy' her.[155] The girl's endeavours to interpret the world are not mediated only through empirical modes (vision and empirical analysis, undermined by the revelation of ghost-seeing), but also intuition and 'insight' (later validated by that same revelation). The girl's gaze at the scholar, as well as being tied to the more explicit romance plot, is thus bound up with an increasing sense of confidence and individuality.

The girl's consistent gaze from the library window initially situates her as a 'spectator,'[156] rather than an object of vision, reversing traditional gender roles so that the female becomes the bearer of the look. The girl's growing sense of independence is

---

[152] Oliphant (1896), 10-11.

[153] The suggestion that her ideas become transgressive or harmful when transmitted to paper invokes nineteenth-century debates about literature's potentially compromising effects on women. As well as expressing concern about the vulgarising links between the woman author and the commercial marketplace (as briefly discussed in Chapter One), some Victorian commentators also worried that certain novelistic topics were inappropriate for women readers. As Kate Flint acknowledges, many of these arguments were 'based on paradoxical grounds,' for example the idea that the woman reader's 'innocent mind' might be 'corrupt[ed]' by certain texts, 'hence diminishing her value as a woman,' or else that she was 'peculiarly susceptible to emotionally provocative material.' Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 22.

[154] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination, 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 130.

[155] Oliphant (1896), 10.

[156] The girl states that she uses the window recess to 'take refuge from all that is going on inside, and make myself a spectator of all the varied story out of doors.' Oliphant (1896), 1.

originally predicated on the idea that she can watch without being seen herself, though this circumstance changes as the narrative progresses. In occupying a position from which she can gaze freely, the protagonist experiences thrills of apparently sexual pleasure.[157] Nonetheless, it seems as if this sexual excitement is crucially rooted in her appropriation of the gaze, and the effects of this experience on her own developing character. As the girl acknowledges, the scholar himself 'did nothing to keep up the absorption of [her] thoughts.'[158] Instead, she is compelled by the potential narratives which he might inhabit. Watching is not, then, a merely passive activity, but here is bound up with creativity and the construction of history.

The girl is originally distanced from the social constraints which dictate feminine decorum, but the tale's revision of the gendered ideology of looking begins to falter when she longs for the scholar to return her attention, envisioning herself as object of the gaze as she lays out glamorous clothes for her trip to the library. As Heller explains: '[i]ronically, the plot about female artistry collapses into a plot about female sexuality […] the scene in which the narrator prepares for the disastrous party in fact recalls the Victorian ritual of the coming-out party.'[159] Heller rightly points out that the late stages of the text troublingly reiterate the traditional roles of male/master and female/slave. Significantly, these roles also influence the climactic scene in which the ghostly scholar and the newly-informed girl share a look across the street:

> He seemed to draw me as if I were a puppet moved by his will […] At last he had seen me: at last he had found out that somebody, though only a girl, was watching him, looking for him […] I could not keep on my feet, but dropped kneeling […] feeling as if my heart were being drawn out of me […] I put my hands together, […] drawn to him as if I could have gone out of myself, my heart out of my bosom, my eyes out of my head.[160]

Reiterating the tropes of masculine domination and feminine submission, the formerly analytical and intuitive girl becomes a mere 'puppet' whose movements are determined by the scholar. Her pose resembles a suppliant subject in prayer, almost unworthy of a man's notice in being 'only a girl.' All of her previously astute intellectual faculties dissolve in this experience, as the scholar's influence triply destabilises her identity ('myself'), her

---

[157] She refers to '[the] thrill of him', 'a sort of rapture', 'my head throbbing, my heart beating', and 'high excitement'. Oliphant (1896), 11, 12.
[158] Oliphant (1896), 13.
[159] Heller (1997), 29-30.
[160] Oliphant (1896), 24-5.

body ('my heart'), and her visual sense ('my eyes'). As with 'The Portrait', this story stages a progressive challenge to 'woman as image, man as bearer of the look,'[161] only to later revert to the gender conventions it formerly sought to question. 'The Library Window' thus both diverges from some aspects of Victorian conservatism (the denial of female subjectivity) while remaining true to others (women as spiritual, the male as active romancer). That these tensions are continually framed through looking once again speaks to the gendered aspects of visual experience, both in the split between masculine empirical seeing and feminine ghost-seeing, and in the power hierarchies embedded in the traditional male gaze. Enchanted by the scholar, the girl is initially able to appropriate the act of looking for her own creative and sexual pleasure. Nonetheless, as the above passage illustrates, 'The Library Window' eventually falls back on standard nineteenth-century gender roles regarding courtship. I argue, however, that its apparent pessimism about female submission is powerfully undermined by the story's closing image. This tableau speaks to the author's conflicted 'feminist' status, also portrayed in her non-fictional writings.

Oliphant's apparent ambivalence about traditional gender conventions, in her non-fiction, reveals a curious blend of conservatism and progressivism regarding women's nature and cultural role. Oliphant was famously condemnatory of the New Woman fiction of the 1890s, which (though disparate in its aims) frankly explored issues of sexual inequality and the lack of professional opportunities available to females. But the author herself expressed dissatisfaction with women's subservient position within Victorian culture. An 1880 article by Oliphant entitled 'The Grievances of Women,' for example, claims to acknowledge men's superiority while adopting a playfully defiant tone which queries it. 'It is curious that [men] should be so anxious to confine and limit the privileges of a companion who is avowedly the weaker vessel,' she writes, stating that it is 'ridiculous' that women are 'the only individuals in the country […] entirely unrepresented, left without any means of expressing [their] opinions on those measures which shape […] the fate of [their] children.'[162] Oliphant's ostensible support of essentialism is thus countered by a sense of exasperation regarding women's culturally-ascribed powerlessness. Significantly, these complexities also influence her later critique of 1890s fiction, which, rather than expressing mere prudishness, covertly challenges the centrality of sex and romance. In 'The Anti-Marriage League' – an article published in the same issue of *Blackwood's* as 'The Library Window' – the author protests against the

---

[161] Mulvey (2000), p. 39.
[162] Oliphant [under M. O. W. O.] (1880), 700, 709.

popular 'inclination towards the treatment of subjects hitherto considered immoral […] and the disposition to place what is called the Sex question above all others as the theme of fiction.'[163] This piece's publication in *Blackwood's* once again sees Oliphant adopting a relatively conservative tone. More importantly, though, her complaint about sex as a literary subject encodes her feeling that sex and romance constitute only one relatively minor facet of life. Oliphant states, in her autobiography, her belief that 'the love between men and women, the marrying and giving in marriage, occupy […] so small a portion of either existence or thought.' [164] In describing this devaluation of romance as 'perhaps more a man's view of mortal affairs,' Oliphant betrays her adherence to traditional gender roles, even as she personally refutes them.[165] Nonetheless, this perception of romantic love as a relatively marginal aspect of women's existence counters the apparent sadness of the tale's closing image. In rewriting the problematic earlier scene between the scholar and the girl, this conclusion alleviates the gendered tensions in looking.

In the story's conclusion, the adult narrator catches a glimpse of the spectral scholar in a crowd as she 'came home from India, very sad, with my little children.'[166] In the tradition of many other Victorian ghost stories, the implication is that the supernatural encounter has had a shattering effect on the protagonist: the girl states that for years afterwards she 'never again looked out of a window when any other window was in sight.'[167] The two poignant images, the traumatised girl and the disappointed widow, might be read as especially pessimistic insofar as the rest of the narrator's life remains obscure: the ethereal, spiritual girl is transformed into a disillusioned woman in an abrupt narrative shift. While several critics have rightly commented on how this closing image speaks to issues of thwarted and unachievable aspirations,[168] the atmosphere of sorrow and loss is partially undermined by the brief moment of affinity she shares with the male writer. This final encounter emerges at a moment at which the woman feels particularly vulnerable and alone: 'There was nobody to welcome me, - for I was not expected: and very sad was I,

---

[163] Margaret Oliphant [published under M. O. W. O.], 'The Anti-Marriage League', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 159. 963 (Jan 1896), 135-49 (136-37).

[164] Oliphant is here discussing the work of Charlotte Brontë. Although Oliphant believes her own literary endeavours are 'perfectly pale and colourless' beside those of Brontë's, she also states that she feels herself to have had 'far more experience, and […] a fuller conception of life.' Oliphant (2002), pp. 43-44.

[165] Oliphant (2002), p. 43.

[166] Oliphant (1896), 30.

[167] Oliphant (1896), 29.

[168] Calder, for example, reads the ending as 'a subtle and complex expression of loneliness and longing' which 'evokes the lost life […] of the artist and scholar that Oliphant felt had been closed to her through the necessity of supporting and caring for others', Oliphant (2000), p. xvii. Heller argues that the conclusion speaks to late Victorian women writers' desire for 'a world that did not use the female body to devalue the female mind' which 'can only haunt their texts as a potent if unsatisfied desire.' Heller (1997), 34.

without a face I knew: when all at once I saw him, and he waved his hand to me.'[169] The scholar seemingly emerges to comfort her: 'I had forgotten who he was, but only that it was a face I knew, and I landed almost cheerfully, thinking here was some one who would help me.'[170] Although this aid apparently fails to materialise, the very sight of him has an invigorating effect. The act of looking, here, is not a painful experience predicated on masculine domination and feminine submission, but instead becomes a moment of hope and sympathy between two friends. Just as Aunt Mary's validation of the girl's spectral experience immersed her into a compassionate familial line of female ghost-seers, so too does the scholar's wave connote a sense of empathy and inclusion, displacing her formerly unrequited romantic feelings. Though melancholy, this scene is suffused with a sense of reassurance and partial closure: 'the anger is gone from him, and he means good and no longer harm to the house of the woman that loved him.'[171] The final, bittersweet image of the male scholar might thus represent not merely the protagonist's frustrated desires, but also her move away from girlish romantic ideals to a more mature female subjectivity, outwith the confines of the male gaze.

Rather than representing a failure of feminine sexuality or creativity, 'The Library Window' envisions forms of female subjectivity distinct from empiricist vision and the potentially limiting male gaze. At the same time, its blend of various dichotomies – the conservative and the progressive, rationality and spirituality, passivity and action, focus and vagueness – functions as a complex expression of women's vexed social position at the end of the nineteenth century. Crucially, these concepts are interrogated through an ambiguous visual experience which acknowledges the contentious and highly unreliable nature of sight. Although the female protagonist is seemingly bereft by the loss of the scholar, the real reward, the story implies, is not the 'clearness [of] sight' or the male attention she had formerly desired, but her development of a feminine subjectivity outside the male gaze. The girl might appear to lose her 'feminine' tendency to see ghosts, but the capacity for this experience is less important than its results. While the protagonist's desire to be aesthetically appreciated might seem to reinstate the gendered hierarchies the story formerly sought to challenge, the tale's ending ultimately portrays looking as an act of affinity and inclusion, rather than a gender-determined performance of domination and submission.

---

[169] Oliphant (1896), 30.
[170] Oliphant (1896), 30.
[171] Oliphant (1896), 30.

Conclusion

By thematising sight and its failures, Oliphant's ghost stories privilege a specifically 'feminine' epistemology, predicated on intuition and emotion. The displacement of vision as a straightforward route to knowledge also destabilises the gendered dynamics of the gaze, complicating the relationship between looking, possession, and physical power. Although the superior forms of knowledge facilitated by Oliphant's epistemological models remain ineffable, fractured, and obscure, they nonetheless facilitate the development of female subjectivities which both reify and subvert traditional ideas about femininity. Of course, the opportunities generated by Oliphant's 'feminine' modes are not only exclusively available to women. Philip, though remaining indebted to the male gaze, hints at developing such consciousness though his changing looks at his mother's portrait, and Lecamus, despite his reliance on the visual, subscribes to intuitive modes in his intangible communications with the dead.

Oliphant's work sometimes supports conventional gender roles, but her apparent conservatism is continually complicated throughout her ghost stories. Rather than entirely sanctioning expectations which facilitated women's subjugation, Oliphant's tales instead adhere to some Victorian gender stereotypes (women as spiritual) in order to critique others (women as powerless objects of the gaze). Many of these debates are framed through explorations of vision, as an incomplete interpretative apparatus inferior to intuition; as an ambivalent means of developing subjectivity; and as a gendered exchange encoding dynamics of possession and submission. This multiplicity speaks to Oliphant's own astute awareness of the nineteenth-century reconfiguration of vision, and its import regarding gender. This awareness in itself acts as a foil to the assumption that women's apparent association with the spectral compromised their ability to engage with nineteenth-century scientific debates.

Perhaps even more importantly for *Haunted Matters*, the unseen, in Oliphant's ghost stories, enshrines a potent sense of material power. Just as 'feminine' epistemology retains value in spite of its marginal status, so too do Oliphant's spectres stay physically strong regardless of their invisibility: they repossess property, open false windows, and violently push living characters against their wishes. The ghosts, then, are not ineffectual wisps or weakened subjects, but instead exercise a peculiar force over the material world. Oliphant's ghost stories therefore present highly influential invisible forces (spectres) and superior forms of feminine knowledge (intuition) as potent sources of power. That the exercise of this power is sometimes fractured, ambivalent, or only partially successful

merely illustrates the necessarily secondary nature of 'feminine' or unseen forms in a visually-orientated patriarchal society.

The writer we will discuss next was also influenced by cultural ideas about femininity, but while Oliphant's stories work to present intuition as a valuable feminine attribute, Lee's tales instead question the idea that women are more susceptible to the supernatural. Oliphant's ghost stories, as we have seen, often focus on the spectre's connection to emotional loss, using it as a means through which to privilege non-visual epistemological modes. Contrastingly, Lee's ghosts are highly aestheticized beings who frequently exert sexual influence over modern subjects. As we shall see in the next chapter, these spectres provided vehicles through which Lee could critique the cultural construction of femininity, and specifically the range of assumptions surrounding the *femme fatale*. Significantly, these interrogations are mediated through her ghosts' reliance on material objects.

Chapter Three. Feminine Fetishes and Masculine Susceptibility:

Gendering Objects in Vernon Lee's *Hauntings* (1890)

In her essay 'Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art' (1880, 1881), 'Vernon Lee' (pseudonym of Violet Paget, 1856-1935) endeavours to distance the supernatural from both materialism and artistic representation. For Lee, attempts to convey the ethereal purge it of its attendant mystery: 'the supernatural is necessarily essentially vague, and art is necessarily essentially distinct: give shape to the vague and it ceases to exist.'[1] This distinction is paralleled in Lee's preface to her elegant collection of ghostly tales *Hauntings: Fantastic Stories* (1890), which distinguishes between deathly dull 'genuine ghost[s]' that 'can be caught in definite places and made to dictate judicial evidence,'[2] and her own 'spurious ghosts' born of the imagination.[3] Lee's spectres, then, are apparently not to be found 'stumbl[ing] and fumbl[ing] […] among the arm-chairs and rep sofas of reality.'[4] Nevertheless, the ghost stories which follow this preface crucially destabilise these distinctions, between the supernatural and representation (in their own status as evocative artworks), and between the mundane material world and Lee's own imaginative spectres (in the latter's reliance on physical objects). The hauntings which recur in Lee's fiction are primarily facilitated by *things*. In charting the vexed boundary between materiality and ethereality through her materially-conscious ghosts, Lee's tales pay tribute to the magical qualities of objects even in an increasingly commodified *fin de siècle* world. Crucially, these interrogations converge around female or feminised figures, engendering complex explorations of 'the universal existence and eternal duration of *La Femme'* via the trope of haunted things.[5]

Although Lee's work has provided an extremely fertile site for recent feminist critics, her relationship with the nineteenth-century movement towards female emancipation was a troubled one. Reluctant to publically condemn gender inequality during the Victorian period, she famously wrote to a friend, in 1878, of her belief that 'no-one reads a woman's writing on art, history or aesthetics with anything but unmitigated

---

[1] Vernon Lee, 'Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art' (1880, 1881), in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, by Vernon Lee, ed. by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Plymouth: Broadview, 2006 [1890]), pp. 291-319 (p. 295).

[2] Vernon Lee, 'Preface' (1889), in Lee (2006), pp. 37-40 (pp. 39-40). Lee's denigration of this type of spectre acts as a counter to Charlotte Riddell's economically-conscious ghosts.

[3] Lee (2006), p. 40.

[4] Lee (2006), pp. 38-39.

[5] Vernon Lee, 'The Economic Dependence of Women', *The North American Review*, 175. 548 (Jul 1902), 71-90 (84).

contempt.'[6] By 1902, however, the author confessed that her eyes had been opened to 'the real importance of what is known as the Woman Question.'[7] Lee, inspired by Charlotte Perkins [Stetson] Gilman's 1898 treatise *Women and Economics*,[8] states her keenness to backtrack on her former 'indifferen[ce]' and even 'hostil[ity]' to the feminist enterprise in 'The Economic Dependence of Women'.[9] Here, she complains of the problematic cultural tendency to view women primarily in terms of their sex: 'while men are a great many things besides being males – soldiers and sailors, tinkers and tailors, […] women are, first and foremost, *females*, and then again females, and then – still more females.'[10] For Lee, drawing on *Women and Economics*, the enforced economic parasitism of women proves detrimental to both genders, and '[t]he different position of the female whom we call Woman is not due to a difference in psychological, but in sociological functions.'[11]

Lee importantly differentiates between women 'as a natural product, as distinguished from women as a creation of men,'[12] but her apparent denigration of the latter is less straightforward than it might appear. In continually exploiting the mythmaking processes surrounding the *femme fatale*, Lee's ghostly tales suggest that the cultural construct of femininity can act as a potent tool through which female subjects can exercise power. In 'The Economic Dependence of Women' Lee condemns biologically-determined ideas about 'woman' as archaic, but this designation is notably offset by an allusion to female inscrutability and the myth of the mysterious feminine.[13] Lee claims that '[w]ith all our literature about *Le Femme*, and all our violent discussions, economical, physiological, psychological, sociological […] as to what women must or must not be allowed to do […] we do not really know what women *are*.'[14] In attempting to segregate real women from the patriarchal construction of femininity, her article instead blends the two in invoking the controversial trope of 'Woman' as 'a living enigma.'[15] Lee thus reveals the frustrating

---

[6] Letter to Henrietta Jenkin, 18th December 1878; quoted in *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography*, by Vineta Colby (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2003), p. 2.

[7] Lee (1902), 71.

[8] American feminist author Charlotte Perkins (1860-1935, also known as Charlotte Perkins Stetson and Charlotte Perkins Gilman following her marriages) famously wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892). While not a supernatural story per se, its claustrophobic evocation of a woman's incarceration under the 'rest cure' has led it to be synthesised in anthologies of Gothic or uncanny tales, e.g. Baldick (2009), pp. 249-63. Lee refers to Perkins Gilman as 'Mrs Stetson' throughout her article, though the author had in fact divorced her husband in 1894.

[9] Lee states that she formerly felt 'indifferent, and perhaps even a little hostile, towards that Woman Question. Indeed, […] I think the real mischief lay in that word "Woman."' Lee (1902), 72.

[10] Lee (1902), 81.

[11] Lee (1902), 74.

[12] Lee (1902), 89.

[13] Lee scathingly references 'woman' as a 'survival of […] pre-Darwinian belief' and 'relic of the philosophy of the Middle Ages.' Lee (1902), 89.

[14] Lee (1902), 88-89.

[15] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by H. M. Parshley (London: Picador, 1988 [1949]), p. 286.

double-bind regarding women: their socially-determined role risks veiling the true nature of female identity, but this nature or 'essence' is itself a myth that perpetuates cultural expectations regarding women's inherent mystery.[16] This tension informs my reading of Lee's use of objects throughout her earlier supernatural tales.

The current chapter argues that Lee's ghost stories overlay primitive and modern versions of supernaturally animated objects through a focus on gender. The fact that haunted objects and suggestive relics are transformed into mediums for feminine/feminised ghosts both reifies and destabilises the trope of mysterious 'Woman' embodied in the *femme fatale*. Lee's work has justifiably experienced a resurgence of critical interest in the past thirty years, spearheaded by Patricia Pulham and Catherine Maxwell's authoritative 2006 reissue of *Hauntings*.[17] Three of the four tales from this collection provide the basis for this chapter, which discusses how the magical qualities of objects in these stories intimate continuity between *fin de siècle* culture and more primitive societies. This reading takes shape through reference to Victorian anthropology (specifically fetishism) and Brownian thing theory, interrogating how these critical lenses might productively supplement the exciting critical field on Lee's supernatural tales, and especially her use of things as discussed by Kristin Mahoney and Patricia Pulham. Importantly, Lee's haunted items are specifically tied to women and/or androgynous men, insinuating a gendered aspect to thingness which challenges cultural perceptions of 'feminine' possessions as potentially frivolous or ephemeral. Objects which appear to speak to female vanity – such as portraits and love-tokens – instead exert supernatural power far beyond the lifetime of their female or feminised owners. The fascination they wield for the (usually male) protagonists complicates the apparent distinction between feminine ethereality and masculine rationalism, evoking and yet at the same time challenging the idea of 'Woman' as an enigma. Simone de Beauvoir rightly argues that the myth of women's mysteriousness can justify male privilege and contribute to female subjugation,[18] but Lee's ghost stories invoke its more empowering aspects in framing femininity as an important device with

---

[16] Iris Marion Young also discusses this issue: 'Patriarchal domination requires the subversion of its authority by the speaking of a specifically female desire beyond its power to know. But there cannot be a woman's desire; the very project of feminist subversion leads us to the dissolution of such universals.' Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: 'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 69.

[17] See Footnote 1 of this chapter for publication details.

[18] 'Few myths have been more advantageous to the ruling caste than the myth of woman: it justifies all privileges and even authorises their abuse […] Of all these myths, none is more firmly anchored in masculine hearts than that of the feminine "mystery" […] it permits an easy explanation of all that appears inexplicable; the man who "does not understand" a woman is happy to substitute an objective resistance for a subjective deficiency of mind; instead of admitting his ignorance, he perceives the presence of a "mystery" outside himself: an alibi, indeed, that flatters laziness and vanity at once.' De Beauvoir (1988), p. 285.

which to consolidate women's agency in a male-dominated world. At the same time, the fluidity and complexities surrounding gender in Lee's tales resist essentialising stereotypes, portraying this concept of mysterious femininity as a culturally-conditioned myth whose power can also be harnessed by men.[19]

Lee's status as a formerly neglected woman writer who published non-traditional ghost stories in a selection of periodicals (before experiencing a posthumous critical revival) explains her relevance to *Haunted Matters*. Moreover, her complicated relationship with the Woman Question, in conjunction with her gender-bending and androgynous characters, posit her as a fascinating subject for feminist scholarship. As Maxwell and Pulham argue, '[i]n extending and complicating definitions of gender and sexuality in [her] stories, Lee fuses femininity to the spectral to suggest something that resists simple categorisation and that leaves everything open and without resolution.'[20] Gender and narrative indeterminacy are indeed crucial to Lee's tales: masculine and feminine roles are constantly queried, subverted, and dramatically rewritten. My chapter interrogates how Lee's stories reinscribe and dissolve gendered identities via a selection of material objects. Tracing the parallels between the Brownian 'thing' and the anthropological 'fetish' illuminates aspects of Lee's use of objects as tools to critique cultural perceptions of femininity. Recognition of a concept's fabricated or illusory nature, however, fails to dispel its uncanny power. Femininity continues to wield influence even as its biologically-determined aspects are undermined, 'haunt[ing] certain brains' through its association with material things.[21]

This chapter opens with a discussion of the connections between the anthropological 'fetish' and the Brownian 'thing' to explain how their parallels and divergences intersect with Lee's use of haunted objects. A short look at the author's life and her position within *fin de siècle* culture precedes an examination of her effusive and highly influential preface to *Hauntings*. Rather than fulfilling the criteria of the supernatural as inherently vague and imaginative, Lee's stories instead tie magic and the ghost *specifically to things*. An examination of 'Oke of Okehurst, or The Phantom Lover' (1886/1890) follows, which looks at the tremendous power of the relics left by a particular deceased woman. While they appear to exert influence primarily over the central living

---

[19] This idea of gender as a fluid cultural construct is also invoked in the conclusion to 'The Economic Dependence of Women,' discussed later in this chapter.

[20] Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham, 'Introduction', in Lee (2006), pp. 9-27 (p. 11).

[21] Lee employs this phrase in discussing her own 'spurious ghosts (according to [Lee] the only genuine ones), of whom [she] can confirm only one thing, that they haunted certain brains, and have haunted, among others, [her] own and [her] friends'.' Lee (2006), p. 40.

female, their power also extends far beyond, insofar as this woman also succeeds in enchanting two different men. This sense of bewitchment, though facilitated by the potentially limiting trope of 'woman as enigma', reifies femininity's awesome cultural power. Moreover, the fact that the seemingly unfinished or inadequate creative endeavours which feature in 'Oke of Okehurst' (the aborted painting, sketches, and even the story itself) also retain the capacity to haunt suggests that objects' transformations into Brownian 'things' and subsequently into supernaturally-attenuated anthropological 'fetishes' are expressly enabled by the *femme fatale*.

'Amour Dure' (1887/1890) similarly features a range of feminised relics which trick the male historian narrator into falling for a historical *femme fatale*. Once again, the story reveals the ways in which patriarchal society was continually attempting to 'fix' women, as the historian reads the woman's image as a substitute for her true self. This critique of female objectification is, however, not without its complications. Paradoxically, it is only through her transformation into the mysterious *femme fatale* that the real and long-dead woman can extend her power. Objects are crucial in establishing the historian's connection with the beloved long-dead female, signalling the extent to which history is premised on the subjective interpretation of fragments. As in 'Oke of Okehurst', these fragments illustrate both the loss of real women beneath the masculine gaze, and the consolidation of female agency through the trope of femininity.

The final part of this chapter considers how two tales which feature spectral castrati – 'Winthrop's Adventure' (1881) and 'A Wicked Voice' (1887) – use androgynous figures to articulate the power of 'things' even beyond their material lifespan. The nuanced relationship between the ethereal and the material is thus taken in a new direction: the subject-object relation, Lee suggests, imbues the thing with a resonance that survives even the destruction of its physical form. These stories replace the *femme fatale* with the gender-ambivalent character of the castrato. In doing so, they complicate traditional gendered dichotomies with slippages and displacements which highlight the fluidity of gender as a cultural norm. Femininity's mysterious fascination, these stories imply, is not exclusively the privilege of women. That the power of feminised fetishes adheres even to intangible 'things' speaks to their liberating and constraining aspects for both women and men who diverge from heteronormative gendered identity. This chapter closes by discussing how Lee's later short story, 'The Image' (1896), partially rehabilitates the motif of the *femme fatale* which recurs throughout *Hauntings*. Exorcising the constructed 'La Femme' enables

emotional engagement with a real female, but the process of differentiating between woman and 'woman' remains a highly vexed one.

Lee's tales thus pay tribute to the tremendous power of feminised fetishes in late Victorian society. While these objects might provide the means through which women themselves are objectified within a historical context, their continual transmutations illustrate the potentially empowering nature of seemingly restrictive feminine stereotypes. That these things eventually metamorphose into haunted fetishes through their connection with enchanting women or androgynous men implies that Lee's revelations of mystery in the mundane material world remain indebted to both the mysterious power of objects and the cultural trappings surrounding femininity (though these are also necessarily mediated through the male gaze). Her ghost stories thus serve a double function: they subtly satirise the construction of history and the practice of female objectification insofar as her (usually male) percipients can only access their ghostly lovers through certain material objects, but at the same time challenge these apparent restrictions by suggesting that seemingly ephemeral feminine 'things' retain an awesome influence over the masculine imagination. Lee's bewitching ghost stories thus reiterate, reify, and subtly undermine cultural perceptions which both idolised and denigrated 'Woman' at the *fin de siècle*.

Fetishes, Things, and 'Feminine' Susceptibility

Lee's tales interrogate these gender issues via a juxtaposition of the anthropological fetish and what Bill Brown has theorized as the 'thing'. Lee, as a prolific and intellectual reader, was familiar with the late-century developing science of anthropology. Kirsty Martin suggests that the author 'annotated volumes of anthropology' in investigating 'theories of how people might be shaped by things beyond their own individual experience, and by the wider influences […] of the culture they have been brought up in.'[22] Moreover, Lee's brief allusions, throughout *Hauntings*, to ancient practices reviewed in anthropological texts imply not only the author's awareness of the field, but her recognition of anthropological fetishism in particular as a suggestive trope for her supernatural fiction.[23] The year in which *Hauntings* was published was the same in which

---

[22] Kirsty Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 73. Christa Zorn also mentions that Lee studied 'aesthetics, literature, anthropology, and political economy.' Christa Zorn, *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003), p. 83.

[23] 'Amour Dure' invokes the use of an amulet or totem, and 'Dionea' references love-potions and the evil eye. Trepka states that Duke Robert 'secretly caused to be made […] a silver statuette of his familiar genius or angel' which 'having been consecrated by the astrologers […] was placed in the cavity of the chest of the effigy by Tassi, in order, says the M. S., that his soul might rest until the general Resurrection.' Trepka confesses that the passage puzzles him considering Duke Robert's Catholic status. The narrator of 'Dionea'

the first volumes of James Frazer's seminal anthropological text, *The Golden Bough* (1890), appeared.[24] It is, however, an earlier study by prominent Victorian anthropologist Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (1871), which establishes a crucial backdrop against which to appreciate Lee's use of supernaturally-attenuated objects.

The influential *Primitive Culture* discusses anthropological fetishism at length. While the term 'fetish' is broadly understood to refer to primitive people's perception of objects in terms of magical power, Tylor's description reveals uneasy correspondences between primitive fetishists and late Victorian culture's supposedly enlightened modern subjects. Tylor defines 'fetishism' as 'the doctrine of spirits embodied in, or attached to, or conveying influence through, certain material objects.'[25] A 'fetish' was thus an object imbued with a mysterious agency, something through which believing subjects could connect with gods or access veiled spiritual power.[26] At the same time, however, Tylor warns against a too-stringent definition of fetishes as 'vessels or vehicles or instruments of spiritual beings,' arguing instead that they can also be 'mere signs or tokens' or even just 'wondrous ornaments or curiosities.'[27] The concept 'fetish' is thus far more multi-faceted and broad than it might first seem.[28]

---

claims that: 'My housekeeper tells me that down in the village [Dionea] is regarded as possessing the evil eye and bringing love misery […] It is love-philters that Dionea prepares.' Vernon Lee, 'Amour Dure: Passages from the Diary of Spiridion Trepka' (1887/1890), in Lee (2006), pp. 41-76 (p. 53); Vernon Lee, 'Dionea' (1890), in Lee (2006), pp. 77-104 (pp. 85, 95).

[24] Originally conceived as a study of 'the succession to the priesthood of Diana at Aricia,' it instead 'branched out in more and more directions' to become a highly diverse work of Victorian anthropology which influenced both creative practitioners and fledgling anthropologists. The apparently linear social progression outlined in *The Golden Bough* – that is, the controversial trajectory from magic to religion to science – also instigated various challenges from a wide range of cultural commentators. Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1993 [1890]), p. v; 'Frazer, Sir James (George), 1854-1941', in *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. by Ian Ousby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1993]), p. 349.

[25] Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom, Vol. 2* (London: John Murray, 1871), p. 132.

[26] Tylor's description of 'one of the most natural cases of the fetish-theory' – that is, 'when a soul inhabits or haunts the relics of its former body' – is frequently utilised in the ghost story. Tylor (1871), p. 137. See, for example, Madame Blavatsky's 'The Ensouled Violin' (1892) and F. Marion Crawford's 'For the Blood is the Life' (1905), both of which feature souls who haunt their bodily remains following death. Blavatsky's tale revolves around a young male violinist, who finds his talents eclipsed by a greater performer, whom is rumoured to have used the intestines of his murdered loved ones to string his violin. The young violinist's mentor commits suicide, urging his friend to use parts of his body to adapt his own instrument and thus match his rival. Unfortunately, the mentor's soul remains bound to his remains, and his ghost pleads with his young friend to free him. At the violinist's ostensible moment of triumph, the ghost of the old man appears, and murders his protégé with the violin strings. 'For the Blood is the Life' is a vampire story in which a beautiful murdered gypsy girl returns to drain the blood of the man she loved in life. Although a stake through the heart eventually halts her vampiric ventures (thus saving the young man), the ghostly shape of her body continues to lie above her grave, reaching out misty arms to anyone who approaches.

[27] Tylor (1871), p. 132.

[28] The *OED* also acknowledges the idiom's manifold nature, from its original referral to amulets used by indigenous peoples of the Guinea Coast, via 'an inanimate object worshipped by preliterate peoples on

At points, Tylor clearly relegates the fetish to the realms of less 'civilized' people, but he is elsewhere far less rigorous in distinguishing between primitive fetishism and Western object culture. His claim, for example, that '[t]o class an object as a fetish, demands explicit statement that a spirit is considered, as embodied in it or acting through it or communicating by it, […] or that the object is treated as having personal consciousness and power,'[29] is countered by others in which he blurs these parameters.[30] Moreover, his reference to the 'tendency [which] runs through all human nature to collect and admire objects remarkable in beauty, form, quality, or scarceness' signals a sense of continuity between the two cultures.[31] Both primitive and modern subjects, Tylor contends, remain preoccupied with things. Contemporary critics have usefully recognised that, as Peter Melville Logan argues, Victorian anthropological fetishism 'designates a relationship rather than a thing,'[32] and therefore can be extended to include diverse kinds of subject-object relations far beyond those of primitive cultures.[33] For Logan, fetishism 'was always a European artefact rather than an African condition,'[34] insofar as it entailed a triangular relationship between object, fetishist, and critic in which the competing cultural values of the latter two clashed. Logan describes the 'critic' in the triangular structure of fetishism as 'a sceptical spectator who interprets the fetishist's relationship to the fetish as a form of false evaluation,'[35] crucially noting how (s)he, in 'assert[ing] the naïve grounds of truth within his or her own system of values,' becomes 'vulnerable to the claim of fetishism by another outsider.'[36] The observer or 'critic' of fetishism is thus always at risk of being labelled a fetishist themselves.

Tylor's ambiguous descriptions of the fetish – in conjunction with Logan's identification of anthropological fetishism's shaky reinforcement of certain cultural hierarchies – invite parallels with Bill Brown's 'thing.'[37] The introduction to *Haunted*

---

account of its supposed inherent magical powers, or as being animated by a spirit,' through to the far vaguer definition of 'something irrationally reverenced.' 'Fetish', in *Oxford English Dictionary* <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/69611?rskey=ptvMPo&result=1#eid> [accessed 8/8/14]. This page also acknowledges the term's alternative meaning in connection with sexual desire.

[29] Tylor (1871), p. 133.

[30] See the preceding paragraph for examples.

[31] See also Tylor's statement that '[t]he turn of mind which in a Gold-Coast negro would manifest itself in a museum of monstrous and most potent fetishes, might impel an Englishman to collect scarce postage-stamps or queer walking-sticks.' Tylor (1871), pp. 132-33.

[32] Peter Melville Logan, *Victorian Fetishism: Intellectuals and Primitives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), p. 8.

[33] Logan also usefully points out the fact that Victorian anthropologists were aware of these complexities regarding their position.

[34] Logan (2009), p. 7.

[35] Logan (2009), p. 8.

[36] Logan (2009), p. 9.

[37] In turn, Brown's discussion of thingness as determined by the subject-object relation parallels Paterian aestheticism's central question: 'What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in

Matters cited Brown's differentiation between the 'thing' and the more mundane 'object': the latter becomes the former via the subject-object relation. For Brown, thingness is determined by an item's 'force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems.'[38] The use of the term 'fetish', here, is particularly important. While the 'fetish' and the 'thing' are not exactly synonyms, Tylor's loose definition of the former and Brown's use of magic-infused language in describing the latter suggest that the 'thing' might be perceived as a modern, secularised revision of the fetish. Both name objects which somehow go *beyond* their status as material entities, and both pay tribute to the slippery and magical mutations which these objects experience in their interactions with the human subject. Nonetheless, they remain distinct: the 'fetish' refers to a primitive form of object relations in which an item (supposedly) supplies the form for a supernatural deity, while the 'thing' is only metaphorically associated with the supernatural, gaining its potency from the subjectivity of its user and possessor.

If Lee's tales overlay these terms in displaying intuitive, mystical vestiges enshrined in modern object culture, they also distinguish between them through a reconfiguration of gendered assumptions. The female or feminised characters transform objects into Brownian things by explicitly foregrounding the subject-object relation, but their male admirers facilitate their subsequent mutation into fetishes (that is, supernaturally-loaded objects which house or enable a ghostly presence). Lee's haunting tales thus stage a playful corrective to the Victorian assumption that women were more 'acutely receptive' to the supernatural than their male counterparts.[39]

As we have seen in the previous chapter, spiritual receptivity could engender superior knowledge, but it was more commonly denigrated as an inferior foil to 'masculine' rationalism.[40] The oppression of both women and non-white subjects in nineteenth-century culture was sometimes justified, by male commentators, through reference to their supposedly 'degraded' belief systems involving intuition and superstition.[41] E. B. Tylor, for example, affiliated the spiritual woman with the 'savage'

---

a book, to *me*?' Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, intro. by Kenneth Clark (London: Fontana Library, 1961 [1873]), p. 27.

[38] Brown (2001), 5.

[39] Galvan (2010), pp. 59-60.

[40] Of course, it might be argued, as discussed earlier, that the ghost story stages an explicit corrective to this hierarchy in privileging spiritual/intuitive knowledge above scientific rationalism. As mentioned in the introduction, however, to interpret this theme as the keynote of all British ghost stories risks neglecting their complex negotiations with the material world.

[41] Anthropologists often favoured a rationalist bias in disparaging such belief systems, as illustrated by Andrew Lang's 1895 comment on anthropologists' reluctance to give credence to supernatural

man. In *Primitive Culture*, Tylor aligns the contemporary spirit-medium – gendered as feminine in Victorian society[42] – with primitivism: for him, 'spiritualistic theory' exemplified by the 'Boston medium' is directly connected to 'the philosophy of savages.'[43] According to Tylor, the 'modern clairvoyant' resembles 'the negro fetish-man' in her belief that objects can function as vehicles for supernatural communication.[44] In tying the female medium to an apparently degenerate form of knowledge facilitated by objects,[45] Tylor reinscribes the gendered nature/culture divide and implicitly sanctions female subjugation. Lee, however, challenges this affiliation through charting the importance of feminised fetishes in her ghost stories, switching focus so that the *men* become the primary believers in this primitive form of knowledge. While the female or feminised individuals exert their influence over certain objects (thus assisting their transformation into Brownian 'things'), it is largely the male characters who extend this process in viewing these things as 'fetishes' with an explicit connection with a supernatural being. The fact that these occult presences are frequently allied with the ideal of the mysterious feminine connotes a reversal of gendered stereotypes which resituates supernatural susceptibility within the masculine realm.

My discussion of feminised objects in Lee's fiction thus draws on the work of Tylor and Brown in exploring the apparent similarities between the art object, the 'fetish', and the 'thing.' For the purposes of clarity, I will not use these terms interchangeably, but will instead remain sensitive to their specific connotations (that is, the 'object' will refer to a material item; when this item becomes noticeable or important via the subject-object relation it becomes a 'thing'; and when linked to a spectre it is identified as a 'fetish'). My

---

manifestations. He states that: 'folklorists and anthropologists will hear gladly about wraiths, ghosts, corpse-candles, hauntings, crystal-gazing, and walking unharmed through fire, as long as these things are part of vague rural tradition, or of savage belief. But, as soon as there is first-hand evidence of honourable men and women for the apparent existence of any of the phenomena enumerated, then Folklore officially refuses to have anything to do with the subject.' Andrew Lang, *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (Auckland: Aeterna, 2010 [1894/5]), pp. iii.

[42] As Galvan acknowledges, 'spirit channelling quickly became marked as feminine' as modern spiritualism gained popularity in nineteenth-century Britain and the United States. Galvan (2010), p. 4.

[43] Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom, Vol. 1* (London: John Murray, 1871), p. 141.

[44] 'As the negro fetish-man […] can divine by means of his dirty cloth or cap instead, so the modern clairvoyant professes to feel sympathetically the sensations of a distant person if communication be made through a lock of his hair or any object that has been in contact with him.' Tylor (1871, v. 1), p. 105.

[45] Although Tylor does not explicitly use the female pronoun, his reading of Spiritualism as closely interlinked with Witchcraft – in that both 'have existed for thousands of years in a closeness of union' – covertly posits it as feminine. Similarly, his discussion of languages 'which lie beyond the range of common European scholarship' draws on the idea of femininity as irrational or spiritualistic in discussing masculine and feminine pronouns. Tylor (1871, v. 1), pp. 128, 274. In addition, as George W. Stocking Jr. notes, Tylor's investigations of Spiritualism (following the publication of *Primitive Culture*) involved female mediums. George W. Stocking Jr., 'Animism in Theory and Practice: E. B. Tylor's Unpublished "Notes on 'Spiritualism'"', *Man*, 6. 1 (Mar 1971), 88-104 (91-92).

use of the term 'fetish' is in the anthropological sense outlined earlier, following Tylor's broad definition which connects an object to a supernatural presence, without necessarily enshrining that presence. It would be inaccurate to claim that all male characters, in the selected stories, view things as the actual manifestation of their attendant ghosts, but the stories largely promote the idea that these items are integral in facilitating the spectres' influence over male subjects. The objects, in their alliance with the ghostly *femmes fatales*, thus possess a potent power that exceeds Brownian 'thingness' to transform them into supernaturally-attenuated 'fetishes'.

This chapter, in its concern with things, follows Kristin Mahoney's argument that Lee's fiction works to maintain or 're-auratize' art objects with their important historical resonances, which were in danger of being eroded or degraded by late-century shifts in economic and aesthetic theory. Mahoney reads Lee's ghost stories in terms of 'an ethical corrective to the subjectivism of modern consumer practices' which challenges 'aggressive modes of consumption that threaten to absorb and assimilate difference.'[46] Lee thus subtly resists the late nineteenth-century 'hegemonic shift' in which 'concern with social relations and production' was replaced 'with a theory of the individual consumer and his wants,'[47] by endorsing the historical 'recontextualization or re-auratization of objects.'[48] Objects, for Lee, should not be markers of taste or fragments in a collection, but valuable individual relics worthy of respect, understood in a manner which pays tribute to both their important historical position and the personal sensations they evoke. Lee thereby, for Mahoney, promotes a sensitive approach to objects which updates Ruskinian ideals of morality in art in accordance with seemingly antithetical Paterian aesthetic ideals.[49] While Mahoney argues that Lee's familiarity with economic and aesthetic theory enables her to champion an 'ethical' mode of consumption through her ghost stories, I explore the significance of history and object-subject relations with reference to gender, arguing that Lee's tales centre on feminised 'fetishes' to destabilise *fin de siècle* gender assumptions. Moreover, I extend Mahoney's argument in positing that *all* objects – not just important historical items, but also aborted artworks and apparent rubbish – can be transformed into fetishes in their bond

---

[46] Kristin Mahoney, 'Haunted Collections: Vernon Lee and Ethical Consumption', *Criticism*, 48. 1 (Winter 2006), 39-67 (39-40).

[47] Mahoney references the influential work of Regenia Gagnier in making this point. Mahoney (2006), 44.

[48] Mahoney (2006), 39.

[49] That is, she develops aesthetic theories which manage to fuse the apparently contradictory ideas of art as ennobling (Ruskin) and 'art for art's sake' (Pater). Mahoney claims that '[a]s [Lee's] aesthetic thinking develops, she moves towards a reconciliation between Ruskinian morality and the particular brand of Paterian aestheticism articulated in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* […] Lee ended as an ethical aesthete, as a moral hedonist […] It is only by being as ethical as Ruskin wished us to be, Lee argues, that we may experience the excessive aesthetic pleasure that Pater described.' Mahoney (2006), 43.

with the *femme fatale*. In addition to valuing what Mahoney terms 'the separate life of objects,'[50] Lee's stories also privilege the subject-object entanglements generated by their 'thingness,' and the supernatural presences associated with them. It is the object's alignment with a particular individual (rather than history in general) which infuses it with its magical powers.

This chapter also, in its concern with objects, artworks, and gender, shares focus with Patricia Pulham's influential work on Lee. Pulham, in her 2008 monograph *Art and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee's Supernatural Tales*, signals the centrality of art objects in Lee's spectral fiction, using Donald Winnicott's psychoanalytic theory of the 'transitional object' to demonstrate that '"play" is at the heart of Lee's engagement with aesthetics.'[51] Referencing the author's extensive knowledge of disparate intellectual fields, Pulham explores how Lee's supernatural provides a site through which she can experiment with 'alternative subjectivities,' connected not only to the historical past, but to an individual's psychic history.[52] This focus, often framed via the maternal, enables Pulham to interrogate Lee's invocations of art, sculpture, and mythical figures such as Medusa. While Pulham's discussions of aesthetics, gender, and 'play' have proved extremely useful to this chapter, I am less focused here on the psychoanalytical implications of Lee's art objects than on their gendered links to anthropology and thing theory. I therefore use Mahoney and Pulham's insightful research as a framework against which to stage my own feminist-historicist analyses.

Another critical context evoked by Lee's use of objects is her spectral tales' anticipation of Walter Benjamin's distinction between the historical relic and the soulless mass-produced commodity in his 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.'[53] For Benjamin, the practice of artistic reproduction threatens the valuable constellations of history and tradition which used to surround the original artwork: 'that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art [...,] the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition' and 'substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.' [54] Benjamin argues that this culture of the copy, rather than merely endangering its own manifestations, impacts on the fabric of art itself, by devaluing the importance of authenticity and ritual: 'the work of art

---

[50] Mahoney (2006), 41.

[51] Patricia Pulham, *Art and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee's Supernatural Tales* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. xvii.

[52] Pulham (2008), p. xvii.

[53] Mahoney also makes this connection in her use of the term 're-auratizication' (39).

[54] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 217-51 (p. 221).

reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility […] the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed.'[55] Benjamin's 'aura' – which infuses the aesthetic object with a kind of agency – shares some characteristics with the 'spirit' of the fetish and the 'thingness' of Brown's thing in paying tribute to the object's mysterious separate life and position within history. Benjamin's theory, however, fails to recognise how the modern subject's influence impacts on the object too, and thus the 'aura' is for Benjamin notably absent from modern, reproducible art objects. Lee's tales invite comparisons with Benjamin's theory insofar as they mark a distinction between original relics and seemingly 'de-auratized' or mass-produced modern commodities. They diverge, however, in subtly blurring and complicating this segregation: in Lee's fiction, even contemporary objects (including superficially worthless incomplete artistic artworks) retain an inherent potential to haunt. The power of objects is not premised solely on their position within history, as Benjamin argues (and Lee's fictional characters might agree),[56] but rather on their connections to particular feminine or feminised figures.[57]

In plotting the transformations and relationships between the object, the thing, and the fetish, Lee's tales reveal that *fin de siècle* society's obsession with objects was necessarily indebted to the fetishism of more primitive cultures, even as modern subjects attempted to detach themselves from such cultures through anthropology and rationalism. The vestiges of superstition in the modern world are specifically tied to feminised objects, as perceived by primarily male percipients. This association implies that cultural assumptions about femininity – as enigmatic and incomprehensible, yet somehow controllable and submissive – remain crucial in maintaining this sense of enchantment. Moreover, Lee's tales posit the concept of the mysterious feminine not only as a patriarchally-inscribed myth with which to subdue women, but as a vital tool through which women (and androgynous men) can wield power.

---

[55] Benjamin (1968), p. 224.

[56] Spiridion Trepka in 'Amour Dure' expresses disgust with modernity and states his own wish to access the past, and the narrator in 'Oke of Okehurst' comments condescendingly on branded furniture and modern commodities.

[57] This chapter also echoes Elaine Freedgood's work on 'thing culture' as a precursor to 'commodity culture', and specifically her claim that the Victorians' 'object relations' were potentially more 'extravagant' than ours, insofar as 'systems of value were not quarantined from one another and ideas of interest and meaning were perhaps far less restricted than they are for us.' While Freedgood is primarily interested in the mid-century novel, Lee's ghost stories also speak to the idea of things as complex loci for a range of different personal and historical associations. Lee's tales evoke the process by which 'apparently mundane or meaningless objects can suddenly take on or be assigned meaning', often blurring the Benjaminian distinction between valuable artworks and modern ephemera. Freedgood (2006), p. 8.

Vernon Lee and *Fin de Siècle* Culture

Lee's life and work – which originally fell out of favour towards the end of her life – has justifiably experienced resurgence in critical interest in the past several decades. Born Violet Paget in 1856, Lee travelled through Europe with her parents as a child, the family living as what Vineta Colby terms 'bourgeois gypsies.'[58] At the age of twenty-four, Violet published her first essay collection – *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880) – under the pseudonym 'Vernon Lee', beginning a lengthy academic career which saw the author, as Sondeep Kandola claims, 'become the uncontested authority on Italian culture, participate […] in the dominant cultural debates of the day and attempt to sway public opinion internationally.'[59] Remaining in thrall to Italy throughout her lifetime, Lee's fascination with the country's vivid cultural history (and the sensualised violence associated with that history) suffuses her supernatural collection *Hauntings*. Later, her love of Italy and pacifist stance posited her as a figure of suspicion during the First World War. The revival of interest in the author began with Burdett Gardner's problematic Freudian reading of her *oeuvre* which attempted to frame Lee as what Maxwell and Pulham term a 'destructive lesbian "monster".'[60] More recent critics, however, have been more sensitive to Lee's life and work as a prolific site for feminist and other forms of scholarship,[61] focussing on diverse issues such as her complex engagement with the 'Woman Question', her omnivorous literary output, her historical studies, her artistic experiments, her use of mythology, and her ambiguous sexuality.

Lee's links to Paterian aestheticism have also provided a fertile site for scholarship on the author. Friends with Walter Pater and a number of other British aesthetes, Lee participated in the aesthetic movement both in her critical writings and her fiction, while remaining unafraid to disparage its problematic double standards regarding gender and the objectification of women. Lee's 1884 novel *Miss Brown* stages such a critique, as when its central male, in painting the eponymous protagonist, expresses his wish only to see 'more only of her superb physical appearance, of that sullen, silent, almost haughty manner which

---

[58] Colby (2003), p. 6.

[59] Sondeep Kandola, *Writers and Their Work: Vernon Lee* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2010), p. 1.

[60] Maxwell and Pulham (2006), p. 21, in reference to Burdett Gardner, *The Lesbian Imagination (Victorian Style): A Psychological and Critical Study of Vernon Lee* (New York: Gardland, 1987 [1954]). The contentious assumptions of this book and its unethical research techniques have been acknowledged by a number of modern Lee critics.

[61] As Pulham notes, 'it is notably difficult to discuss sexualities that, in Lee's own lifetime, sexologists had only recently begun to define, and using the term "lesbian" in relation to Vernon Lee, and/or describing her relationships as "romantic friendships" seem decidedly unsatisfactory.' Pulham (2008), p. xiv. The pigeonholing tendency which Pulham critiques seems especially inappropriate given Lee's preference for indeterminacy and inbetweenness regarding sexual identity in her supernatural fiction.

accompanied it. As to anything there might be, intellectual or moral, behind this beautiful dramatic creature, he did not care in the least.'[62] This scene illustrates the novel's condemnation of a certain kind of male aesthetic critic, who privileges evocative images of 'Woman' over the actual nature of any female subject he might portray. As Kandola argues, both *Miss Brown* and Lee's ghost story 'Oke of Okehurst' demonstrate that:

> however radical high art circles perceive themselves to be in the dangerous and provocative images of women that they produce and promote, […] essentially their gender politics are just as intractable and insensitive to women's needs as the values of the wider society which they seek to challenge.[63]

This tension between the image of mysterious 'Woman' and real women's individual qualities and desires informs Lee's other ghost stories, too. Perhaps this sense of dissatisfaction with aestheticism's gendered bias explains why Lee, though indebted to Pater's artistic theories, developed her own theory of art – termed 'aesthetics of empathy' – through frequent trips around galleries with Kit Anstruther-Thomson.[64] This 'empathetic' approach required the viewer to allow his or her own bodily sensations (poise, breathing, speech, humming musical notes, etc.) to alter naturally while gazing at an art object: this performative experience privileged individual sensation while simultaneously straining to recover the lost character of either the artwork or its creator. This procedure could appear rather comic in practice,[65] and was later attacked by critics;[66] moreover, some modern scholars have interpreted Lee's investment in this approach as an expression of Lee's

---

[62] Vernon Lee, *Miss Brown, Vol. 1* (London: Forgotten Books, 2013 [1884]), pp. 50-51.

[63] Kandola (2010), pp. 26-27. For a discussion of the critical reception to *Miss Brown* as an unfair attack on Pre-Raphaelitism, and the novel's links to the female *bildungsroman* and New Woman fiction, see Zorn (2003), pp. 111-39.

[64] Maxwell and Pulham (2006), p. 14. Lee's close friendship with Anstruther-Thomson is just one of the many relationships she developed with notable men and women of the period; however, her sometimes-tactless literary caricatures of contemporaries (such as Henry James) led to the rupture of several friendships.

[65] See, for example, the recollection of viewing Kit and Lee's experiments in Dame Ethel Smyth, *What Happened Next* (London: Longmans, Green, 1940), p. 160; quoted in Diane Maltz, 'Engaging "Delicate Brains": From Working-Class Enculturation to Upper-Class Lesbian Liberation in Vernon Lee and Kit Anstruther-Thomson's Psychological Aesthetics', in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. by Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia, 1999), pp. 221-29 (p. 223).

[66] Phyllis F. Mannocchi notes that Lee and Anstruther-Thomson's publication of 'Beauty and Ugliness' (1897) was subjected to mixed reactions, misunderstandings, and charges of plagiarism from psychologists and writers interested in the field: 'Karl Groos […] gave the article "generous notice," but Theodor Lipps subjected it to "acid fault findings"' while 'Bernard Berenson, their friend and neighbour in Florence, claimed that […] they had plagiarized his ideas.' Mannocchi also suggests that Lee came to believe that 'even those who regarded their work favourably […] never really had grasped their ideas,' and that they evoked 'strongly unfavourable reactions' in 'retrospective opinions' from their circle. Phyllis F. Mannocchi, 'Vernon Lee and Kit Anstruther-Thomson: A Study of Love and Collaboration Between Romantic Friends', *Women's Studies*, 12. 2 (1986), 129-48 (137-39).

same-sex devotion to Kit, rather than a serious artistic theory.[67] Regardless of how far Lee believed in her aesthetics of empathy, it is clear that the author's ongoing interest in aestheticism – and specifically, as Mahoney argues, an ethical brand of aestheticism which pays tribute to the object itself – feeds into her allusive ghost stories. The ambivalence surrounding the aesthetics of empathy (that is, whether a spectator was *accessing* a fragment of the past, or imaginatively *constructing* it) is especially relevant to Lee's use of feminised things.[68]

This tension between material *thereness* and imaginative construction is also invoked in Lee's famous preface to *Hauntings*, which, as mentioned earlier, privileges the latter in its discussion of ghosts. The author is particularly keen to distance her stories from a certain type of material spectre: that is, the ghost rationalised and interrogated by the SPR, a society which Lee believed was draining spectres of their crucial mystery. Lee condemns the attempted pathological or physiological explanation of ghosts through her sardonic references to a certain 'maiden aunt' and her crushingly mundane haunting, concluding that: 'you can always tell a genuine ghost-story by the circumstance of its being about a nobody, its having no point or picturesqueness, and being, generally speaking, flat, stale, and unprofitable.'[69] Instead, Lee favours the non-quantifiable, suggestive spectre born of the creative mind: 'sprung from the strange confused heaps, half-rubbish, half-treasure, which lie in our fancy, heaps of half-faded recollections, of fragmentary vivid impressions.'[70] These spectres, for Lee, must for the most part remain 'enwrapped in mystery,'[71] as to quantify, document, or describe the supernatural is to risk destroying its precious atmosphere. As in her earlier examinations of aesthetic ideals,[72] Lee shows herself keenly aware of the impossibility of representing the ineffable.

---

[67] See Mannocchi (1986), Maltz (1999), and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, '"Still Burning from this Strangling Embrace": Vernon Lee on Desire and Aesthetics', in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. by Richard Dellamora (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 21-42.

[68] Interestingly, an 1894 article by Lee suggests that the author's perception of literature was based on a similar transaction between author and reader: 'the literary work of art is dependent on two persons, the one who speaks and the one who listens, the one who explains and the one who understands, the Writer and the Reader; a fact which resolves itself into the still more fundamental fact, that the words which are the Writer's materials for expression are but a symbol of the ideas already existing in the mind of the reader; and that, in reality, the Reader's mind is the Writer's palette.' We might see here, too, parallels with Paterian aestheticism ('what is this thing *to me*?) and Brown's discussion of the necessity of the subject-object relation in determining 'thingness'. Vernon Lee, 'The Craft of Words', *The New Review*, 11. 67 (Dec 1894), 571-80 (571).

[69] Vernon Lee, 'Preface', in Lee (2006), p. 38.

[70] Lee (2006), p. 39.

[71] Lee (2006), p. 37.

[72] In her 1881 text *Belcaro*, Lee expresses disappointment at the material representation of her aesthetic ideals. She states that: 'In order to endure, they had, these ideas, to be removed out of all this living frame-work; to be written down, […] to be made quite lifeless and inorganic, and dry and stiff, like some stuffed animal or bird. And when it came to sorting them, to preparing them to show to other folk; [she experienced

Her ghosts and the stories which house them, however, must rely on material objects – possessions, portraits, prose – to exert their effect. Lee's preface seems to promote an anti-materialist stance which simply rejects the question (key to some other Victorian ghost stories) of whether or not the spectres are real, and instead recognises them as products of sensations or impressions. But Lee can only convey a sense of mystery through a reliance on material items: fragmentary and elusive objects which double as evocative Brownian 'things', such as 'the glint on the warrior's breastplate, […] faded herbs and flowers, […] the spectral pines, […] the moonlit sea.'[73] This focus on objects as mediums or representatives of the ethereal infuses the whole collection, subtly undermining Lee's claim that the supernatural is antithetical to representation. At the same time, the preoccupation with evocative objects as a route to self-discovery aligns the ghost with aestheticism. As Pulham argues, Lee's continual references to physical art forms in *Hauntings* 'lend Lee's "ghosts" a solidity' which allows them to 'become "art objects" in their own right.'[74] While the spectres and the stories themselves remain highly aestheticized art objects, the latter also double as commodities in a changing literary marketplace.

The dual status of *Hauntings* as both a commodity and an art object parallels the competing claims of aestheticism at the *fin de siècle*. Aestheticism itself, though seeming to offer an intellectual alternative to commodity culture, was explicitly rooted in and shaped by that same culture, as discussed by critics such as Regenia Gagnier.[75] Just as Lee's ghosts rely on objects to exert their influence, her prose must be enshrined in paper and transmitted to the literary marketplace in order to exude its allure. The stories in *Hauntings* therefore resemble the things which litter them, as both aesthetic relics and priced wares in a market. Although Lee, unlike the other authors considered in this study, was not driven to write by financial constraints, several of her ghost stories appeared in periodicals, situating the author as a participant within the late Victorian literary scene. The short-lived *Murray's Magazine*, in which 'Amour Dure' first appeared in 1887, was started

---

a] vague melancholy sense of how different they now looked, my poor art thoughts all dreary in their abstractness, from what they had been when they had first come into my head.' Vernon Lee, *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: W. Satchell, 1881 [Kindle edition]), Chapter 1: The Book and Its Title.

[73] Lee (2006), pp. 37, 38, 40. The reference to 'the mouldering walls of the house whence Shelley set sail for eternity' (p. 40) has a double effect: as well as implicitly evoking the concept of death (crucial to the ghost story, but generally undiscussed in the preface), it also bolsters the idea of organic, romantic creativity, and peripherally connotes the type of dreamlike and romantic creative processes favoured by Lee.

[74] Pulham (2008), p. xvi.

[75] For Gagnier, aestheticism 'was grounded in the beginnings of modern spectacular and mass society and depended upon image and advertising,' and 'the emerging service and consumerist economy […] determined late-Victorian aestheticism.' Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), pp. 8, 5.

by bookseller and publisher John Murray in his endeavours to create an accessible in-house periodical,[76] while the infamous aesthetic journal the *Yellow Book* published the strange, fairy-tale-esque 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' (1896).[77] Lee's discussions of the supernatural's resistance to representation encode an implicit wariness of the commercial literary arena: her reference to the deadening effects of paper, for example, appears to privilege a transcendental form of ghost story free from the trappings of the market.[78] For the author, 'to write is to dispel the charm; […] printers' ink chases away the ghosts that may pleasantly haunt us, as efficaciously as gallons of holy water.'[79] Her enchanting and 'spurious ghosts' are at risk of being turned into the dreary spectres of the SPR in their committal to paper.

Ironically, however, this form of materialisation ensures the ghost's survival in the modern world, long after the demise of its creator or percipient. It is *only* through material things that ghosts are able to exert their influence. Lee condemns the fact that the supernatural, when subject to artistic endeavours to structure it into 'a definite or enduring shape,' appears to lose its force: 'it vanishes out of [the artist's] grasp, and the forms which should have inclosed it are mere empty sepulchres, haunted and charmed merely by the evoking power of our own imagination.'[80] Yet this description of the deadening effects of representation encodes the very opposite. The 'empty sepulchres' remain highly evocative *things*, and we must thus, like the aesthetic critic, imaginatively infuse them with a sense of mystery and enchantment.[81] Lee might express wariness about her ghosts' relationship to materialism, but it is only through material things that they can wield influence in the modern world.[82]

This concept of seemingly worthless or vacuous things being brought to life by a human subject's perception of them informs *Hauntings*, as evidenced by the range of semi-valuable detritus that litters Lee's tales: paintings left in lumber-rooms, underappreciated ornaments, modern commodities, and historically-resonant love tokens. Moreover, the

---

[76] 'John Murray Publishers (1768-)', in *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism,* ed. by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (London: Academia Press, 2009), p. 322.

[77] 'Oke of Okehurst' was first published in novella form as *The Phantom Lover: A Fantastic Story* in 1886, by prominent periodicals publisher William Blackwood of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Maxwell and Pulham (2006), pp. 41, 182, 105.

[78] Her denigrating references to the (now fashionable, then aligned with rapid urbanization) London areas of Islington and Shepherd's Bush seems to support this idea, in implicitly distancing Lee's narratives from urban domestic venues. Lee (2006), p. 39.

[79] Vernon Lee, dedicatory letter which precedes 'Oke of Okehurst; or, The Phantom Lover' (1886), in Lee (2006), p. 105.

[80] Lee, Vernon, 'Faustus and Helena', in Lee (2006), p. 292.

[81] This sense of reading as a kind of Paterian transaction between text (or author) and reader is invoked by Lee in 'The Craft of Words', as discussed in Footnote 68.

[82] A similarly paradoxical tension infuses femininity in Lee's tales, as we will see throughout this chapter.

stories situate artistic and literary endeavours – including the tales themselves - amongst this selection of things. Despite her implicit denigration of the literary marketplace, Lee's all-compassing appreciation of objects synthesises her own supernatural stories within the glut of material which accumulates throughout *Hauntings*, apparently worthless things which retain emotional value via the subject-object relation. As Nicole Fluhr acknowledges, each text in the collection is shadowed by another unfinished artwork: all of the narrators are 'writers or artists,' each of whom 'produces his story […] at the same time as he is trying and failing to complete another work.'[83] We can see, in this inclusive range of things, that it is not just the valuable historical relic which wields the power to evoke ghosts. Instead, subject-object relations render any object vulnerable to transformation into a thing, and even a fetish – provided it shares a connection with a (male or female) *femme fatale*.

This all-encompassing perception of things can be discerned in Lee's novella, 'Oke of Okehurst,' which charts the evocative powers of a selection of different objects via the intriguing figure(s) of Alice Oke. Not only do the ancient relics of a long-dead woman possess fetishistic authority, even aborted modern artworks can hold a strange power over the contemporary imagination. The failed portrait of the modern Alice Oke is described as a 'huge wreck' which 'seems quite mad,'[84] but this picture is just as redolent and enchanting as the story's range of sumptuous historical relics. In delineating the non-representability of the enigmatic central woman, Lee's 'Oke of Okehurst' interrogates *fin de siècle* culture's desire to fix women in accordance with potentially limiting ideas about femininity. For Gail Finney, the *femme fatale* 'flourished in the latter nineteenth century' as a result of 'an overcompensating reaction both to the sexual repressiveness of the era and to the waves of hysteria and feminism it produced.'[85] Lee's tales instead provide a progressive counter to this argument, in balancing the masculine bias adhering to the *femme fatale* with an acknowledgement of its empowering aspects for women. Just as the literary ghost's influence depends on material representation, so too does the central woman's power derive from the potentially restrictive trope of feminine mysteriousness. The ideal of the enigmatic feminine transcends its constructed nature to become even more haunting than the ghost.

---

[83] Nicole Fluhr, 'Empathy and Identity in Vernon Lee's *Hauntings'*, *Victorian Studies*, 48. 2 (Winter 2006), 287-94 (287).

[84] Vernon Lee, 'Oke of Okehurst; Or, The Phantom Lover' (1886/1890), in Lee (2006), pp. 105-53 (p. 106).

[85] Gail Finney, *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theater at the Turn of the Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 52.

Fetishism and Representation: 'Oke of Okehurst' (1886/1890)

'Oke of Okehurst' is narrated by an unnamed bourgeois artist who grudgingly agrees to paint the wife of a seemingly dull country squire, William Oke, after finding his own services shunned by society when he paints a plump and vulgar woman in too honest a fashion. On arriving at Okehurst, the narrator, who had envisioned a conventional house complete with fashionable commodities, is astonished to discover an opulently-furnished manor and William's entrancingly unusual wife, Alice. Alice's eccentricities mean that the childless Okes live in isolation, with few visitors. The aesthetically-minded narrator is increasingly fascinated by his hostess (in an artistic rather than a romantic way), producing several unsatisfactory sketches of her in which he attempts to capture her inexplicable essence. Alice is obsessed with a relative from her family's past – also called Alice Oke – who, along with her husband Nicholas, murdered a poet, Christopher Lovelock, who was seemingly the ancestral Alice's lover. The present-day Alice emulates her relative by idolising her portrait, dressing in her clothes, mooning over Lovelock's poetry, and implying that she is, in some sense, Alice's double. William displays anxiety about his wife's peculiar preoccupation, and becomes increasingly disturbed as he believes he sees his wife walking with another man. In the story's dramatic denouement, Oke mistakenly and fatally shoots his wife, seemingly aiming at the ghost of Lovelock. He then attempts to shoot himself, and dies raving a few days later.

'Oke of Okehurst' uses the living Alice Oke and her obsession with her ancestor's possessions to critique the potential loss of real women beneath the trope of 'woman as enigma'. The story might appear to counter my thesis, in this chapter, that it is largely the male characters who facilitate the thing's transformation into a fetish: Alice is seemingly more susceptible to the charms of the past than the two central men, and she uses a selection of objects – a portrait, a song, a lock of hair – as mediums through which to understand and mimic her ancestor. But the tale gradually unravels the distinction between the spiritual female and the rational males. While Alice transforms ancient objects into 'things' and 'fetishes' in connecting them to her long-dead relative, it is the narrator who extends this process in viewing both the living Alice and the portraits which portray her as forms of supernaturally-resonant fetishes. Intriguingly, the artist-narrator begins as the 'critic' in the structure of fetishism, but soon succumbs to an alternative view when he falls under the living Alice's thrall. 'Oke of Okehurst' thus demonstrates the vulnerability of men to the ideal of the *femme fatale* through a preoccupation with material things.

The unnamed artist-narrator's susceptibility to 'imaginative impression' – the succumbing to which he describes as 'a certain kind of voluptuousness, peculiar and complex and indescribable, like the half-drunkenness of opium or hashish'[86] – situates him as an explicitly Paterian critic, one whose ideological values diverge from those of Lee.[87] Primarily interested in beauty and originality, the narrator's perception of the past is premised on nebulous, romanticised daydreams. He comments, in an echo of Lee's preface, on 'the beautifully damascened suits of armour' which looked 'as if no modern hand had ever touched them,'[88] and on 'a vague sense of rose-leaves and spices, put into china bowls by the hands of ladies long since dead.'[89] Although he lazily perceives objects as links to a highly personalised, imaginatively-tailored past, the narrator is largely uninterested in their actual connection to particular historical moments, and thus fails to share what Mahoney describes as Lee's ethical 'method of appreciation that acknowledges the historical otherness of the cultural relic.'[90] Mahoney argues that Lee's work attempts to revise the Paterian theory of art – that is, 'What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*?' – into a less narcissistic question: 'How does my manner of consuming affect this picture, this statue, this book?'[91] The artist-narrator, in his selfish preoccupation with the subject-object relation embedded in 'things', fails to share this ethical sense. He values the Okes's luxurious furniture only insofar as it provokes his own exquisite daydreams.

The narrator's unethical approach to objects bleeds into his callousness about people, as evidenced by his continual self-assuring statements about his own failure to intervene in the approaching crisis. He claims that witnessing the Okes's vexed marriage was 'a perfect treat to an amateur student of character' like himself, and attempts to justify his non-intervention under the guise that 'any interference on [his] part' might potentially 'animate [Alice's] perversity.'[92] The narrator points out Alice's initial disinterest in him through a teasing analogy with domestic objects, stating that it took time for her to become 'aware of [his] presence as distinguished from that of the chairs and tables.'[93] He too, however, is guilty of failing to differentiate between things and people in his sustained perception of the Okes as objects of study. This selfish worldview acts as a fitting prologue

---

[86] Lee (2006), p. 112.
[87] As acknowledged earlier, Lee, as Mahoney argues, seems to favour an ethical form of object appreciation which combines both Ruskinian and Paterian approaches to art.
[88] Lee (2006), p. 111.
[89] Lee (2006), p. 112.
[90] Mahoney (2006), 39.
[91] Mahoney (2006), 41.
[92] Lee (2006), p. 141.
[93] Lee (2006), p. 118.

for subsequent events. The narrator's objectification of Alice blurs the boundary between subject and object, and his eventual bewitchment by her (and her associated representations) seems like a fitting punishment for his insensitivity. In valuing both objects and people primarily for his own ends, the artist unveils the self-interest and moral ennui underpinning the principles of a particular kind of male aesthetic critic.

The developing relationship between the artist-narrator and Alice Oke also invokes fetishism's precarious attempted inscription of certain value systems. The narrator, originally the 'critic' in Logan's outlined triangular structure of fetishism, eventually transforms into a 'fetishist' himself, in succumbing to Alice's own beliefs. Alice seems to access her ancestor (and to a certain sense *embody* her ancestor) through the ownership and display of her long-dead relative's former possessions: a portrait, her clothes, and a love poem written for her. Alice apparently views herself as the reincarnation or receptacle of her relative, as she seems to be 'speaking of herself in the third person' when talking about the other Alice.[94] The conflation between the two women's identities is established through the use of objects as totems: the love-tokens fuel Alice's obsession and facilitate her doubled selfhood, and the narrator comments that 'the resemblance was heightened' between the two women by Alice's choice of dress.[95] Although he early in the narrative refers to Alice's preoccupation with her relative as merely 'the caprice, the mania, the pose, the whatever you may call it' of 'a childless and idle woman,'[96] he later succumbs to the idea that Alice is 'a weird creature, visibly not of this earth, a reincarnation of a woman who murdered her lover two centuries and a half ago.'[97] Thus, while the artist-narrator seems to cast an analytical eye on his peculiar hostess – as the 'critic' in the triangular structure of fetishism observing the 'fetishist' Alice – he too soon becomes embroiled in the sense of mystery and enchantment embodied by the twinned Alices.

This transformation is importantly facilitated by the cultural perception of 'Woman' as inherently mysterious. As Elizabeth Grosz argues, '[t]he enigma that Woman has posed for men is an enigma only because the male subject has construed itself as the subject par excellence.'[98] This arrogance is evident in the narrator's description of Alice as 'something [which] seemed always to have been present in one's consciousness, although

---

[94] Lee (2006), p. 131.
[95] Lee (2006), p. 119.
[96] Lee (2006), p. 122.
[97] Lee (2006), p. 142.
[98] Elizabeth Grosz, 'Sexed Bodies' (1994), in *Continental Feminism Reader*, ed. by Ann J. Cahill and Jennifer Hansen (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), pp. 292-322 (p. 297).

present, perhaps, as an enigma,'[99] the real living woman reduced to an object, an aspect of the male's psychology, a 'strange psychological riddle' which the spectator is invited to 'solve.'[100] While the narrator admits that Alice vexes and bewitches him, there are certain points at which he believes he has deciphered the mystery of her personality. He claims that he would like to 'enlighten' Oke about his wife's character, which he himself 'seemed to understand […] so well,'[101] describing Alice as a 'mixture of self-engrossed vanity, of shallowness, of poetic vision, of love of morbid excitement.'[102] This attempt to 'fix' the real woman draws on cultural myths regarding what Sarah Alexander terms 'distinctly feminine vices' like 'vanity, frivolity, and materialism,'[103] and can perhaps be partially attributed to the narrator's own shallowness, poeticism, and excitability. As an aesthetic critic of the Paterian school, the narrator's fixation with Okehurst's beautiful art objects is gradually displaced by an obsession with Alice Oke, until she becomes a kind of art object herself: a beautiful muse, a mystery to be unravelled, and something ethereal which he strives to enclose in a material form. As with the earlier-quoted passage from Lee's 1884 novel *Miss Brown*, the real woman's 'intellectual or moral' potential is subsumed beneath the 'superb physical appearance' of a 'beautiful dramatic creature' that the male spectator both worships and demeans.[104] 'Oke of Okehurst' thus highlights the dubious aesthetic critic's reverence for, and objectification of, women, while implying that it is through such problematic processes that the idea of 'Woman' retains its potency.

Perhaps because of the narrator's determination to view Alice as the embodiment of woman as 'living enigma,'[105] she continually defies his attempts at representation. As Pulham argues, Alice, like many of the female spectres in *Hauntings*, 'resist[s] being captured and/or remaining captive in art.'[106] The first descriptions of her, appropriately, are ekphrastic, comprised of a series of attempted sketches made by the artist-narrator: the reader encounters a (textual) representation of another (visual) representation, further complicated by the later revelation that Alice herself is an attempted replication of another character.[107] What Finney terms the 'two-sidedness' of the *femme fatale* – her crucial

---

[99] Lee (2006), p. 113.
[100] Lee (2006), p. 117.
[101] Lee (2006), p. 140.
[102] Lee (2006), p. 140.
[103] Sarah Alexander, *Shopping for Pleasure: The Fashion Lover in Victorian Fiction* (Michigan: ProQuest, 2008), p. 5.
[104] Lee (2013), pp. 50-51.
[105] De Beauvoir (1988), p. 286.
[106] Pulham (2008), p. 120.
[107] Ekphrasis also implicitly connotes the text's artificiality through its attempted alignment with the 'real' created art object, as discussed more fully later in the section on 'Amour Dure'.

combination of 'beauty and death'[108] – finds a literal and dizzying manifestation in the plethora of real and represented Alices. This sense of doubled production or inauthenticity is strengthened by the narrator's use of performative terms which align her with an artist's model or actress: Alice has 'an *artificial* perverse sort of grace and research';[109] 'something suggesting *study*, which might lead one to tax her with *affectation*';[110] and seems to adopt 'a kind of *pose* on her part.'[111] The narrator can only begin (unsuccessfully) to comprehend her mystery through false means, considering her as an actress, or as a beautiful art object. Rather than perceiving her as 'a body,' he sees her as 'merely a wonderful strangeness of lines' evoking 'a wonderful strangeness of personality.'[112] Of course, his attempts to objectify Alice are continually complicated by her inherent non-representability, as the narrator complains that 'if the pencil and brush, imitating each line and tint, can't succeed, how is it possible to give even the vaguest notion with mere wretched words,' which possess 'only a wretched abstract meaning, an impotent conventional association?'[113] Neither type of 'line' (artistic and lingual) is sufficient in portraying Alice's inscrutable fascination. In presenting these complexities, this story stages a subtle corrective to the narrator's previous misogynistic desire to 'solve' the feminine mystery exemplified by his hostess.

This sense of non-representability, alongside her ambiguous relation to her ancestor, also aligns Alice with the troubled relationship between the fetish and representation. For Logan, the 'very communion of object with spirit, signifier with signified, makes the fetish antithetical to representation.'[114] Logan is here discussing examples in which the material form of the object and the spiritual form of a supernatural presence become one, which is not entirely the case with Alice and her possessions. Nonetheless, the narrator's slipperiness in discussing her ambivalent status (as beautiful art object, living woman, reincarnated ancestor and/or spiritual vessel) portrays her ultimate resistance to interpretation. Despite the narrator's attempts to enshrine her in art and prose, she, like the fetish, 'exists "outside" all representational systems, including the system of language.'[115] The mysterious feminine epitomised by Alice both invites and resists analysis, initiating an abundance of copies (the aborted portrait and practice sketches)

---

[108] Finney (1989), p. 52.
[109] Lee (2006), p. 106, my emphasis.
[110] Lee (2006), p. 116, my emphasis.
[111] Lee (2006), p. 116, my emphasis.
[112] Lee (2006), p. 114.
[113] Lee (2006), p. 115.
[114] Logan (2009), p. 10.
[115] Logan (2009), p. 11.

which draw on, without entirely replicating, the magical force of the original.[116] As with Lee's favoured supernatural, these copies seemingly falter in the process of representation, but nonetheless remain fraught with a sense of uncanny power. While Alice imbues even apparently worthless objects with resonance as 'things' (via the subject-object relation) and even 'fetishes' (in their supernatural connection to her relative), this process is crucially mediated through the narrator in his almost-mystical repeated attempts at lingual and artistic representation. Just as the former Alice's love-tokens summon the spirit of their original possessor, so too do the late Victorian Alice's replicated images invoke her mysterious quality, even as they appear to mourn their failures in doing so.

If the character of Alice speaks to the incomprehensible and non-representable nature of femininity, its potentially shattering effects on masculinity is portrayed via William Oke. William functions as an archetype of a certain kind of mid-Victorian manliness: chivalrous, courteous, staid, and aristocratic. Seemingly unimaginative, his eventual mental collapse emphasises this form of masculinity's vulnerability to the *femme fatale*. The narrator views William as almost painfully conventional. Describing him at first as 'absolutely like a hundred other young men, […] and absolutely uninteresting,'[117] he later acknowledges him as a 'type of the perfectly conscientious young Englishman, […] devout, pure-minded, brave, incapable of any baseness.'[118] This paragon of idealised Victorian masculinity is, however, continually cast down and eventually obliterated by Alice's 'charming yet cruel' nature.[119] Dennis Denisoff rightly argues that William's aristocratic manliness presents him as an anachronistic figure disillusioned by late Victorian consumerism.[120] His gradual decline is also connected to Alice's power over things which he himself lacks, as he becomes increasingly unhinged when Alice flaunts her various trophies. Rather than adhering to the rationalism associated with masculinity, or the religion in which he supposedly trusts, William eventually (even more so than the

---

[116] For a later ghost story which explores the uncanny power of a 'copy' of an original, see M. R. James's 'The Diary of Mr Poynter' (1919). The male protagonist, in this tale, is haunted by a strange being when he uses a scrap of material from an old diary as a design for his new curtains. This story's closing lines knowingly lampoon the genre, almost directly anticipating Baldick's facetious example of a ghost story which opens this study: 'Mr Cartell's comment upon what he heard of the story took the form of a quotation from Shakespeare. You may guess it without difficulty. It began with the words "There are more things."' M. R. James, 'The Diary of Mr Poynter' (1919), in Cox (1996), pp. 46-55 (p. 55).

[117] Lee (2006), p. 107.

[118] Lee (2006), p. 117.

[119] 'The typical femme fatale of the nineteenth century is cold, arrogant, and inaccessible, yet irresistible; defiant of social convention; mysterious, enigmatic, and exotic, often Middle Eastern or North African; charming yet cruel, sometimes to the point of perversity and even sadism; she frequently takes the form of the *allumeuse* […], who excites men's desire without satisfying it.' Finney (1989), p. 52. Alice fulfils some, but not all, of these criteria.

[120] Dennis Denisoff, "Vernon Lee, Decadent Contamination and the Productivist Ethos", in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, ed. by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 75-90.

narrator) comes to believe in Alice's version of their ghostly love triangle. Alice's looks and words might be 'distant, intangible, not of this earth,'[121] but these are crucially emphasised through clothes, paintings, and love-tokens, finally proving fatal to what the narrator terms William's 'poor fellow's honest soul.'[122] The trope of 'woman' as enigma does not, then, simply emerge from male privilege even as it resists masculine attempts at representation; it also poses a genuine threat to masculinity in advocating feminine power.

This redistribution of gendered power is made explicit in the reversal of conventional stereotypes as the story reaches its climax. When Alice shocks her assembled audience by dressing up in the clothes of a groom (like the ancestral Alice on the night of the murder), William is likened to a 'hysterical woman.'[123] Just as Alice's possessions are transformed into things or fetishes with the power of invoking the long-dead Alice, the living woman breaks away from her original designation (as Oke's owned wife, and the narrator's riddle to be solved) in an act of cross-dressing which both destabilises and reifies her status as *femme fatale*. In a neat parallel, Alice's death imbues her attempted representations with a sense of mystery, just as the former Alice's love triangle infused her possessions with the same. Both situations draw on the enigmatic feminine, but its status as a cultural construction perpetuated by a male-orientated culture fails to inhibit its intrinsic power. 'Oke of Okehurst' thus utilises the motif of the *femme fatale* in conjunction with a range of fetishistic objects to critique *fin de siècle* society's problematic assumptions about women.

Troubled Materialisations: The *Femme Fatale* in 'Amour Dure' (1887/1890)

Some feminist critics have championed the progressive qualities of the *femme fatale*,[124] but this trope nonetheless relies on various controversial stereotypes regarding women: the Eve-esque myth which links them to immorality and/or male ruin; the suggestion that female sexual transgression and villainy go hand-in-hand; and the problematic perception of women as mysterious which, as intimated earlier, could contribute to their subjugation. 'Amour Dure' explores these ideas through its use of the

---

[121] Lee (2006), p. 150.
[122] Lee (2006), p. 139.
[123] Lee (2006), p. 144.
[124] Jennifer Hedgecock reads the *femme fatale* as 'vibrant and courageous, […] and very different from her female counterparts such as the idealized domestic woman, or the shunned and ill-used fallen woman' (p. xv). While I acknowledge that this motif could function as 'a literary signpost of the changing roles of women in the nineteenth century' which 'foreshadows later protests against society's treatment of women,' Hedgecock's analysis is perhaps too optimistic in its failure to consider the *femme fatale*'s connection to various damaging stereotypes regarding women. Jennifer Hedgecock, *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat* (London: Cambria Press, 2008), pp. 2-3.

male narrator's fascination with a long-dead woman. While some critics have suggested that late Victorian supernatural fiction expresses a panicked cultural anxiety about an involuntary return to the past through atavism and regression,[125] 'Amour Dure' instead charts the magical, fetishistic ways in which we reconstruct history through material fragments.[126] We might value things for their mystical affiliation with a distant past, but part of their charm emerges from our own imaginations, revealing the extent to which the seemingly academic pursuit of historical research necessarily remains entangled with intuition, and even superstition. Lee uses the spectral *femme fatale* to explore these ideas through a gendered lens. Even more so than 'Oke of Okehurst', 'Amour Dure' emphasises the power of feminised fetishes in the contemporary world, subtly satirising the contentious processes through which women are enshrined in history.

Narrated in diary form by a young Polish historian, Spiridion Trepka, 'Amour Dure' opens on the protagonist's anticlimactic fulfilment of a wish to confront the past: 'I had longed, these years and years, to be in Italy, to come face to face with the Past; and was this the Past?'[127] Having been commissioned to complete an official history of Urbania, he is severely disappointed at the modernity which has infiltrated Italy. Throughout the course of his research, he comes across the story of Medea da Carpi, an enigmatic, Lucrezia Borgia-esque figure from the sixteenth century, who bewitched and apparently murdered several suitors, and allowed others to be killed in their attempts to fulfil her wishes. Captured and later assassinated at the bequest of her enemy Duke Robert, Medea exercised a form of romantic attraction infused with violence. Trepka's mild interest in this woman soon develops into an obsessive fascination as he uncovers and accumulates ever more artistic material about her: 'a miniature in the Archives, […] a marble busy in the palace lumber-room; […] a large composition […] representing Cleopatra,'[128] and later 'a heap of letters' revealing her handwriting and an exceedingly grand portrait.[129] Medea's things – and the images portraying her – continue to haunt Trepka's thoughts as he makes these discoveries, and he declares himself ever more understanding and forgiving of her violence as a product of her difficult position in a brutal patriarchal society. Events soon take an uncanny turn: a mysterious woman stops in the street to listen to Trepka's song about Medea, and he receives communication to visit an

---

[125] See, for example, Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Identity and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[126] Although the narrator is murdered at the end, the tale, his beatific anticipation of his own demise complicates attempts to read this as a cautionary tale, although (as we shall see) some critics promote this interpretation.

[127] Lee, (2006), p. 41.

[128] Lee (2006), p. 51.

[129] Lee (2006), pp. 57, 61.

old church, where he apparently encounters his spectral lover on two occasions. On the second of these, Medea gifts him 'a real, a living rose, dark red and only just plucked.'[130] When he follows Medea for a third time, Trepka finds a letter which asks him to cut into the statue of Duke Robert in order to destroy the silver effigy (which Robert believed would protect him from Medea's influence) enclosed inside: 'Let thy courage be equal to thy love, and thy love shall be rewarded.'[131] While completing this commission, Trepka is accosted by several of Medea's previous lovers, who advise him not to proceed. Ignoring them, he follows the directions and returns to his room, excitedly anticipating Medea's visit and hearing her step on the stair. A brief note attached to the end of the diary narrative states that Trepka 'had been discovered dead of a stab in the region of the heart, given by an unknown hand' the morning (Christmas Day) following his nocturnal adventure.[132]

Critical approaches to 'Amour Dure' often focus on Trepka's dual role as historian and aesthetic critic, and on the dangerous and/or empowering aspects of his obsession with the past.[133] Several suggest that the historian's preoccupation with Medea enables productive or detrimental personal transformations which might otherwise have remained unavailable to him. Christa Zorn, for example, argues that Medea's 'untamed, uncanny sexual attraction' offers Trepka 'an escape from dull historical research into the fantastic past,' thus endowing him 'with an identity, however outside the confines of society.'[134] Sondeep Kandola reads the story in cautionary terms, as 'a highly coloured dramatization of the concerns Lee expressed in *Euphorion* on the temptations and insidious moral dangers posed to the modern mind by the impressionist historical method.'[135] For Kandola, the author remains 'entirely pessimistic' about how modern subjects were affected by 'scholarly celebrations of Renaissance immorality.'[136] While these readings are undoubtedly useful, interpretations which focus solely on Trepka's experiences risk reiterating his failings in allowing the real woman to become obscured by the seductive image of the *femme fatale*. In other words, such readings can neglect the extent to which Medea da Carpi herself potentially suffers through the protagonist's imaginative approach to history. T. D. Olverson, in an excellent discussion of this woman's resemblance to the

---

[130] Lee (2006), p. 70.
[131] Lee (2006), p. 71.
[132] Lee (2006), p. 76.
[133] Lengthy descriptions of Medea's portraits have been extensively analysed by various critics, but these discussions usually feed into the central theses about Trepka himself.
[134] Zorn (2003), p. 160.
[135] Kandola (2010), p. 42.
[136] Kandola (2010), p. 46. See also Fluhr's argument that 'Amour Dure' intimates that 'one must be *both* a novelist and a historian to touch the past […] the price of empathetic identification that allows one to understand history is a loss of self that leads to death or compromised autonomy.' Fluhr (2006), 288.

Medea of Greek myth, argues that 'Trepka essentially typecasts Medea, ranking her alongside other notorious and misrepresented women from the Renaissance.'[137] According to Olverson, the way in which 'the visceral figure of Medea is removed to the margins and disembodied' within Lee's story 'illustrates […] how the lives of women are redacted to comply with dominant historical narratives and paradigms.'[138] Indeed, the reader's access to Medea is necessarily mediated through Trepka, and the historian sometimes appears less than stringent in analysing past records and legends concerning his beloved.

Like the artist-narrator in 'Oke of Okehurst', Trepka attempts to objectify the woman who fascinates him, but, by conflating the woman with her portrait, he instead falls under the enchantment of a variety of feminised things. While critics have examined how Trepka's descriptions of his discovered images of Medea feed into aesthetic and imaginative approaches to history, this section instead traces the significance of objects as magical totems through their alignment with the *femme fatale*. 'Amour Dure' thus speaks to this chapter's broader concerns with the complex connections between fetishes and femininity in the Victorian world.

Trepka's excited assumption that the relics gradually bring him closer to Medea echoes late nineteenth-century anthropological work on primitive societies. As we have seen earlier, Tylor extends the concept of the fetish to include even 'symbolic charms' or 'things regarded in some undefined way as wondrous ornaments or curiosities,'[139] thus revealing insidious correspondences between the primitive fetishist and the modern historian. Tylor's gradual debunking of overly restrictive definitions of fetishism ends up synthesising the superstitious primitive, who believes an object will facilitate communication with the gods, into a broader community of artists and historians, who inevitably place emotional stock in signs, tokens, representations, and ornaments. Trepka continually views such things as mediums through which to access an imaginatively-constructed past. Even before he falls under Medea's thrall, he notes that the charming Italian scenery engenders fantasies of bygone days: 'I almost expected […] that a troop of horsemen […] would emerge, with armour glittering and pennons waving in the sunset.'[140] We might thus read Trepka's transformation from researcher (concerned with 'curiosities') into fetishist (ascribing objects 'mysterious power') as an indication of the ways in which Victorian approaches to art and history imbued objects with personalised resonances as

---

[137] T. D. Olverson, *Women Writers and the Dark Side of Late-Victorian Hellenism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 170.
[138] Olverson (2010), pp. 145, 158.
[139] Tylor (1871, v. 2), p. 132.
[140] Lee (2006), p. 42.

'things'. The ease with which the transition from historian to fetishist is completed intimates that the two subject positions were never wholly dissimilar in the first place. Even more importantly for this chapter, Trepka's transformation into a fetishist is specifically entangled with his obsession with a historical *femme fatale*.

Medea's various love-tokens are macabre instruments of seduction which seem to hypnotise the men who receive them; the extent to which objects operate as mediums for the soul demonstrates how the objectification and vilification of women can contribute to their post-death power. As well as being objects in their own right, the aforementioned love-tokens also double as fetishes, gaining uncanny power in being imbued with Medea's spectral presence. Paradoxically, they function as enchanted relics which bring Medea back to life, before working to convince Trepka of the non-importance of materiality in the deep love he feels for her. But they also suggest that Medea's image is more important than the woman herself, in a process of objectification in which the imagined is privileged above the real. Trepka's fetishistic appreciation of relics signals the necessity of objects in accessing the lost past, while acknowledging their constrictive nature in figuring only a fractional, often-subjective record of historical events. That these complications accrue around a long-dead woman speaks to things' limiting and liberating potential regarding gender. 'Amour Dure' thereby implies that the historical re-membering of female figures can occlude actual women behind the trope of the *femme fatale*. Paradoxically, however, this trope provides the means through which long-dead women are remembered and esteemed in the modern world.

Trepka's gradual bewitchment by Medea takes place through a kind of symbolic scavenger-hunt in which each discovered relic contributes to the ghost's gradual manifestation. Medea possesses power over objects even before her death; for example she uses an 'embroidered handkerchief' to fortify her influence over the 'poor mangled creature' who had done her bidding and is being tortured for it, after which the boy 'ask[s] the executioner to wipe his mouth with it, kisse[s] it, and crie[s] out that Medea was innocent.'[141] Taking its cue from this encounter, in which the beloved's possession functions as a fetishized substitute for the woman's absent body, Trepka's delighted unearthing of Medea's letters is accompanied by his sense that 'almost […] there hangs about these mouldering pieces a scent as of a woman's hair.'[142] As Olverson acknowledges, 'Trepka never directly quotes from any of the[se] letters' and therefore

---

[141] Lee (2006), p. 50.
[142] Lee (2006), p. 58.

'[h]is self-obsessed narrative excludes Medea's attempts at self-representation.'[143] The protagonist's privileging of physical matter over the letter's intellectual content symbolises his preoccupation with 'Woman' rather than Medea herself: the scent of her hair is far more enchanting than anything she might write or say.

Somewhat paradoxically, the ghostly Medea's face and body continually obscure her identity, revealing the extent to which the (actual and historical) male gaze continually objectifies women. Both Trepka and the young 'mangled' boy express sexual desires through tactile sensation, treating Medea's possessions as precious extensions of her own physical self. When the protagonist receives a rose from his beloved, he is dismayed to discover its speedy degeneration:

> The rose, which last night seemed freshly plucked, full of colour and perfume, is brown, dry – a thing kept for centuries between the leaves of a book – it has crumbled into dust between my fingers. Horrible, horrible! But why so, pray? Did I not know that I was in love with a woman dead three hundred years? […] If only I could hold Medea in my arms as I held it in my fingers, kiss her lips as I kissed its petals, should I not be satisfied if she too were to fall to dust the next moment, if I were to fall to dust myself?[144]

As with the letters, Medea's gift represents her body, not least because it is an object traditionally associated with love and romance. Trepka's fixation with the flower's contours acts as a displaced expression of his erotic desire. His horror at the rose's decay is thus associated with necrophilia, as evidenced by his assertion that 'if I had found a skeleton it could not have been worse!'[145] Yet his immediate and voluntary reconfiguration of his beliefs transforms a potentially terrifying image of self-annihilation (Trepka falling to dust) into one of delightful erotic fulfilment. The irony, here, is that this rejection of the material collapses the very fabric through which the love affair took shape.

Trepka confuses different aspects of Medea – the real woman, her image, and historical construction – in his description of her portraits, in which the accumulation of detail highlights their status as invented objects in another type of created text. Lee thus, in an echo of the failed portraits of Alice Oke, creates a Russian-doll style network of associations in which the real Medea is always just out of reach. Illustrating the ways in which subjectivity necessarily influences perceptions of the past, encoded references to

---

[143] Olverson (2010), p. 168.
[144] Lee (2006), p. 70.
[145] Lee (2006), p. 70.

Medea's apparent immorality creep into Trepka's account of her appearance. Contrasting animal images – the elegant, 'supple […] swan'; the 'leech' with the potential to 'bite or suck'[146] – connote a disturbingly carnal sensuality, mirroring her legend as a violent woman responsible for the deaths of several men. Further, as Christa Zorn and Patricia Pulham have acknowledged, these portrait scenes clearly allude to Pater's discussion of Da Vinci's *La Gioconda*,[147] and particularly to his reference to her as 'a vampire [who has] learned the secrets of the grave.'[148] While this connection to vampirism strengthens Medea's status as *femme fatale*,[149] the allusion to Pater might remind one of the aesthetic critic in 'Oke of Okehurst', implying that Trepka's description reveals more about his suspect prejudices regarding femininity than it does about the woman herself. Moreover, the nods to legend – the mythological Medea,[150] 'Arethusa'[151] – remind the reader that (s)he is perceiving a representation of another representation which draws on culturally-resonant myths.[152] As Valentine Cunningham argues, ekphrasis in literature can often function as a kind of 'lay[ing] claim to the absolute *thereness* of an aesthetic object' which paradoxically highlights the text's status as created fiction:[153] '[w]hat we are actually reading, and what the narrator is actually reading, is artifice.'[154] This sense of doubled representation, as in 'Oke of Okehurst', once again illustrates the loss of the woman beneath the enigmatic ideal of the feminine. Nonetheless, Medea's very mysteriousness and intangibility seem to fortify her inherent power. The *femme fatale*'s 'obscurity,' as Heather L. Braun argues, is 'essential to her survival': when she ceases to be 'nebulous, ethereal, and impenetrable,' her intrinsic allure inevitably fades.[155] Ironically, it is only through her transformation into a myth of femininity (transmuted via things) that Medea can exert her force.

---

[146] Lee (2006), p. 52.

[147] Christa Zorn, 'Aesthetic Intertextuality as Cultural Critique: Vernon Lee Rewrites History Through Walter Pater's *La Gioconda*', *The Victorian Newsletter*, 91 (Spring 1997), 4-11; Pulham (2008), p. 124.

[148] Pater (1961), p. 123.

[149] Heather L. Braun argues that '[i]n the 1890s, the femme fatale's physical charms and rhetorical skills found their fullest expression in the monstrous sensuality of the vampire tale.' Heather L. Braun, *The Rise and Fall of the Femme Fatale in British Literature, 1790-1910* (Plymouth: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), p. 95.

[150] For an astute discussion of the tale's links to this figure, see Olverson (2010), pp. 145-70.

[151] Lee (2006), p. 52.

[152] As Rebecca Stott acknowledges, the late nineteenth-century *femme fatale* is 'mythically rooted and derives power from her association with figures such as Cleopatra, Salome, Judith, Helen, mermaids and sirens.' Medea's connection to enigmatic female figures from Greek myth thus strengthens her power over Trepka. Rebecca Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996 [1992]) p. viii.

[153] Valentine Cunningham, 'Why Ekphrasis?', *Classical Philology*, 102. 1 (Jan 2007), 57-71 (61).

[154] Cunningham (2007), 67.

[155] Braun (2012), p. 1.

'Amour Dure' evokes the tension between Medea's genuine self and her construction as *femme fatale* when Trepka – denied access to the fleshly Medea – accepts her painted image as a form of truth. Substituting the representation for the real, Trepka ecstatically claims of her grand picture that 'it is Medea, the real Medea, a thousand times more real, individual, and powerful than in the other portraits.'[156] Predicated on an imaginative leap, this questionable judgment implicates the love-struck historian in a troubled history of patriarchal objectification of women. Medea's image, for Trepka, becomes her 'self,' synthesising Trepka within a community of aesthetically-minded men who privilege feminine beauty and mysteriousness over real women's needs and desires. Trepka's descriptions of Medea's various portraits combine meticulous details with creative conjectures, which highlight the necessity of such fantasies in the male viewer's construction of history. Trepka's language cycles through discreet near-reiterations of certain terms – 'tight, flesh, pearl(s), over-round/rounded, like a fleece/fleecelike, curled/curls/curved'[157] – generating an uncannily enigmatic motif which attempts to revive Medea even as it reminds us that this particular Medea is Trepka's invention. The lack of balance between soft ('rounded, curved'[158]) and hard ('rigid, stiff, stiffer, hard, alabaster'[159]) terms emphasises Trepka's intense confusion between the ethereal and the physical, anticipating Medea's gradual materialisation. What materialises, however, is arguably not the 'real' Medea, but a spectre correspondent to Trepka's perception of her, created from the various historical and visual representations he encounters. This historical *femme fatale* exerts her force through things, which both liberate her form and constrain her identity. Medea's spectral power over Trepka can thus be read as both a reiteration of the *femme fatale* myth which reifies its potency, and a feminist critique of its cultural persistence.

'Amour Dure' illustrates the benefits and shortcomings of material things as links to the distant past, revealing how an investment in these relics often relies on intuition and imagination rather than the stringently accurate detail we might associate with professional historical research. These processes of identification reveal the historian's indebtedness to primitive cultures, but things only become fetishes in 'Amour Dure' through their association with the *femme fatale*. The historian Trepka, in being bewitched by Medea's various love-tokens, demonstrates a masculine susceptibility to this persistent trope, enabled by a variety of feminised relics. At the same time, Medea's inclusion into a

---

[156] Lee (2006), pp. 61-62.
[157] Lee (2006), pp. 51-52, 61-62.
[158] Lee (2006), p. 62.
[159] Lee (2006), p. 62.

community of fatal women reveals the questionable processes by which women are enshrined in history.

Lee's apparent critique of female vilification is crucially complicated by the fact that Medea appears to roam free at the end of the text. Although she is fixed to a stereotype by her represented image, Trepka's fetishistic worship contributes to her apparent revival. Thus, the real woman's disappearance beneath the *femme fatale* myth is countered by the fact that the potency of this image facilitates her manifestation. Medea's various things prove integral to her developing authority. Her love-tokens increase in physical power as the story progresses, with the spiritual influence of the (feminised) decomposing rose eventually transforming into the material strength of the (phallic) knife which kills Trepka. Similarly, Trepka's enforced destruction of the Duke's silver effigy enables Medea's materialisation, further consolidating the awesome power of things. Just as the ghost's influence takes shape through things and fetishes, so too does the *femme fatale* myth enable her manifestation, even as the tale itself questions its underpinning assumptions. Trepka's fate might synthesise him into Lee's community of the dead whose leftover art objects (in this case, his diary) continue to exert mystical power over the living. But, of course, this fascination is necessarily channelled through Medea.

Material Destruction and the *Homme Fatale*: 'Winthrop's Adventure' (1881) and 'A Wicked Voice' (1887)

The two Lee ghost stories considered thus far use objects to evoke ghosts; the fact that these objects are transformed into fetishes in their connection with mysterious female figures reiterates and satirises the processes of objectification to which *fin de siècle* culture often subjected women. In Alice Oke, the sense of non-representability enshrouding the enigmatic feminine enables Lee to fulfil her own stringent criteria for portraying the supernatural, through vagueness, indeterminacy, and suggestion. These depictions of non-representability are pursued even further in two tales in which haunted objects are displaced by the intangible form of the song. That these narratives substitute the *femme fatale* with the androgynous figure of the castrato – himself a manifestation of the dangerous feminine – once again troubles the distinctions between femininity, ethereality, and materiality. Lee utilises the destruction or expulsion of particular material relics as a means of reifying their inherent potency in terms of subject-object relations. While things and fetishes themselves, like Trepka's rose, remain vulnerable to processes of decomposition and decay, the sensations attached to them linger long after their apparent demise.

Drawing on the incongruence between the physical (but potentially lifeless) form of the musical score and the non-material sound of music itself, Lee interrogates the discrepancy between the material and the ethereal in two narratives which feature the ghosts of long-dead castrati. 'Winthrop's Adventure' (1881) has often been side-lined by critics in favour of the story's arguably more sophisticated reincarnation as 'A Wicked Voice' (1887), a dark and enchanting narrative in which the composer-narrator is haunted by the voice of a long-dead singer. The earlier tale's treatment of objects anticipates the thing-laden environments of *Hauntings*, providing a blueprint for the later story in which a preoccupation with ethereality emphasises the perpetual importance of objects beyond their material forms. Somewhat paradoxically, the attempt to break away from the material world in 'A Wicked Voice' only strengthens the latent power of things. Objects may be crucial in instigating hauntings, but their demise does not necessarily result in the loss of the ghost. This move away from the material is paralleled by an increasingly fluid treatment of gender. In Lee's castrato tales, the concept of 'femininity' is revised and extended to encompass queer men, suggesting that its potency as a cultural construct is not exclusively limited to women.

The unnamed male narrator in 'Winthrop's Adventure' recounts how an eponymous protagonist is uncommonly affected by an old air sung by a Countess, and demands to see the score. Winthrop, an artist, explains that he uncannily reproduced the melody on paper the previous year, after an encounter with a painting in an Italian house owned by a musical score-collecting acquaintance. The portrait depicted the castrato Rinaldi, getting ready to sing. Haunted by 'something peculiar and unaccountable in the look of [his] face,'[160] and eager to learn more about the castrato and his music, Winthrop discovers that the singer was murdered after being dismissed from the court of Parma.[161] He feels drawn to visit the villa where Rinaldi was killed, and resolves to spend the night in the place. There, he hears the mysterious, silvery strains of Rinaldi's voice and catches a glimpse of the castrato himself, but is appalled when the sounds are superseded by a 'long, shrill, quivering cry' and 'the heavy dead thud of a falling body.'[162] The spell broken, Winthrop discovers a wrecked harpsichord in the room from which the sounds emerged, and, terrified, accidentally knocks himself unconscious in his endeavour to escape. He develops a bad fever and, returning to the framing-device of the story, tells his friends that

---

[160] Vernon Lee, 'A Culture-Ghost: or, Winthrop's Adventure' [published anonymously], *Fraser's Magazine*, 613 (Jan 1881), 1-29 (9). Although I am here discussing the 1881 version, Pulham argues that the narrative's earliest manifestation can be dated back earlier, only '[a] year or two' after the author and John Singer Sargent's initial 1872 encounter with Farinelli's portrait. Pulham (2002), 428.

[161] Lee (1881), 12.

[162] Lee (1881), 26.

he was unable to source the mysterious air he had heard, until eventually and unexpectedly hearing it from the Countess.

As Mahoney acknowledges, the story uses the owner of Rinaldi's painting, nicknamed Maestro Fa Diesis, to critique a negative form of object accumulation. This character's hoarding habits result in a treasured but seemingly useless collection of musical scores, preventing any transformations into Brownian 'things'. Fa Diesis conducts an elitist and selfish relationship with art objects in which he ironically neglects their artistic merit: these objects are not enchanting 'things' for the owner, but mere fragments in a series. Described by Winthrop as 'a highly learned and highly snuffy old gentleman,'[163] Fa Diesis amasses musical scores in a way which asserts their historical context yet denies their crucial original use-value. Despite his obsession with the material record of its production, he despises the sound of music, apparently caring 'not a jot' for it,[164] illustrated by the fact that Winthrop believes Fa Diesis would 'have died rather than spend a soldino on going to the opera.'[165] The collector's obsession borders on the ridiculous. As Mahoney argues, his 'grotesque and consuming sickness […] absorbs and emaciates the world surrounding it while nourishing the selfhood of the collector,'[166] and depends on the musical scores being completely separated 'from their contexts and their functions.'[167] Not only does this mode of collecting distance these scores from their original uses and position within history, but it also paralyses their potential to turn into Brownian 'things.' Fa Diesis cannot see beyond the materiality of his belongings, and thus the subject-object relationships which they invoke are inherently selfish ones of possession rather than interaction.

The story itself privileges a more sensitive approach to objects via its protagonist, Winthrop, whose fantasy of 'all th[e] slumbering music' awakening counters Fa Diesis' quantifying, deadening approach to objects.[168] Winthrop imagines his acquaintance's instruments mutating into people from the past, a fancy which transforms the objects into highly evocative 'things', and signals his vulnerability to their fetishistic appeal. Like the artist-narrator and Trepka, Winthrop indulges in fantasies in which objects are suffused with spiritual power, even transforming them into anthropological fetishes through which the dead can access the modern world. His recognition that the musical instruments suffer from their reduction to mere possessions in a collection, whose owner cares nothing for

---

[163] Lee (1881), 6.
[164] Lee (1881), 7.
[165] Lee (1881), 7.
[166] Mahoney (2006), 55.
[167] Mahoney (2006), 55.
[168] Lee (1881), 7.

their original use, affiliates him with Lee's more ethical aesthetic appreciation of objects as acknowledged by Mahoney.

Yet this seemingly ethical approach is not without its limitations, as revealed by Winthrop's fascination with Rinaldi's portrait. Contrasting the collector's *modus operandi*, Winthrop's viewing of this picture seems to constitute a form of subjective *reaching out* to history, combining desires to possess, understand, and recreate the past by imaginatively attempting to map his own personality onto the artwork. But, as with Trepka, the cultural trope of the *femme fatale* influences his perception, despite the fact he is looking at a (castrated) man. Winthrop oscillates between curiosity and revulsion, referring to Rinaldi's 'vague, wistful depth of look' and 'odd and not yet entirely agreeable' face,[169] utilising dichotomies or jarring terms in attempting to convey its mysteriousness ('dark'/'light'; 'clear'/'hazy'; 'beautiful'/'not beautiful'; 'transparent'/'bronzed').[170] He describes the face as possessing 'something sullen and effeminate,'[171] and ever changing in its associations: 'I caught myself using expressions about it which I should not have used in the morning […] my recollection of it seemed to differ from the original impression.'[172] As with the portrait of Medea, the figure it represents seems partially an imaginative construction; however, even more so than with the woman's portrait, this picture seems to develop a life beyond its first description, continually changing in Winthrop's mind. The protagonist's confession that 'I never saw the portrait again' just over halfway through the story does little to dispel its awesome power.[173]

Although 'Winthrop's Adventure' largely revolves around the portrait rather than the song, Lee recognises the latter as a means of conveying the immaterial, as signalled towards the story's denouement. The portrait, which Winthrop claims was 'haunting' him,[174] is displaced by sound, as Winthrop hears several ambiguous horror-stricken/orgasmic exclamations in his vigil inside the house. The protagonist describes these sounds as 'a weird, mysterious sigh, a rapid luminous shake, […] scuffling and suppressed voices […] another long, vibrating, terrible cry' in which the voices of the murdering singer and the murdered hearer become confused.[175] This blending of victim and killer parallels the many other types of conflations that take place throughout – between male/female; subject/object; dark/light; and image/music. At the same time, it

---

[169] Lee (1881), 9.
[170] Lee (1881), 9.
[171] Lee (1881), 9.
[172] Lee (1881), 9.
[173] Lee (1881), 17.
[174] Lee (1881), 9.
[175] Lee (1881), 26.

highlights the endurance of seemingly transient experiences. As Winthrop's preoccupation with the music and Rinaldi's picture implies, the subject-object relationships evoked by 'things' exert a lasting power that persists beyond the brief moments of direct encounter. The earlier tale of the castrato thus subtly anticipates the shift away from the material (the portrait) to the ethereal (the song) which provides the central focus of the later story, invoking the survival of 'thingness' even beyond its material form.

'A Wicked Voice' interrogates this survival of 'thingness' in accordance with Lee's discussion of the supernatural as most effective when vague, charting the influence of 'femininity' in a narrative that seems to involve only male characters. By presenting a gender-ambiguous figure as the seductive spectre, the story suggests that the sense of mystery adhering to feminine things is not exclusively limited to a particular kind of anatomically gendered body. Its presentation of a revitalised castrato narrative dissolves the boundaries between masculine/feminine and ethereal/material, again evoking and complicating the cultural assessment of femininity as both bodily and spiritual. Particularly intriguing about the story is the fact that, although its central portrait is ostensibly less evocative than the song, the haunting it describes gains strength through the *destruction* of a material relic. As with Trepka's annihilation of the Duke's effigy, the ruin of a thing merely consolidates its intrinsic magical power.[176] Magnus may tear up the castrato's picture, but the face and the voice remain with him. In this way, 'A Wicked Voice' might be understood in terms of Benjamin's re-auratization of the art object, rehabilitating its ideology to suggest that the aura itself can last beyond the artwork's physical lifespan. That this magical post-death power even accrues to ephemera revises Benjamin's theory about mass production into a far more all-encompassing celebration of the importance of 'things'.

'A Wicked Voice' – in a vague echo of the repeated attempts at representation which litter 'Oke of Okehurst' – recasts the materials which comprise 'Winthrop's Adventure' in a radically different way. Pulham rightly suggests that the first story 'lack[s] the sophistication that marks Lee's later tales' and that 'the castrato figure appears in its most complex and intriguing manifestation' in the subsequent incarnation.[177] While Winthrop's narrative hovers around Rinaldi's mysterious portrait and the music occupies a secondary role, the protagonist in 'A Wicked Voice' is primarily bewitched by music, with

---

[176] Trepka's destruction of the Duke's effigy seemingly facilitates Medea's manifestation and leaves the Duke vulnerable to her uncanny power. The fact that this mission is successful suggests that the effigy was indeed a magical totem which originally protected the Duke.

[177] Pulham (2002), 430.

the picture of the castrato working to bolster this primary haunting. The artist Winthrop is replaced by the Norwegian composer Magnus, whose love for Wagnerian excess is severely challenged when he becomes unwillingly entranced by the music of an eighteenth-century castrato. In the story's opening, Magnus grudgingly recollects the praise he has garnered for eschewing 'the new-fangled nonsense of Wagner' in favour of 'the traditions of Handel and Gluck and the divine Mozart.'[178] He then embarks on a vitriolic denigration of the voice as instrument. He recounts his experiences in Venice, which he visited for inspiration while attempting to write an opera in the Wagnerian style. Seeing a portrait of the castrato Zaffirino, and hearing the tale of how he once killed a woman by singing to her, Magnus derides both the importance of the singer and the eighteenth century generally, and rips up Zaffirino's picture in a fit of anger, tearing it 'into half a dozen shreds.'[179] After this, he begins to be haunted by an elusive singing voice, enacting the twirls and flourishes of the eighteenth-century music which Magnus finds so 'flat and vulgar and vapid.'[180] He realises that this voice paralyses his creative flow, and so departs to his friend's villa at Mistra in the hope that the country air will cure him of his strange malady. But the voice follows Magnus even there, and he hears it emerging from the villa one night. Curious, he follows the sound and enters a kind of gallery, from which he sees the figure of Zaffirino serenading a prostrate woman in a moonlit hall. There, Magnus eventually recognises 'what seemed to be hidden from [him] till then, that this voice was what [he] cared most for in all the wide world.'[181] As he continues to listen, he realises that the song will have a fatal outcome, and that if he continues to listen the woman will die. Bursting into the room and finding only an empty hall suffused with moonlight, Magnus takes fright and wanders outside until dawn. This nocturnal venture instigates a fever from which he is lucky to recover, but at the cost of his genius. He continues to hear the despised music of the eighteenth century interminably, and is unable to shake off a perpetual longing to once again hear the mysterious voice, a desire which 'parch[es his] soul like hell-thirst.'[182]

The switch in the source of the haunting across the two stories – from the material (the portrait) to the intangible (the song) – is paralleled in the shift from linear chronology to a more muddled, fractured mode of narration. Descriptions of music, as with most immaterial things, are necessarily predicated on suggestion, rendering the form of the

---

[178] Vernon Lee, 'A Wicked Voice' (1887), in Lee (2006), pp. 154-81 (p. 154).
[179] Lee (2006), p. 168.
[180] Lee (2006), p. 161.
[181] Lee (2006), p. 179.
[182] Lee (2006), p. 181.

haunting an appropriate one through which to present Lee's ideal supernatural. Discussing 'A Wicked Voice', Hilary Grimes argues that the elusiveness of music mirrors the troubled status of art itself, which is 'both realistic and abstract, material and able to escape materialism, a matter of form but also a form which in its description is like nothing we have experienced before.'[183] All of Lee's tales capitalise on the vexed relationship between materialism and ethereality, but it is perhaps the shadowy, half-lit 'A Wicked Voice' which explores this troubled boundary most fully.[184] The sense of vagueness shrouding Zaffirino's voice seeps into the narrative itself. As Angela Leighton claims, 'the crazy paving of language' in the story, with its dreamlike repeated cadences and inexplicable patterns, speaks to the way in which the tale 'collapses the frames' of its references as 'the text plays out the ghosts in what should be safe and sane meanings.'[185] For Leighton, words such as 'airs' and 'vapours' – in 'circl[ing] maddeningly through several meanings'[186] – work to cast malaria as a pervasive undertone to the text, the disease's yellow hue also mimicking the perceived colour of aestheticism. This sense of muddled repetitions, coded details, and fragmentation finds a parallel in Magnus's involuntary move away from the grand, sweeping music which he plans to produce – 'savage, […] heroic, funereal'[187] – to the 'voluptuous phrases', 'florid cadences,'[188] and 'frivolous or languishing little phrases' of the eighteenth-century music which he so despises.[189] While this shift might be read this as a move away from masculine 'grandness' to feminine 'detail,'[190] the gender slippages which recur throughout complicate straightforward dichotomies. Intriguingly for a narrative in which women are largely absent, femininity is frequently invoked: the tale's blending of ethereality and materiality speaks to what Alain Renaut terms femininity's elusion of 'the opposition between being and nothingness.'[191] Both Magnus and Zaffirino are aligned with femininity at points, allowing Lee to stage sensitive explorations of its potential power and limitations.

---

[183] Grimes (2011), p. 133.

[184] I borrow this idea of half-light from Lee's essay 'Faustus and Helena,' in which she states that 'the more logical we become in our ideas, […] the greater the longing for a momentary half-light in which forms may appear stranger, grander, vaguer than they are.' Lee (2006), p. 312.

[185] Angela Leighton, 'Ghosts, Aestheticism, and Vernon Lee', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28. 1 (2000), 1-14 (8-9).

[186] Leighton (2000), 9.

[187] Lee (2006), p. 166.

[188] Lee (2006), p. 168.

[189] Lee (2006), p. 171.

[190] For a discussion of how these gendered concepts recur throughout history, see Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 2007 [1987]).

[191] Alain Renaut, *The Era of the Individual: A Contribution to a History of Subjectivity*, trans. by M. B. DeBevoise and Franklin Philip (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997 [1989]), p. 157.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Magnus's gradual enchantment under Zaffirino's implicitly feminine music is accompanied by the composer's transformation into a subservient, feminised figure: an 'unstrung' and 'love-sick hobbledehoy.'[192] As Pulham acknowledges, Magnus is 'metaphorically emasculated and castrated,' insofar as he is '[p]enetrated by Zaffirino's voice' and suffers the loss of his own artistic authority.[193] But while Magnus's feminisation takes the form of passivity and subjugation, the story also promotes a more authoritative form of feminised masculine identity through Zaffirino himself. Winthrop's earlier account of Rinaldi is revised into an even more sexually-loaded one, in which Magnus describes Zaffirino as resembling the 'wicked, vindictive women' which featured in his 'boyish daydreams' engendered by reading the works of 'Swinburne and Baudelaire.'[194] Once again, the trope of the *femme fatale* functions as a substitute for any real engagement with the feminised subject, and the reference to aesthetic authors align this misguided interpretation with the dubious aesthetic critic's objectification of the feminine. That Zaffirino's voice is sexually indeterminate – 'a man's voice that had much of a woman's, but more even than a chorister's […] without its limpidity and innocence'[195] – further blurs the boundary between masculinity and femininity. This destabilisation of gender is paralleled in the tale's invocation of the troubled co-existence of the physical and the ethereal, particularly in the ruin (or imagined ruin) of two material items, which seem to retain power even after their apparent obliteration.

Buried within the rich tapestry which constitutes 'A Wicked Voice' are two specific acts of artistic destruction: that is, Magnus's ripping-up of Zaffirino's picture, and his envisioned (but apparently never completed) incineration of his own manuscript. These two scenes allow 'A Wicked Voice', with its ostensible rejection of material things, to be synthesised within this chapter's thesis about feminised fetishes. As we have seen, many of Lee's other protagonists are enthralled by portraits of historical figures. Magnus, unlike the spectators in 'Oke of Okehurst' and 'Amour Dure,' is troubled by these feelings when he encounters Zaffirino's picture, to the extent that he obliterates the artwork:

> my eyes chanced to light upon the portrait of Zaffirino, which my friend had pinned
> against the wall. I pulled it down and tore it into half a dozen shreds. Then, already
> ashamed of my folly, I watched the torn pieces float down from the window,
> wafted hither and thither by the sea breeze. One scrap got caught in a yellow blind

---

[192] Lee (2006), p. 158.
[193] Pulham also suggests that the fluidity of his orgasmic sensations link him to female dissolution. Pulham (2002), 431.
[194] Lee (2006), p. 162.
[195] Lee (2006), p. 170.

below me; the others fell into the canal, and were speedily lost to sight in the dark water. I was overcome with shame.[196]

Magnus, here, is 'ashamed' at the portrait's enchantment over him, and expects that his act of destruction will break the spell. Instead, the annihilation of the picture merely reifies its attached supernatural power. The scene encodes an anxiety that things – like Medea's portraits – possess a disturbing and not always welcome agency over the human mind. Unlike his predecessors, Magnus feels shame over what he recognises as a disturbing and even immoral investment in the picture. He might not literally view the image as a means to communicate with the dead, but his act of destruction crucially initiates Zaffirino's anger, thus positing his picture as a type of magical portent wielding influence. As with Duke Robert's protective silver effigy in 'Amour Dure', the annihilation of a physical object merely strengthens its power as a 'fetish' in provoking the emergence of the spectre. The composer's claim that this act enabled him to 'settle down […] and even […] work at' his opera signals Magnus's belief that the past must be quashed in order to give rise to the present.[197] But in reality his action has the very opposite effect: Zaffirino's (hi)story continues to haunt the ultra-modern Magnus, and he remains unable to write scores in anything other than the eighteenth-century style. Thus, the drowned scraps of paper retain their potency even as their material presence dissolves. The magical power of the fetish, like the ethereal quality of music, continues to exert influence even after the form's apparent annihilation.

This act of artistic destruction is paralleled in Magnus's claim, near the story's opening, that he will write 'the tale of [his] miseries […] only to tear up, to throw the manuscript unread into the fire.'[198] Crucially, he links this act to a kind of immolation or sacrifice: 'And yet, who knows? As the last charred pages shall crackle and slowly sink into the red embers, perhaps the spell may be broken, and I may possess once more my long-lost liberty, my vanished genius.'[199] The tale heavily implies that the curse will *not* be broken as Magnus hopes; moreover, the very existence of 'A Wicked Voice' itself suggests that Magnus was unable or unwilling to destroy the manuscript as planned.[200] This imagined or real destruction of a material relic merely consolidates its latent authority over

---

[196] Lee (2006), pp. 168-69.
[197] Lee (2006), p. 169.
[198] Lee (2006), p. 156.
[199] Lee (2006), p. 156.
[200] Either that, or we are reading the ghost of his manuscript, which would add a tantalising extra dimension to Lee's perception of the supernatural as antithetical to representation. Unlike in 'Amour Dure', which features a postscript from an unknown contributor which informs the reader of Trepka's death, there is no supplementary material: only Magnus's voice can be heard throughout.

the human subject. Walter Benjamin, in discussing mass production, suggests that the 'contemporary decay of the aura' of an artwork – the aura being the work's intrinsic spirit generated by its place in history – partially stems from 'the desire of the contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly.'[201] Modern people, according to Benjamin, seek to 'pry an object from its shell' through laying hold of its reproduction.[202] In removing an artwork from its crucial historical position, modern subjects thus contribute to the de-auratization of art objects. It seems, however, that 'A Wicked Voice' poses a challenge to this idea, in its suggestion that all types of things, not just art objects, but seemingly worthless fragments, possess a sense of power that endures even beyond their material annihilation. Just as Zaffirino's voice and image enthral Magnus even after the ruin of his portrait, the subject-object relations engendered by the thing – and the supernatural presence associated with the fetish – continue to survive its physical lifespan.

'A Wicked Voice' uses the figure of the castrato to complicate cultural constructions of femininity, while consolidating the endurance of things. While objects can be destroyed, things (or rather, the subject-object relations which characterise their 'thingness') persist. Moreover, Magnus's involuntary belief in objects as fetishes (connected to Zaffirino) once again inverts ideas about 'feminine' susceptibility. That femininity is presented as simultaneously powerful, mysterious and threatening (through Zaffirino) and submissive and fragile (through Magnus) speaks to the competing motifs surrounding gender stereotypes at the *fin de siècle*. At the same time, Lee's choice of casting a castrato in the role of the *femme fatale* collapses the ideal of the enigmatic feminine even as it disseminates its potency.

Lee's 'The Economic Dependence of Women' closes with a vivid image of gender indeterminacy which invokes the importance of artworks ('things') in establishing gendered identity. Lee suggests that men and women, rather than being defined by oppositional traits, often resemble each other when we extend focus to examine different cultures: 'at Tangier, […] the ultra-feminine woman belonged, quite naturally, to the effeminate man. In a similar way, the "masculine" Englishwoman, fox-hunting, Alpine-climbing, boating, is the natural companion of the out-of-door, athletic, sporting, colonizing Englishman.'[203] The article closes with reference to the 'statues of gods and goddesses' left by our ancestors, 'whose marvellous vigor and loveliness we are often in

---

[201] Benjamin (1968), p. 223.
[202] Benjamin (1968), p. 223.
[203] Lee (1902), 89-90.

doubt whether to give the name of Apollo, or that of Athena.'[204] This sense of gender

ambivalence as a formidable combination of masculine power ('vigor') and feminine

beauty ('loveliness') is paralleled in Zaffirino, with his 'mocking, fatuous smile'[205] and

implicit alliance with lilies, peaches, scent, and aestheticism. The castrato, like the statue(s)

of Apollo or Athena, resists straightforward classification. Perhaps the cultural

construction of femininity is similarly difficult to quantify. Simultaneously enchanting and

enslaving, limiting and empowering for both women and men, the trope of femininity, in

Lee's ghost stories, is continually linked to supernaturally-attenuated things. In intimating

that it is largely the male characters who become fetishists in their preoccupation with

items associated with *femmes fatales*, Lee's tales thus query and recast ideas about

'feminine' susceptibility.

Conclusion

In Vernon Lee's 'The Image' (1896),[206] a female collector loses her taste for

procuring *bric-a-brac* after an encounter with a doll, modelled on a widowed count's

deceased wife. The woman collector, who narrates the tale, describes how she stumbles

upon the image of the beautiful young countess when visiting an old palace, with her male

friend and 'curiosity-dealer' Orestes.[207] This doll had been constructed at the bereaved

husband's special request: originally worshipped by him, she/it was eventually abandoned

when the count remarried a laundress who bore him a daughter. Despite this child's

'lingering regard' for the doll,[208] it is gradually forgotten, only to be brought out

occasionally to be dusted or manhandled by the palace staff. The female collector/narrator

experiences a strange affinity with the figure, feeling she 'knew everything about her.'[209]

This sympathy leads her to purchase it, so that she and Orestes can burn it on a majestic

funeral pyre. Afterwards, Orestes remarks to the woman that: 'you have put an end to her

[the doll's] sorrows.'[210]

Mahoney rightly reads this story as one of a 'collector's reformation' which

facilitates 'the liberation of an object from degradation and disregard.'[211] But there is also a

---

[204] Lee (1902), 90.
[205] Lee (2006), p. 163.
[206] Vernon Lee, 'The Image', *Cornhill Magazine*, 26. 155 (May 1896), 516-23. This story was republished in 1927 as 'The Doll'. Salmonson includes this (only very slightly amended) later version of the story in her anthology of women's supernatural fiction.
[207] Lee (1896), 516.
[208] Lee (1896), 522.
[209] Lee (1896), 520.
[210] Lee (1896), 523.
[211] Mahoney (2006), 39.

specifically *gendered* aspect to this release. Salmonson's argument that the tale encodes a 'condemnation of the artificiality of the trappings of beauty' and 'the liberation of a woman's spirit from the hollowness of such trappings' reflects this gendered quality,[212] and it is only in viewing 'The Image' alongside Lee's other supernatural stories that its nuances can be fully appreciated. As Pulham notes, to read the doll solely as an epitome of 'the still, silent, and subordinate position that characterized the expected position of women living in a patriarchal society' risks glossing over the complexities inherent in 'the narrator's affinity' with the figure.[213] While Pulham discusses this affinity as a nuanced portrayal of same-sex desire, it also stages an implicit corrective to Lee's former portrayal of 'the universal existence and eternal duration of *La Femme*.'[214]

'The Image' is not only a critique of the cultural construction of superficial femininity: it is also a rehabilitation of the types of object appreciation that recur throughout *Hauntings*, in which the trope of the mysterious woman or *femme fatale* is finally (or rather, almost) laid to rest. The female narrator resembles Trepka in that she makes 'no distinction between the portrait and the original,'[215] but this identification engenders sympathy, rather than idealisation, and enables an emotional connection outwith the contentious processes of sexual objectification. While the female/feminised spectres in the previous stories operate as catalysts for male desire, the female protagonist's sensitivity to the doll/woman's own feelings intimates a revision of object appreciation which pays tribute to an item's attendant ghost. The tale's destruction of a material relic (in an echo of Trepka's rose and Zaffirino's portrait) seems to consolidate its power to haunt, as evidenced by the female narrator's explanation that she has lost her passion for collecting. This haunting, however, is more subdued and melancholy than the feverish, excited enchantments which precede it. Freeing the 'real' woman from imprisonment in her 'image' might seem to exorcise the trope of 'Woman' from the cultural trappings surrounding femininity, but disentangling these concepts remains an intensely difficult process. Just as Lee's spectres, enshrined in prose, depend on material forms in exercising

---

[212] Jessica Amanda Salmonson, introduction to 'The Doll', in Salmonson (1989), pp. 192-93 (p. 193). I disagree, however, with Salmonson's contentious and presumptuous argument that 'it is probably not misstepping by far to interpret "The Doll" as an exorcism of the author's feelings for women and to read the final scene as a purge of difficult love affairs in Lee's own life.' (p. 192) The story does invoke same-sex desire between the narrator and doll, as Pulham notes, but it remains problematic to attribute these feelings directly to Lee.

[213] Pulham (2008), p. 107.

[214] Lee (1902), 84. Lee, referencing Dumas, reads 'La Femme' as the 'oversexed' woman, determined solely by her gender and often conceived as threatening to men. While Lee states, in 'The Economic Dependence of Women', that she does not believe in the endurance of this figure, the persistence of the *femme fatale* motif in her ghost stories suggests otherwise.

[215] Lee (1896), 520.

their influence, concepts of femininity and its attendant mysteries continue to shape perceptions of women.

Things, in Lee's ghost stories, continue to enthral long after the demise of their feminine or feminised owners, or (in the case of paintings) those whom they represent. This endurance might function as a tribute to the mysterious power of the *femme fatale*, but one in which this concept is itself dismantled, challenged, and revealed as an alternately damaging and empowering cultural construction. Lee's own impressive knowledge of anthropology, aestheticism, and object culture – and her apparent resistance to gender essentialism – encourages this reading of her tales as narratives which both promote and critique the ideal of the enigmatic woman. This ideal, though potentially constraining, provided a means through which real women could exert power in a male-dominated *fin de siècle* world. Lee's use of feminised fetishes thus functions as an implicit corrective to the myth of 'feminine' susceptibility.

While Lee's preface to *Hauntings* appears to detach the ethereal from the material, the stories which follow instead reveal the entangled interdependency between the two, evoking the paradoxical cultural perception of women as both spirit and body, a constellation of characteristics clustered around the motif of the *femme fatale*. The fact that these tales revolve around feminised fetishes and their attendant ghosts reveals the processes of mythmaking that have surrounded femininity throughout history. These processes often unveil the patriarchal bias of male subjects, as with Trepka's perception of the painting as the 'real' Medea, and the artist-narrator's attempts to solve the mystery that is Alice; they also reflect modern culture's alliance with the primitive, intuitive forms of knowledge from which it was attempting to distance itself. Lee's fiction continually invites and resists gendered readings, through the complicated blurred boundaries between masculinity and femininity it produces. These slippages are articulated through intensely powerful (and sometimes cross-dressing) women, emasculated lovesick men, and castrati who replicate bewitching *femmes fatales*. Such gendered complexities find a parallel in Lee's use of material things as a means of invoking ghosts. Physical fragments may indeed be all that remain of the distant dead, but the subject-object relations attached to them, for both past and present subjects, ensure their magical survival even beyond their material lifespan. Although the author worried that her ghosts might be chased away by printer's ink, this very form of materialisation enables modern readers to access Lee's spectres.

Lee's evocative ghost stories pay tribute to the fetishistic and mystical qualities of objects in inducing the mysteries surrounding femininity, but other late Victorian women

writers employed materialism in a very different way. Rather than subtly distancing themselves from the literary marketplace in which they were immersed, the horror stories by Edith Nesbit considered in the following chapter appear to be geared towards a reading public seeking chills and thrills. Yet I aim to demonstrate that these seemingly disparate writers, Lee and Nesbit, share a concern with women's subservient status in the late nineteenth century. I examine how Nesbit's critique of female subjugation, rather than being mediated through aestheticized relics or *femmes fatales*, is articulated primarily through the female corpse.[216] While Lee's portrayals of Alice Oke and Medea satirise and revise the ways in which women are fetishized and objectified throughout history, Nesbit's supernatural fiction employs images of dead women to stage an explicit attack on the gender inequalities which vexed *fin de siècle* marriage.

---

[216] Although it has not been a focus in this chapter, Lee's fiction also features various images of prostrate women. For an insightful discussion of this motif in Lee's work (and particularly her use of dolls), see Pulham (2008), pp. 66-154.

Chapter Four. The Fatal Effects of *Fin de Siècle* Patriarchy:

The Female Corpse in Edith Nesbit's Horror Stories

As Lee's exotic spectral tales departed from the more familiar British hauntings which featured in earlier examples of the ghost story form, such domestic hauntings were themselves undergoing drastic changes as the twentieth century approached. Michael Cox and Robert Gilbert suggest that 'the 1890s brought a change of style' in the ghost story, with the demand for shorter texts leading spectres to become 'more urgently and inventively malevolent.'[1] Relatedly, the genre also became more focussed on physicality and the body, in line with the emergence of the *fin de siècle* Gothic.[2] This new breed of Gothic, as Kelly Hurley convincingly argues, often focused on what she terms the 'abhuman' body: 'admixed, fluctuating, abominable.'[3] It also revamped many of the motifs common to its literary predecessor: anxieties about the demise of the family line were displaced by Darwinian-influenced fears of degeneration; trapped heroines were joined by troubled men; and, as Linda Dryden points out, the narratives, rather than taking place in ancient crumbling castles, were often 'transplanted [...] into the heart of the late nineteenth-century metropolis.'[4] This revitalised genre's influence on the ghost story can be traced throughout the 1890s and beyond. Flimsy and often benign spectres were superseded by more terrifyingly material and malevolent creatures,[5] while scenes of death and murder – formerly veiled at the heart of the ghost story – found explicit manifestation in a developing literary preoccupation with the corpse.

One of the key writers in this horror-focused stage of the spectral tale's evolution was Edith Nesbit. Much of Nesbit's early 1890s short fiction – published in a selection of Victorian periodicals, and repackaged in the 1893 collection, *Grim Tales* – undermines the

---

[1] Cox and Gilbert (2008), p. xiv.

[2] Perceval Landon's 'Thurnley Abbey' (1908) provides a wonderful example of this new preoccupation with physicality, insofar as its unfortunate protagonist actually attacks and destroys a ghost's material form, mistakenly believing it to be a hoax. He punches, tears, and stamps on the manifestation, ripping cloth and splintering bone. Afterwards, the ghost gathers its constituent parts back together.

[3] Kelly Hurley, 'British Gothic Fiction, 1885-1930', in Hogle (2002), pp. 189-208 (p. 190).

[4] Dryden (2003), p. 20. Some argue that the genre never actually went away in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, but instead surfaced covertly in ghost stories, realist novels, and sensation fiction. For in-depth discussions of the Gothic and its varied Victorian manifestations, see Smith and Hughes (2012).

[5] While earlier fictional ghosts had performed malicious actions, these were usually directed towards people who had wronged them in life, such as murderers or unfaithful lovers. Examples which feature this type include Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 'The Cold Embrace' (1860) and Henry James's 'The Romance of Certain Old Clothes' (1868). By contrast, later ghost stories often featured terrifying spectres whose malevolence towards the living was seemingly unmotivated, or justified on far flimsier grounds. See, for example, Bram Stoker's 'The Judge's House' (1891), Edith Nesbit's 'Man-Size in Marble' (1893, discussed in this chapter), and M. R. James's 'Count Magnus' (1904). Of course, there were many exceptions to this rule.

redemptive power of love and grief (present in earlier, more sentimental ghostly narratives) in the face of the unsettling physical products of death. Central to many of these texts is the figure of the corpse, which, in Nesbit's pre-1900 fiction, often belongs to a female character killed by the ignorance or callousness of her male spouse. Critics have linked *fin de siècle* Gothic fiction's apparent obsession with the female body to cultural anxieties about the period's shifting gender politics.[6] While some argue that the trope articulates attempts to control or destroy the type of progressive-thinking females that the Victorian press was uneasily labelling 'New Women,'[7] Nesbit instead used the corpse to demonstrate the sexual inequalities that troubled marital relationships at the *fin de siècle*. Her horror tales imply that the culturally-prescribed 'feminine' role was already rendering women deathly, with submission to marriage in particular often precluding a woman's untimely demise. Edgar Allan Poe, in 1846, had claimed that 'the death […] of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world – and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such a topic are those of a bereaved lover.'[8] Almost fifty years later, Nesbit was to explore the unsettling gender politics underpinning this image through the popular literary form of the ghost story.

This chapter thus examines how Nesbit's ghost stories promote a coded, but limited, feminist politics, in charting the potentially disastrous effects of patriarchy (and especially the institution of marriage) on female identity through the corpse.[9] Nick Freeman argues that, 'although there was considerable misogyny in late Victorian Gothic, the genre could be used to interrogate, rather than merely reinforce, such attitudes,' claiming that Nesbit herself 'questioned patriarchy as keenly as many of her now more celebrated contemporaries.'[10] Expanding on Freeman's thesis – which traces this concept

---

[6] Much of this discussion has converged upon the representation of women in Bram Stoker's seminal Gothic novel, *Dracula* (1897), and whether it functions as a panicked misogynistic response to the breakdown of traditional gender roles, or a progressive examination of female power. See, for example, Carol A. Senf, '*Dracula*: Stoker's Response to the New Woman', *Victorian Studies*, 26. 1 (Autumn 1982), 33-49; Mulvey-Roberts (1998), pp. 78-95; and Alexandra Warwick, 'Vampires and the empire: fears and fictions of the 1890s', in *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1995]), pp. 202-20.

[7] Recent criticism on the New Woman has argued that it was a phenomenon largely created by the late Victorian press, and that the term was applied to women from all across the political spectrum. See, for example, *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, ed. by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

[8] Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition' (1846); quoted in *The Poe Encyclopedia*, ed. by Frederick S. Frank and Anthony Magistrale (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), p. xxi. Christine Quigley suggests instead that '[f]or most poets, […] the sight of the corpse of a lover is an abomination.' Christine Quigley, *The Corpse: A History* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1996), p. 33.

[9] Nesbit's feminism is 'limited' insofar as her horror fiction portrays women as victims which, as discussed in the introduction, is not always a productive way of positioning women within history. Nonetheless, Nesbit uses these victimised women to stage stinging condemnations of patriarchal marriage.

[10] Nick Freeman, 'E. Nesbit's New Woman Gothic', *Women's Writing*, 15. 3 (2008), 454-69 (455).

in one of Nesbit's most popular short stories, 'Man-Size in Marble' (1893) – throughout a broader range of Nesbit's texts, this chapter emphasises the author's use of dead female bodies specifically as a vehicle for feminist critique. By aligning the alluring beautiful woman with the repellent abject corpse, these stories reveal the horrifying transformations engendered by Victorian marriage. Moreover, that these condemnations of gender inequality were embedded within popular fiction narratives enabled Nesbit to both contribute to and subtly satirise trends in the *fin de siècle* literary scene, in which a changing readership clamoured for stimulating entertainment. As well as providing a venue for overt debates on woman's rights, the periodical press often functioned as a fertile site for less conspicuous investigations of culture via popular or 'light' literature. Nesbit was largely reluctant to engage with female emancipation during her lifetime, but she nonetheless staged a vitriolic critique of marriage through her late nineteenth-century supernatural fiction. Although the recurring motif of the beautiful dead wife exploited the Victorian public's desire for literary thrills, it also encoded a stringent comment on the strangulating effects of patriarchy: the idealised Victorian woman is darkly doubled in the female corpse.

Nesbit's focus feeds directly into my larger contention throughout this study, that women writers utilised objects, bodies and perception to critique the contradictory roles which society expected them to fulfil. Situating Nesbit in relation to the rise of the New Woman – and particularly this figure's challenge to the regulation of women's bodies – informs feminist readings of her supernatural fiction. According to Elisabeth Bronfen, Western culture distances and somewhat alleviates its anxieties about death by mapping it onto the (othered) female body in art and literature, a process which additionally works to subjugate women.[11] Nesbit's wry narrative voice revises this process into a feminist comment, rather than a misogynistic attack. Moreover, the constellation of debates surrounding dead bodies and gender respectively at the *fin de siècle* made the female corpse a particularly suitable vehicle for Nesbit's reflections.[12] Christine Quigley argues that '[w]hen we die, we relinquish our individuality. Void of personality, the corpse joins

---

[11] Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

[12] As Thomas Laqueur notes, the introduction of Britain's first crematorium in 1885 was an important historical moment in which attitudes to the dead apparently shifted: 'British cremationists were making an enormous cultural claim by insisting that dead bodies were just a species of dirt and should be treated and talked about as such.' These attempt to reduce the corpse to waste paradoxically strengthened its cultural capital: as Laqueur argues, '[i]t is precisely in claiming that dead bodies are *only* dead bodies that the cultural – the massive historical power – of the dead is reasserted and appropriated in support of a worldview that would seem to deny such a claim. Thomas Laqueur, 'Form in Ashes', *Representations*, 104. 1 (Fall 2008), 50-72 (59).

the masses.'[13] In aligning the dead body with the idealised Victorian woman, Nesbit reveals the extent to which cultural perceptions of 'woman' – and especially wives – succeed in stifling and ultimately devastating female identity. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar acknowledge, the stereotypical Victorian female was already rendered deathly through her designation as domestic 'angel': women were presumed to exemplify 'slim, pale, passive beings whose "charms" eerily recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead.'[14] Nesbit frames the connections between women and corpses through a focus on marriage, thus illuminating the horror and violence underpinning marital union even in the late nineteenth century. These tales can be synthesised within various supernatural genres – the ghost story, the late Victorian Gothic, and as important precursors to twentieth-century horror – but their focus on destroyed female bodies also signals their relevance to the New Woman literature that sought to query women's role in *fin de siècle* Britain.

An examination of the New Woman and the prostrate female body segues into an analysis of Nesbit's position within the increasingly commercialised *fin de siècle* literary scene. Some Victorian commentators complained that the rise of popular fiction was detrimental to the nation's intellectual and moral wellbeing, in offering undemanding reading experiences which appealed to sensory pleasure;[15] however, these developing literary forms could also crucially operate as sharp critiques of the dominant culture. By exploring both the publication venues of her original stories, and the press response to their repackaging as *Grim Tales*, we can situate Nesbit's work in relation to the important recent move to recognise popular fiction's transgressive potential, in proffering 'not so much an authentic account of people's everyday lives, but an example of the interaction between that experience and the dominant (or hegemonic) social and cultural structures and ideologies.'[16] Nesbit's grim stories thus employ the device of light literature to promote serious evaluations of nineteenth-century sexual inequality.

My discussion of two of Nesbit's most frequently anthologised tales[17] – 'John Charrington's Wedding' (1891) and 'Man-Size in Marble' (1893) – interrogates the

---

[13] Quigley (1996), p. 9.

[14] Gilbert and Gubar (1984), p. 25.

[15] See, for example, the anonymous commentator who claimed that 'an epoch of decadence has set in – at least in our literature – and it will be well if this does not foreshadow a similar falling off in our national prosperity and prestige.' Anonymous, 'The Decline of Literature', *Bow Bells*, 25. 325 (Mar 23rd 1894), 298.

[16] David Glover and Scott McCracken, 'Introduction', in Glover and McCracken (2012), pp. 1-14 (p. 8).

[17] *The Supernatural Index* suggests that both stories have been anthologised, respectively, in more than twenty collections of ghost stories and supernatural fiction since the 1930s, far more than any other of Nesbit's tales. *The Supernatural Index: A Listing of Fantasy, Supernatural, Occult, Weird, and Horror Anthologies*, ed. by Mike Ashley and William G. Contento (Westport: Greenwood, 1995), p. 425.

damage caused by Victorian marriages in which the patriarch wields power, as two newlywed brides are equally reduced to corpses. Both stories implicitly reiterate some of the gender assumptions of the Victorian period (women as spiritual, intuitive, and submissive), but they also hint at a subtext which implies that the constraints placed on women are already in the process of transforming them into the dead. Reading them concurrently illustrates the extent to which wives of highly disparate temperaments – from the traditionally compliant girl to the active working writer – risk the effacement of personal identity through their husbands' influence. Further, the later story implies that this subjugation of women is potentially damaging to masculinity itself. Both tales feature a reanimated male subject emerging to claim and/or destroy the female. Her passive corpse then closes the narrative in a disturbing revision of the happy marital ending of mid-Victorian fiction.

The female corpse takes on a more active role in 'Hurst of Hurstcote' (1893) and 'From the Dead' (1893), but still these figures crucially lack the power of their equivalent men. While male corpses return to control and devastate living women, Nesbit's resuscitated women are merely destroyed once more by masculine ignorance or callousness. 'Hurst of Hurstcote' reworks a motif of the Victorian Gothic – the morally-suspect male scientist – in charting how a husband's hypnotic power over his wife extends beyond her death. In presenting this dubious male figure as a practitioner of black magic, the tale complicates the distinction (evoked elsewhere in Nesbit's fiction) between male rationalist and female intuitive, instead suggesting that the occult too can function as a tool with which to suppress women. 'Hurst of Hurstcote' thus draws on the Gothic theme of incarceration, in which the ivy-laden ancestral manor symbolises the paralysing institution of marriage. That this imprisonment is created by marital union and facilitated by a woman's body establish the links between marriage and bodily regulation that constituted a central cultural topic in the *fin de siècle* press.

'From the Dead' challenges the regulation of female bodies in a different way: in presenting the image of a reanimated mother who returns only to fulfil her sexual and emotional (rather than maternal) desires, the tale critiques the Victorian ideology that motherhood should form the basis of a woman's existence. In this story, a neglected wife, Ida, returns from the grave in order to seek forgiveness from a husband for a white lie she told prior to their marriage. The panicked narrator is caught between his love for his dead wife and his horror of her deceased body: ultimately, the horror triumphs, and the narrator is once more left bereft. In its almost complete rejection and objectification of the child,

this tale acts as a counterpoint to the New Woman fiction that championed motherhood as a woman's prerogative and duty. Kristeva's theory of abjection illuminates how the use of a mobile female corpse underscores the traumatising effects of patriarchal power on husbands and children.

This chapter closes by considering the parallels between 'horror' and women's lived existence within patriarchal society. Although the two experiences are not exactly synonymous, horror's focus on bodily sensation, loss of identity, and powerlessness enshrines intriguing parallels with the constraints placed on real women even at the *fin de siècle*. Nesbit's fiction, in speaking to this tradition, provides a crucial development in the female-authored ghost story, drawing on other supernatural genres in framing its feminist critique.

The Rise of the New Woman and the Prostrate Female Body

The period in which Nesbit's tales emerged was one in which the 'Woman Question' was fiercely debated. While disputes about the character and social role of women had been conducted throughout the nineteenth century, they gained particular urgency during the 1880s and 1890s, in line with changing attitudes to women's educational and professional opportunities.[18] Many of these discussions converged around the figure of the 'New Woman'. The portrayal of this figure in the press – as plain, unfeminine, or reduced to 'man-hating, oversexed stereotypes'[19] – belied the diversity of both real and fictional New Women. As Angelique Richardson argues, they 'took many forms, […] and cannot be characterised by a single set of ideas.'[20] The title could name 'a beacon of progress or beast of regression, depending on who was doing the naming.'[21] Despite their disparate and sometimes contradictory social and political aims, all New Women sought to pose a challenge to '[women's] traditional role in society and […] the way they had been represented in fiction.'[22] Thus, numerous female commentators aimed

---

[18] 'The fruits of earlier improvements in girls' education were maturing by the 1890s […] There was a small, but significant rise in the number of women employed in the United Kingdom in the period 1890-1914, the rise being concentrated amongst the middle classes […] By 1890 there was a generation of reasonably educated young women who looked for some continuing fulfilment through work.' Viv Gardner, 'Introduction', in *The New Woman and her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre, 1850-1914*, ed. by Viv Gardner and Susan Rutherford (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 1-14 (p. 6).

[19] Angelique Richardson, 'Introduction', in *Women Who Did: Stories By Men and Women, 1830-1914*, ed. by Angelique Richardson (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. xxxi-lxxxi (p. xxxv).

[20] Richardson (2002), p. xxxiii.

[21] Lyn Pykett, *The 'Improper Feminine': The Woman's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (Oxon: Routledge, 1992), p. 139.

[22] Carolyn Christensen Nelson, 'Introduction to Part I: Short Stories by New Woman Writers', in *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles and Drama of the 1890s*, ed. by Carolyn Christensen Nelson (Plymouth: Broadview, 2000), pp. 3-6 (p. 3).

to overhaul inequalities such as women's limited career opportunities, the ideology of separate spheres, the sexual double standard, and the gendered imbalances in Victorian marriage.

Scottish writer Mona Caird's 1888 article 'Marriage', which controversially challenged the institution, was vital in establishing the subject as an essential one in public debate.[23] Writing in the independent section of the *Westminster Review*, Caird designated modern marriage a 'vexatious failure' insofar as it endorsed women's subjugation, by encouraging them to embody stereotypically 'feminine' attributes:[24]

> Women's chastity becomes the watch-dog of man's possession […] The quality […] has attained its present mysterious authority and rank through man's monopolizing jealousy, through the fact that he desired to 'have and to hold' one woman as his exclusive property […] However valuable the quality, it certainly did not take its rise from a sense of self-respect in woman, but from the fact of her subjection to man.[25]

Vitriolically condemning modern marriage as 'the most hypocritical form of woman-purchase,'[26] Caird promotes a freer form of union predicated on equality, in which women could be co-educated with their male counterparts and would never be forced to select husbands for economic reasons. Caird's article provoked a flurry of debate around marriage,[27] a topic also emphasised in much of the New Woman literature and fiction of the 1890s.[28] The subject proved so pervasive that Sarah Grand, author of seminal New Woman novel *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), remarked in 1894 that 'the Woman Question is now the Marriage Question.'[29] As Caird's references to 'chastity,' 'monopolizing,' and

---

[23] Rather appropriately, the editor's preface to this 'Independent Section' features a disclaimer that it might 'contain opinions at variance with the particular ideas or measures [the *Review*] advocates,' revealing its own gendered bias in its reference to 'men of high mental power and culture.' Mona Caird, 'Marriage', *Westminster Review*, 130. 1 (July 1888), 186-201 (186).

[24] Caird (1888), 197.

[25] Caird (1888), 193.

[26] Caird (1888), 195.

[27] As Molly Youngkin notes, a responsive article in the *Daily Telegraph*, 'Is Marriage a Failure?', instigated 27,000 replies. Molly Youngkin, *Feminist Realism at the Fin de Siècle: The Influence of the Late-Victorian Women's Press on the Development of the Novel* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2007), p. 84.

[28] See, for example, Clementina Black, 'On Marriage: A Criticism', *Fortnightly Review*, 47. 280 (April 1890), 586-94; and Mona Caird, 'The Lot of Women', *Westminster Review*, 174. 1 (July 1910), 52-59. New Woman novels that debated the role of marriage for women include Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), which critiqued the sexual double standard that left wives vulnerable to venereal disease, and Ménie Muriel Dowie's *Gallia* (1895), in which the protagonist is torn between marrying a dissipate man for love and a healthy one to whom she is indifferent. Youngkin also notes that Caird was involved in the 1891-2 debate on 'Wild Woman,' instigated by Eliza Lynn Linton. Youngkin (2007), p. 85.

[29] Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', *North American Review*, 158 (1894), 275; quoted in Richardson (2002), p. liii

'exclusive property' establish, these tensions over marital union intersected with the long-fought cultural question about the regulation of women's bodies.

The *fin de siècle* has from its inception been recognised as 'a time of deep concern about bodies,'[30] and particularly those belonging to women. As Elizabeth Stephens argues, 'female bodies have traditionally been read as representative of "the body" as a whole, [and] it is over the bodies of women that wider debates about corporeality have traditionally been conducted.'[31] While feminist critics have rightly emphasised the ways in which female physical forms have been controlled, manipulated, and determined by patriarchal culture, the 'history of the female body', as Andrew Mangham and Greta Depledge claim, remains 'a complex nexus of intersections and conflicts' whose collective voice remains necessarily 'uneven, incomplete, and varied.'[32] Sharpening focus to late Victorian Britain, however, enables us to disentangle some of these divergent strains. Women's bodies might occasionally function as sources of power or pleasure in this context, but more often the nineteenth-century assumption 'that all women were, from puberty through menopause, ruled and governed by a "uterine economy"' provided a means through which to justify women's subjugation.[33]

As we have seen in the introduction, nineteenth-century women were often perceived to be determined by their physiological make-up, and the *fin de siècle* emergence of the New Woman generated even more opportunities for male commentators to pathologise female behaviour. Rather than perceiving women's frustration as an authentic and justifiable response to their intensely limited social position, some conservative commentators instead sought to delegitimise women's behaviour by linking it directly to the female body. The label of hysteria, for example, could function as 'a convenient catch-

---

[30] Donna Decker, 'Reading Books and Body: New Woman and Authority', in *New Woman Writers, Authority and the Body*, ed. by Melissa Purdue and Stacey Floyd (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 89-118 (p. 89).

[31] For Stephens, this focus is exemplified in *fin de siècle* Britain by the 'far […] greater proportion' of female bodies in professional and popular anatomical museums and medical facilities. Elizabeth Stephens, 'Anatomies of Desire: Photographic Exhibitions of Female Bodies in Fin-de-Siècle Anatomical Museums', in *Sexuality at the Fin de Siècle: The Making of a 'Central Problem'*, ed. by Peter Cryle and Christopher E. Forth (New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp., 2008), pp. 25-41 (p. 28).

[32] Mangham and Depledge also suggest that 'the monolithic readings of many feminist histories' obscures both 'the clinical remit of [medical] procedures, operations, and developments that have been made throughout history' and 'the multiple resistances of women.' This chapter aims to chart one such example of resistance in literature. Andrew Mangham and Greta Depledge, 'Introduction', in *The Female Body in Medicine and Literature*, ed. by Andrew Mangham and Greta Depledge (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012 [2011]), pp. 1-15 (pp. 5-6).

[33] Janice M. Allan, 'Mrs Robinson's "Day-book of Iniquity": Reading Bodies of/and Evidence in the Context of the 1858 Medical Reform Act', in Mangham and Depledge (2012), pp. 169-81 (p. 173). Allan borrows the phrase 'uterine economy' from Sally Shuttleworth, 'Female Circulation: Medical Discourse and Popular Advertising in the Mid-Victorian Era', in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, ed. by Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 47-68 (p. 64).

all that contentiously justified hypervigilant attention' to potentially transgressive women, thereby medicalizing and undermining women's emotions and responses.[34] Women's actions, in Victorian culture, were bound up with their physicality, and the rebellious woman therefore a sickly one.

If women were perceived to be defined by their material form, it is perhaps understandable that the figure of the recumbent female body – placid, silent, controlled – recurred in literature at a period during which real women were rebelling against their social constraints. As Nina Auerbach has acknowledged, late Victorian popular fiction often fixated on 'mesmerised and apparently characterless' female subjects 'whose wills are suspended by those of the magus/master.'[35] While these images might be interpreted as coded attempts to control or placate female transgression, Auerbach argues that the most iconic examples – that is, Trilby, Lucy Westenra, and Freud's 'Dora' – also speak to the 'powers that were somewhat fancifully, somewhat wistfully, and somewhat fearfully imagined in women throughout the century.'[36] The seemingly inert woman possesses a potent veiled strength.

In contrast to these subversive mesmerised bodies, Nesbit's female corpses might seem fairly conservative in their lack of strength and authority. Nesbit's male corpses return from the dead to claim and/or destroy living women, while the female ones largely emerge only to be sacrificed all over again. Situating Nesbit within the context of New Women fiction, however, posits this discrepancy as a feminist comment, as opposed to a cynical repetition of gendered hierarchies. In aligning the uncanniness and potential post-life mobility of the dead with attempts to fix (and thus control) women, Nesbit highlights what Freeman terms 'the latent violence inherent in the sexual politics of the period.'[37] Her apparent denial of female agency functions as an example of what Gail Cunningham has called the 'near-universal pattern' in New Woman fiction, in which 'novelists allow[ed] their protagonists to break down at the end,' creating 'fictional closures which either killed or re-conventionalised their New Woman figures.'[38] Nesbit's reiteration of the female corpse thereby positions her within the tradition of 1890s New Woman literature which staged an acerbic critique of *fin de siècle* culture's gender politics. A brief look at her life both supports and complicates this reading.

---

[34] Jill R. Ehnenn, *Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 101.
[35] Auerbach (1982), p. 16.
[36] Auerbach (1982), p. 16.
[37] Freeman (2008), 466.
[38] Gail Cunningham, 'He-Notes: Reconstructing Masculinity', in Richardson and Willis (2001), pp. 94-106 (p. 99).

Edith Nesbit and Popular Fiction: 'Six Shudders for a Shilling'

Nesbit is primarily remembered in the twenty-first century as the author of children's novels such as *Five Children and It* (1902) and *The Railway Children* (1906); however, like Charlotte Riddell and Margaret Oliphant, she was a prolific writer who worked across a range of genres. Although Nesbit felt her true passion to be poetry, she continually produced children's fiction instead, in order to support her family.[39] She also published popular fiction for adults, much of which centred on the figure of the corpse. Nesbit knew that the dead body could instigate shudders insofar as it tapped into childhood fear: the author herself suffered this dread when she travelled abroad with her family as a young girl. *Night Visitors* author Julia Briggs, in her excellent biography of Nesbit, describes how young Edith (or 'Daisy' as she was then known) experienced a dream about her dead father which Nesbit claimed was 'the first remembrance I have of any terror of the dead, or of the supernatural.'[40] Similarly, her disturbing encounter with the mummies at Bordeaux – as '[s]keletons draped in mouldering shreds of shrouds and grave-clothes' – is described by the author as 'the crowning horror of my childish life' to which she attributed 'nights and nights of anguish and horror […] long after [she] was a grown woman.'[41] Nesbit thus exploited the corpse's links to visceral fear, and its power to evoke childhood trauma.[42]

Nesbit's use of the corpse as a source of fear was thus understandable,[43] but her exploitation of its metaphoric potential (as an emblem for subjugated women) is

---

[39] For Nesbit's most recent biographer, Julia Briggs, the author 'secretly dreamed of becoming a great poet' but 'it turned out to be prose and not poetry that she excelled at. She never really overcame the disappointment of that discovery.' Julia Briggs, *A Woman of Passion: The Life of E. Nesbit, 1858-1924* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 36. This concept – a woman writer's discontent with her literary endeavours, linked to her decision to financially support her loved ones – echoes Oliphant's meditations on whether she made the right choice in taking on responsibility for her brother's children upon his death.

[40] Edith Nesbit, 'My School-Days, Part III', *Girl's Own Paper* (Dec 1896), 184; quoted in Briggs (1987), p. 13. This dream involves Nesbit's father returning to demand a change in his tombstone's description. Briggs explains that '[i]ncreasingly [Daisy's] imagination focused on the Gothic horrors of death and the awful imagination of the inanimate – for had she perhaps not secretly wished for her dead father to come back to life, and if he had, would it not have been in this scarcely thinkable form?' Briggs (1987), p. 14. The distressing irreconcilability of the desire for a lost loved one and the terrifying quality of their actual return recurs in Nesbit's short fiction. Though Briggs does not discuss the dream's links to patriarchal authority and authorship, it seems significant that young Daisy (who would herself become a writer) imagines that her father comes back to 'edit' his tombstone's inscription.

[41] Edith Nesbit, 'My School-Days, Part V: The Mummies at Bordeaux', *Girl's Own Paper* (Feb 1897), 313; quoted in Briggs (1987), p. 13.

[42] In the twentieth century, Julia Kristeva explored these associations through a psychoanalytic lens, discussed more fully later.

[43] This sense of fear made the corpse a compelling motif for popular fiction, especially since, as critics have noted, it could also function as a source of titillation or excitement. Jarlath Killeen argues that both the corpse and the mutilated body, from the eighteenth century onwards, had provided thrilling stimulation for a public eager to 'get their bloody fill,' whether from gruesome public hangings or cheap 'penny dreadfuls'. Quigley states that 'the dead can repulse or attract,' and that corpses may be used 'for personal pleasure.' Jarlath

complicated by the author's apparent reticence to promote women's rights. Nesbit and her husband, Hubert Bland, were key founders of the Fabian Society, which sought to gradually reform late Victorian Britain in line with socialist principles.[44] The couple's political progressiveness, however, seemingly failed to extend to the 'Woman Question'. Briggs argues that Hubert's involvement in the Fabian Society masked an implicit conservatism, one borne out by his rather traditional view of women. Nesbit apparently shared her husband's belief that women should be 'supportive, comforting, and decorative,'[45] even though the author herself was an unconventional character who flaunted these restrictions.[46] According to Briggs, Nesbit's reluctance to champion women's rights can be attributed to her husband,[47] but the author's writing and eccentric behaviour belie this façade, in offering glimpses of a progressive 'New Woman' who, though opposed to women's suffrage, 'had in practice enjoyed the benefits of independence, both financial and sexual.'[48] The tension between the apparently contrasting images of Nesbit as both docile wife and energetic New Woman perhaps explains why popular fiction provided the medium through which she critiqued Victorian marriage. Just as her supportive wifely persona partially appeased her eccentricities, so too did the frightening aspects of her stories obscure their stringent feminist attack. Several critics have argued that Nesbit's supernatural fiction articulates her own feelings of conjugal distress.[49] But reducing her tales to veiled autobiographical expression risks undermining Nesbit's cultural significance as a New Woman writer.[50] Instead, studies of the author's fiction must balance biographical information with contextual material, to appreciate its

---

Killeen, 'Victorian Gothic Pulp Fiction', in Smith and Hughes (2012), pp. 43-56 (pp. 45-46); Quigley (1996), pp. 2-3.

[44] Briggs (1987), pp. 62-68.

[45] Briggs (1987), p. 33.

[46] Briggs notes that Nesbit's short haircut, smoking habit, and public recitals 'ran counter to the traditional ideal of femininity.' Briggs (1987), p. 68.

[47] 'Yet though several of her friends were actively engaged in the Women's Movement, with which she might have been expected to sympathise, [Nesbit] refused to be drawn into it and from quite early on regarded the women's vote as unnecessary and even undesirable, politically speaking. Her view on this matter, as on many others, had been strongly influenced by Hubert's.' Briggs (1987), p. xviii.

[48] Briggs (1987), p. 335.

[49] David Stuart Davies suggests that her troublesome fictional marriages 'illustrate the strong undercurrents of anxiety and emotional pain [Nesbit] must have felt' at her husband's numerous sexual transgressions. Such a reading risks victimising the writer, and moreover neglects the fact that the Blands' union was an unconventional one in which Edith also seemingly conducted love affairs. Michael Cox also implicitly supports a similar interpretation, in noting that Hubert was an 'incorrigible womanizer' and that some of Nesbit's most famous ghost stories 'were written during the first traumatic years of her marriage to Bland.' David Stuart Davies, 'Introduction', in *The Power of Darkness: Tales of Terror*, by E. Nesbit (Ware: Wordsworth, 2006), pp. 7-13 (p. 9); Michael Cox, 'Notes and Sources', in Cox (1996), pp. 411-21 (p. 411).

[50] Moreover, as suggested in the previous footnote, the image of Nesbit as a faithful and long-suffering wife is not necessarily accurate. Briggs's study argues that this image was partially generated by Doris Langley Moore's 1933 biography of the author, which had suppressed information about Nesbit's love affairs in order to preserve the writer's reputation. Briggs's own biography seeks to modify this cultural perception of Nesbit, in discussing the unconventionality of the Blands' marriage.

relevance to feminist debates about marriage, inequality, and the regulation of women's bodies. Nesbit's supernatural stories thus invoke broader cultural questions about women's role and character, particularly within sexual and marital relationships.

Nesbit's non-involvement in feminist campaigns in a period in which women's position was rapidly changing might seem strange considering her apparently progressive socialist stance; however, this inaction should not inhibit attempts to situate her within feminist literary history. Briggs's biography occasionally references the author's covert support of some aspects of feminist thought,[51] and some recent critics, such as Linda K. Hughes and Nick Freeman, have continued this important work. Hughes positions Nesbit's poetry within a tradition of neglected New Woman literature which offers a sensitive and often blistering critique of Victorian marriage,[52] and Freeman reads Nesbit's tales as 'sardonic commentaries' which 'expose the simmering antagonism beneath the genteel surface of bourgeois existence.'[53] Modern criticism posits the New Woman phenomenon as a non-homogenous cultural construct veiling a plethora of disparate political stances. As Richardson and Chris Willis claim, 'New Women themselves did not always define their goals clearly: their fiction and prose-writing reveal contradictions and complexities which resist reductive, monolithic readings.'[54] Nesbit's coded feminism is thus no less relevant because she pursued it through aesthetic rather than political channels. I follow Hughes and Freeman in suggesting that Nesbit's ghost stories supplied a vehicle for her suppressed feminism, through which she disparages women's subservient position at the end of the nineteenth century. The flourishing periodical press, and specifically the popular fiction forms it propagated, provided venues for these critiques.

We have seen, in Chapter One, that education reform and tax repeals generated an increasingly diverse readership in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, subsequently impacting on the Victorian literary scene. Graham Law argues that the British publishing industry, at the turn of the nineteenth century, was 'concerned predominantly with supplying luxury goods in limited editions for an elite readership,' but by the turn of the twentieth, 'the focus had shifted in the main to the manufacture of inexpensive items in

---

[51] As mentioned in Footnote 46, Briggs argues that Nesbit often diverged from the traditional feminine role through her unconventional behaviour. Briggs also suggests, however, that the author was not as progressive as some of the women with whom she mixed, concluding that Nesbit was 'a woman who presented a mass of contradictions, and whose various roles, whether imposed or willingly assumed, were often difficult to reconcile.' Briggs (1987), p. xvi.

[52] Linda K. Hughes, 'Daughters of Danaus and Daphne: Women Poets and the Marriage Question', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34 (2006), 481-93.

[53] Freeman (2008), 458.

[54] Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, 'Introduction', in Richardson and Willis (2001), pp. 1-38 (p. 12).

large print runs for a mass reading public.'[55] This move from costly books for a privileged group to literary commodities for the masses importantly modified cultural perceptions of reading, audiences, and the literary scene in general, especially as tax repeals generated opportunities for cheaper publications in greater numbers. As one Victorian commented in 1897:

> modern education has so far equalised the social classes of the community that the pleasure of reading, which at the beginning of this century was enjoyed by a small cultivated minority, has already become, or is fast becoming, the boon of all.[56]

While some viewed this democratization of reading as a progressive step, others perceived its destabilisation of established boundaries with suspicion and negativity. Some Victorian commentators complained that the displacement of 'books which require thought and solid application' with seemingly more pleasurable and less demanding works signalled the intellectual and moral decline of the nation.[57] Of course, this assumption was a distinctly classed and gendered one, in which the elitist upper echelons of society sought to shore up class divisions via denigration of literatures favoured by working-class men and women. 'Of the general lack of culture among the great majority of [the working classes],' one critic commented in 1881, 'there can unfortunately be no doubt.'[58]

This model of 'decline' also relied on an erroneous perception of 'light' literature as simple ephemera, to be unthinkingly digested and thrown away. Instead, much of what was labelled 'trashy and frivolous' by upper- and middle-class commentators encoded astute social commentary on the dominant culture.[59] Roger Luckhurst persuasively argues that, rather than exemplifying 'a symptom of the decline of the public sphere,' popular fiction offers 'one of the most vibrant places to find arguments about the nature and the limits of the public.'[60] Similarly, as several critics have demonstrated, Victorian periodicals which sought to entertain worked to revise perceptions of mass culture, and to reconfigure nineteenth-century reading practices (from linear to selective).[61] Although some mourned

---

[55] Graham Law, 'Sensation Fiction and the Publishing Industry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 168-81 (p. 179).
[56] J. E. C. Welldon, 'The Art of Reading Books', *The National Review*, 23. 134 (Apr 1894), 213-18 (214).
[57] Anonymous (1894), 298.
[58] Thomas Wright, 'On a Possible Popular Culture', *The Contemporary Review*, 40 (Jul 1881), 25-44 (25).
[59] Wright (1881), 27.
[60] Luckhurst (2012), p. 83.
[61] See, for example, Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green and Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jennifer Phegley, 'Domesticating the Sensation Novelist: Ellen Price Wood as Author and Editor of the *Argosy Magazine*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 38. 2 (Summer 2005), 180-98; Brake and Codell (2005); and Julia M. Chavez, 'Wandering Readers and the Pedagogical Potential of *Temple Bar*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 40. 2 (Summer 2007), 126-50.

the apparently 'retrogressive [rather] than progressive' state of Victorian literature and culture in the wake of educational reform,[62] modern critics have instead emphasised miscellaneous or 'leisurely' periodicals as sites through which 'a persuasively critical attitude towards established systems of order and hierarchy' could be articulated.[63] Such publications doubly blurred the elitist distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture, not only in being miscellanies aimed at both middle- and working-class readers, but in establishing populist or 'light' literature as a medium through which to stage sophisticated interrogations of dominant modes.

Nesbit's participation in this complex literary marketplace is signalled by her prolific publication in such periodicals. The author's 1893 collection of stories, *Grim Tales*, opens with an acknowledgement of the various publications in which the texts originally appeared: the author thanks 'the Editors of *Longman's Magazine*, *Temple Bar*, the *Argosy*, *Home Chimes*, and the *Illustrated London News*' for allowing her to republish the works.[64] *Longman's*, as Julia Reid demonstrates, purported to avoid controversial topics in favour of 'intellectual entertainment' and 'amusement', but under the influence of Scottish writer and anthropologist Andrew Lang the publication gradually synthesised anthropological and psychical concerns into 'the domain of popular culture.'[65] Nesbit's macabre fiction fulfils a similar cultural role, insofar as its accessible literary thrills belie important questions about gender inequality. Further, some of Nesbit's publication venues were especially responsive to women. *Temple Bar* and the *Argosy,* with their respectable female editors and amenability to women contributors, embodied what Jennifer Phegley terms 'family literary magazines,' which provided crucial environments in which 'women writers could succeed and […] have an impact on the nation's cultural values' in a literary marketplace which was largely dominated by men.[66] Although these tales first appeared individually, the cultural response to them can best be gauged through examining reviews of *Grim Tales* as a whole.

The collection received mixed reviews on its release, and its contemporary readers largely ignored its implications about marriage in favour of its frightening and aesthetic

---

[62] Wright (1881), 26.
[63] Chavez (2007), 132. Chavez is discussing *Temple Bar*, whose invitation to 'the comfortable, literate, but ill-educated middle-class' belies an implicit challenge to the dominant culture. 'Temple Bar: A London Magazine for Town and Country Readers, 1860-1900', in *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*, ed. by Walter E. Houghton, 386-91 (387-88); quoted in Chavez (2007), 129.
[64] Edith Nesbit, *Grim Tales* (London: A. D. Innes & Co., 1893), p. 6.
[65] Julia Reid, '"King Romance" in *Longman's Magazine*: Andrew Lang and Literary Populism', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 44. 4 (Winter 2011), 354-76 (356).
[66] Phegley (2005), 181.

effects.[67] Andrew Lang, in line with other reviewers, evaluated *Grim Tales* in terms of its entertainment value, stating that: '[t]here is a special shudder in each story, and six shudders for a shilling is a generous allowance.'[68] Lang claimed that the tales 'deserve praise for being really grim,'[69] but adds the disclaimer that some of them 'stagger credulity' with their 'rather undisciplined "go" and vigour.'[70] And while one reviewer delights in the author's ability to write 'an effective "bogie-story" excellently well' and believes that Nesbit's already 'high reputation' will be 'enhanced' by the collection,[71] another condemns their apparent ineffectuality owing to 'the dull and lifeless' character of the people who suffer these visitations.[72]

This ostensible lack of variation in the characters is, however, the very point: in continually reworking the motif of the callous male lover who inadvertently kills his beloved, Nesbit emphasises the ultimate result of society's suppression of women. We see, in these tales, the disturbing embodiment of what Caird terms 'the folly of permitting the forces of one sex to pull against and neutralise the workings of the other.'[73] Nesbit's macabre works illustrate that attempts to objectify women transforms their existence into a pseudo-Gothic nightmare in which their value is determined by their bodies. Moreover, such endeavours to oppress, which ultimately reduce women to corpses, parallel Nesbit's male narrators' reductive textual descriptions of their female contemporaries. Despite their clear differences, these women ultimately converge into one beautiful, pliant representation of femininity already apparently 'fading into the grave.'[74]

---

[67] This neglect of the collection's rather explicit gendered politics seems somewhat strange; perhaps the authors commissioned to review *Grim Tales* were not the kinds of readers who might decode attacks on marriage within ghost stories.

[68] Lang debates the collection's value beyond entertainment, but this emerges as a critique of its apparent sketchiness of 'psychical details': 'The psychical details would not always pass with the Psychical Society, they are rather pre-scientific […] people who like a ghost, with no nonsense of explanation, will do well to purchase "Grim Tales", but it is not necessary to lend them to amateurs in the schoolroom.' Lang is perhaps misguided in critiquing these apparent absences for, as Vernon Lee reminds us, meticulous psychical research (such as the SPR's experiments) used heavy-handedly in fiction risks purging the ghost story of its traditional thrills. Andrew Lang, 'At the Sign of the Ship', *Longman's Magazine*, 22. 129 (Jul 1893), 273-82 (281).

[69] Lang (1893), 281.

[70] Lang (1893), 281.

[71] Jas. Stanley Little, 'New Novels', *The Academy*, 1101 (June 10th 1893), 501-02 (502).

[72] Anonymous, 'Our Library Table' [Book Reviews], *The Athenaeum*, 3418 (April 29th 1893), 535.

[73] Caird (1888), 201.

[74] This phrase is used to describe Mrs Waite in Riddell's 'Nut Bush Farm' who, as discussed in Chapter One, represents a parasitic and sickly femininity, which problematizes the links between feminine delicacy and innocence. Riddell (1885), p. 162.

Dead Brides: 'John Charrington's Wedding' (1891) and 'Man-Size in Marble' (1893)

Two of Nesbit's most famous supernatural tales – 'John Charrington's Wedding' and 'Man-Size in Marble' – explicitly feature the female corpse of, in each case, a newly-married woman. While the men who precede them to the grave enact a grisly return, neither of these women come back from the dead in any form: instead, their inert bodies close the stories in a disturbing play on the traditional narrative device (often employed in early- and mid-nineteenth century realist novels) in which marriage constitutes a satisfactory conclusion. In both texts, the brutal death of the woman is apparently avoidable, and responsibility rests squarely with the male characters. These stories, however, imply that men too will be damaged by patriarchal authority's attempts to objectify and thus control the opposite sex.

'John Charrington's Wedding' is a brief and disturbing tale in which a fiancé, on being killed several hours before his scheduled marriage, returns from the dead to claim his bride. Narrated by a male friend of the two central characters, the story describes how the eponymous protagonist persevered to woo beauty May Forster, swearing his determination to marry her despite ridicule from his friends. Although he succeeds in winning her hand, Charrington worries his betrothed when he insists on visiting a dying male relative just prior to the wedding, assuring her that he will come home in time. Charrington has still not returned by the morning of the wedding date: May explains to the narrator that he had promised his uncle he would stay an additional night, but should arrive that afternoon in order to wed. When the narrator attempts to collect Charrington from the station, he is infuriated to discover that his friend has missed both possible trains. He rushes to the church to find that the wedding has already taken place, but Charrington looks ghastly: he is pale, dusty, and injured, and several spectators believe him to be drunk. He and May depart in the wedding carriage, followed by the narrator and May's irate father. The latter two arrive at the house first, but discover the wedding carriage empty save for May's crumpled figure. On lifting her veil they witness an expression of unspeakable horror upon her face. Just then, a telegraph boy delivers a message to the narrator stating that Charrington was killed on being thrown from the dog-cart on his way to the station at half-past one; the wedding had taken place at half-past three. May dies within the week, and is laid 'beside her husband in […] the churchyard where they had kept their love-trysts.'[75]

---

[75] Edith Nesbit, 'John Charrington's Wedding' [published anonymously], *Temple Bar*, 93 (Sept 1891), 105-11 (111).

John Charrington's domestic constraints ultimately prove fatal, as his uncle's selfish wish to delay Charrington from his wedding instigates the latter's premature demise. When May pleads with her fiancé not to leave her, he implies that he has no choice, stating that '"the old boy's been awfully good to me, and now he's dying I must go and see him."'[76] Charrington, then, is clearly relying on some form of inheritance from his relative, which may be jeopardised by prioritising his beloved May. But just as Charrington's uncle's desires dictate his nephew's behaviour, so too do Charrington's actions determine the fate of his bride. Although the would-be husband is killed in his attempt to satisfy both parties, his possessive claim over May demands that she join him in death. The story's portrayal of Charrington's destruction between his conflicting familial duties is thus countered by a more extreme and disturbing annihilation of female subjectivity generated by the controlling husband.

This bleak tale thereby presents marriage as a suffocating stranglehold fatal to women, as a distinct undertone of masculine aggression and feminine docility belies the ostensibly happy union. Marlene Tromp rightly argues that May's innocence enables us to read the story in terms 'of a violence that does not wait for married life […] With this vision of a man's love […] no woman is safe.'[77] Tromp's claim, however, that 'May has done no wrong,'[78] seems to miss the point, since it is May's embodiment of the meek wife which enables Charrington's jurisdiction over her, and induces her untimely demise.[79] The story's opening statement connotes possessiveness and sexual force: 'No-one ever thought that May Forster would marry John Charrington; but he thought differently, and things which John Charrington intended had a queer way of coming to pass.'[80] This overtone is strengthened by the narrator's playful (but disconcerting) reference to thought-control, in his question of whether it was 'mesmerism, or a love-potion' that had convinced May to accept the proposal.[81] Masculine desire's vehement control over female behaviour is enabled by May's apparent 'feminine' docility.

The bride herself is objectified and diminished throughout, and May thus appears less of an individual than an epitome of generic femininity. Beautiful, pure, and apparently lacking character, she presents a blank canvas onto which the male characters can project their own desires. The narrator explains that to be in love with her 'was a sort of fashion,

---

[76] Nesbit (1891), 107.
[77] Tromp (2006), p. 206.
[78] Tromp (2006), p. 206.
[79] As I demonstrate later, even active and confident women are destroyed through marriage in Nesbit's fiction, but this tale implies May's complicity in the troubling marital power dynamics.
[80] Nesbit (1891), 105.
[81] Nesbit (1891), 105.

like masher collars or Inverness capes,'[82] and there is double-meaning in his claim that his sisters were 'more interested in the *trousseau* than the bride herself.'[83] May's commodification on the marriage market is mirrored in her association with clothes, as she becomes the garments in which she weds her husband, even fading to their very whiteness. At the wedding, Charrington's ghostly pallor is described as 'not greater than that of the bride, who might have been carved in ivory – dress, veil, orange blossoms and all.'[84] Her alignment with the colour white implies that the type of virginal innocence (and implicitly, ignorance) associated with femininity and exemplified by May is itself a kind of ghastly precursor to death. Just as the frail living women in Riddell's 'Nut Bush Farm' are seemingly more ghostly than the male spectre, May is already more 'dead' than the spouse who emerges to claim her. Her reluctant acquiescence in Charrington's callous treatment of her has moulded her into a passive partner. Her defencelessness is starkly juxtaposed against Charrington's possessive dead hands, contrasting the female loss of identity within marriage against the patriarchal power inherent in inheritance processes.[85] May-as-bride is thus subject to a systematic course of objectification, appearing as little more than a series of disturbingly colourless objects.

The thing-laden description of May's bridal appearance anticipates her almost-immediate transformation into a mere thing herself, in her transition from bride ('woman') to wife (corpse). The darkly comic coach chase which follows the wedding – in which the narrator and May's angry father attempt to rescue the new bride from the seemingly drunk Charrington – precludes the discovery of May as an inert pile of material: 'a huddled heap of white satin lying half on the floor of the carriage and half on the seat.'[86] Her dishevelment suggests a ghostly consummation of the marital union, and the narrator's glimpse of her face – 'white, white and drawn with agony and horror, bearing such a look of terror as I have never seen since except in dreams'[87] – functions as a morbid emblem of the potential horror facing women sold into the marriage market. May has become, in Caird's terms, 'the victim of that vampire "Respectability" which thenceforth was to fasten upon, and suck the life-blood of all womanhood.'[88] The type of legal and sexual subjugation demanded by men like Charrington can only result in a draining-away of personality, which transforms May from youthful beauty to haggard woman to corpse.

---

[82] Nesbit (1891), 105.
[83] Nesbit (1891), 106.
[84] Nesbit (1891), 110.
[85] After all, it is these male-dominated inheritance processes which seemingly instigated the chain of unfortunate events in the first place.
[86] Nesbit (1891), 111.
[87] Nesbit (1891), 111.
[88] Caird (1888), 191.

Before marriage, May's value was founded on her prettiness and popularity; following it, her identity is beaten and destroyed into colourlessness, so that even her 'radiant blonde hair' turns 'white like snow.'[89] Within the week, May's transformation into a corpse is complete, and her body, somewhat distressingly, laid beside the man whose determination to possess her drew her to her early death.[90]

Significantly, May's only act of rebellion against her future husband – her plea to him not to leave her – capitalises on the trope of 'feminine' receptivity. Several recent critics have argued that Victorian women's apparent susceptibility to the supernatural could function as a locus of power, though one not without its complications. Alex Owen, for example, notes that '[t]he spiritualist conception of women as uniquely gifted in spiritual matters was at once both liberating and restricting,'[91] insofar as it drew on cultural perceptions of women as inherently passive and receptive. While many Victorian women identified and exploited what Owen terms '[t]he "innate" feminine qualities which afforded women scope and status as mediums,'[92] these ventures nonetheless remained entangled with the same cultural myths which justified women's subjugation.[93] Furthermore, patriarchal society's bias demanded that 'feminine' intuition must be validated and sanctified by male subjects in order to exert influence, as illustrated by May's neglected pleas to her lover not to leave her. May rebels against Charrington in her intuitive feeling that he will come to harm, stating: 'Oh, I wish you wouldn't go, John […] I feel certain that something will happen.'[94] But her 'pleading intensity' fails to move her blithe fiancé, and of course she is proved right.[95] Charrington's devaluation of May's intuition indicates that 'feminine' knowledge matters little in a culture in which women remain second-class citizens. The device of an intuitive (and often female) ghost-seer being ridiculed by a male rationalist before eventually achieving validation is a familiar

---

[89] Nesbit (1891), 111.
[90] The connotations of May's two surnames implicitly emphasise this point: the fertile site of her pre-marital identity (May Forster – spring forest) becomes a burnt-out wasteland (Charrington – charred). 'Charrington' also evokes 'charwoman' – the term for a female cleaner – perhaps subtly positing marriage as a form of servitude or slavery for women.
[91] Owen (2004), p. 8.
[92] Owen (2004), p. 8.
[93] Intriguingly, Briggs speculates that Nesbit herself might have capitalised on the trope of 'feminine' weakness and emotion when attempting to sell her home-made greeting cards. Briggs cites an incident in which Nesbit was two days late in delivering her products to a firm of printers, leading the manager to turn her away because they never took in late work. When Nesbit burst into tears, the manager relented. Briggs suggests that: 'No doubt [Nesbit's] distress was real enough, but then and later this very emotional woman was inclined to use her emotions in a manipulative way […] In a society which insisted upon women's weakness, a determined woman might well find herself obliged to explore her frailties instead of her strengths.' Briggs (1987), pp. 55-56.
[94] Nesbit (1891), 107.
[95] Nesbit (1891), 107.

one in Victorian ghost stories.[96] In tying this motif to a courting couple, Nesbit critiques the disconcerting politics inherent in nineteenth-century sexual relationships, in which the woman's wishes will only be fulfilled if they correspond with those of her male partner.

May's vague proleptic feeling comes to fruition in Charrington's death, whose fate ultimately seals her own, in a macabre symbol of the female loss of identity within patriarchal marriage. As a woman whose very existence is premised on that of her future husband, it is perhaps only fitting that Charrington's demise prompts that of his prospective bride. May – whose very name intimates tentativeness – might try to prevent her husband's death, but female intuition is rendered ineffectual beneath the seemingly weightier demands of masculine materialism. Of course, the tale makes a wry comment in the fact that May's fiancé dies before he can wed her, implying that it is not just marriage but the processes of courtship which succeed in suffocating and objectifying women. Even the woman's promise, then, encodes a sense of loss. Both Charrington and May are destroyed through their attempted fulfilment of domestic duties, suggesting that such obligations can be detrimental to both women and men. It is Charrington's uncanny return, however, which dramatizes the unsettling gendered power imbalance underpinning late Victorian marriage. This dark undertone of masculine possession troubles the final image of the reunited couple passively resting in the graveyard.

Although the eponymous male suffers in his execution of familial responsibilities, 'John Charrington's Wedding' primarily uses the corpse to speak to the stultifying effects of Victorian gender expectations – and especially traditional marriage – on female identity. Ostensibly about a love which ruptures the boundaries of mortality,[97] its depiction of a fiancé returning to claim his bride instead portrays the inefficacy of female intervention in the disturbing enforcement of male sexual power. But while this tale is relatively bleak, some of Nesbit's other stories are more playful in utilising the female corpse to speak to Victorian sexual politics. One of these, published two years later, exchanges the passive woman for a working female writer. Nevertheless, the fact that the first-person male narrator continually overlooks his wife's intelligence and independence – preferring instead to tease and infantilise her – illustrates the pervasiveness of Victorian feminine

---

[96] See, for example, B. M. Croker's '"To Let"' (1890), in which a husband refuses to believe his wife has witnessed a horrific ghostly repetition of a past tragedy. Margaret Oliphant's 'The Open Door' (1882) also capitalises on this trope, though it uses two men to fill these divergent roles.

[97] For a tale which deals with similar themes, see Louisa Baldwin's 'Many Waters Cannot Quench Love' (1895), in which two lovers – separated by many miles – die by drowning in the same hour. Unlike in Nesbit's story, there is no sense that the man has returned to claim his betrothed: it is left ambiguous as to whether their love has been strong enough to unite them in death, or whether the man has thrown himself into the river on seeing his lover's ghost. Dalby (1992), pp. 255-62.

stereotypes, even in a culture in which New Women were gaining prominence. That this wife eventually suffers the same fate as May suggests that it is not merely docile girls, but active working women, who can be destroyed through the institution of marriage.

Originally published in *Home Chimes*, 'Man-Size in Marble' is narrated by a man who loses his wife on All Saint's Eve when two marble effigies come to life and return to their former home, then occupied by the narrator and his spouse. The artist-narrator, Jack, and his writer-wife, Laura, are relatively poor. They move to a cottage in the country following their marriage, and hire a servant, Mrs Dorman, for housework. Mrs Dorman, who entertains them with folklore and supernatural tales, insists that she must leave them temporarily at the end of October. When Jack asks why, she reveals that she believes in a superstition which claims that two marble effigies in the church – formerly 'fierce and wicked men' who lived in a large house which had stood on the site of Jack and Laura's cottage[98] – break from their resting place to visit their former residence: 'They do say as on All Saint's Eve them two bodies sits up on their slabs and gets off of them, […] and comes back to their old home.'[99] Jack derides this idea, dismissing it from his mind and neglecting to tell his wife. The couple spend a happy few days doing the housework themselves, but on All Saint's Eve Laura seems nervous, explaining that she has had a premonition of evil similar to that she experienced when her father died. Jack leaves the house to smoke and (despite Laura's request that he return soon) spends a significant amount of time enjoying the evening, wandering along to the church. On entering it, he is terrified to realise that the two marble effigies are gone, but, as he rushes home, he runs into an Irish doctor, who convinces him that it has been a hallucination, and insists that Jack return with him to the church to prove it. The two marble figures are restored to their places, but one has a broken hand. The doctor accompanies Jack back to the cottage, where they find a disturbing scene:

> [T]he parlour […] was all ablaze with candles […] Light, I knew, was Laura's remedy for nervousness. Poor child! Why had I left her? Brute that I was […] She had fallen back against a table in the window, and her body lay half on it and half on the window-seat, and her head hung down over the table, the brown hair loosened and fallen to the carpet. Her lips were drawn back and her eyes wide, wide open […] Her hands were tightly clenched […] When I was quite sure that

---

[98] Edith Nesbit, 'Man-Size in Marble', in Nesbit (1893), pp. 111-43 (p. 121).
[99] Nesbit (1893), p. 125.

she was dead, and that nothing mattered at all anymore, I let [the doctor] open her hand to see what she held. It was a grey marble finger.[100]

Of course, Jack's self-reproach cannot save the unfortunate Laura. As in 'John Charrington's Wedding,' the female corpse provides the ghastly spectacle upon which the narrative closes.

Jack's determination to view his wife as a frail, delicate creature blinds him to her real status as a working woman, anticipating her eventual transformation into a corpse. He nicknames her 'Pussy,' claims that housework was 'too much' for her to bear, and worries that night air will transform her into an 'invalid.'[101] Thus, his comment about the houses the couple view before finding their own cottage – 'if we found a vine or a rose-covered porch, corruption invariably lurked within'[102] – functions as a metaphor for the inequality underpinning their apparent marital idyll. Despite Jack's love for his wife, he continually undermines her. Freeman persuasively argues that readers should look beyond Jack's perception of Laura as a fragile young girl to see her true status as a writer, claiming that the tale functions as 'a revealing criticism of the dangerous pretensions of [Nesbit's] purportedly radical male contemporaries' which posits Jack as 'a narrow-minded specimen of his class.'[103] For Freeman, Jack possesses an outdated belief that women, particularly his 'nervous' wife, are '[in]capable of bearing heavy emotional burdens.'[104] Moreover, Jack perceives Laura's aversion to housework, the responsibility for which Laura worries will leave her no time to write, to be an indication of her feminine delicacy, rather than an understandable concern for the couple's economic security. Crucially, Jack describes his distressed wife as 'a crumpled heap of pale muslin weeping on the window seat' at this point,[105] anticipating her eventual murder by the male effigies. Again, this image suggests that masculine expectations of feminine feebleness are already having a subjugating effect on women. Jack's callous remark that Laura 'was very unreasonable [but] who wants a woman to be reasonable?'[106] epitomises his complete denial of Laura's own beliefs and character in adherence to 'feminine' traits. To him, she cannot be a practical person expressing justifiable unease, but must only embody a stereotypically irrational woman.

---

[100] Nesbit (1893), pp. 141-43.
[101] Nesbit (1893), p. 131.
[102] Nesbit (1893), pp. 114-15.
[103] Freeman (2008), 458. This reading seems to echo Kandola's discussions of Lee's critique of aesthetic circles in *Miss Brown* and in her ghost stories, discussed in the previous chapter. Both Lee and Nesbit use the medium of fiction to articulate doubts about the contentious gender politics of supposedly progressive male-dominated groups.
[104] Freeman (2008), 460.
[105] Nesbit (1893), p. 117.
[106] Nesbit (1893), p. 119.

As in 'John Charrington's Wedding', feminine intuition is validated, but its validation comes too late to save its possessor, as the male protagonist fails to comprehend its legitimacy. Both Laura and Mrs Dorman communicate their intuitive fears to Jack, but neither possesses the influence to persuade Jack to heed them. Strangely, even the final revelation that Mrs Dorman's prophecy came to pass apparently fails to convince the male narrator of the importance of 'feminine' caution. Despite his self-recrimination upon his discovery of Laura, Jack, in relating the tale from a future vantage point, jarringly veers between traumatised regret and a self-righteous ridicule of the women's superstition. Thus, during Mrs Dorman's speech he interjects with blithe remarks, sarcastically backtracking on his claim not to laugh at her,[107] and smirkingly commenting on the evocativeness of her descriptions.[108] The reader can tell, from the story's denouement, that Mrs Dorman's beliefs are substantiated through Laura's death, but Jack never seems to depart from his assumption that his charwoman embodies 'contagious credulity.'[109] Instead, Jack's mode of opening – which stages a fairly typical face-off between scientific rationality and the apparent (supernatural) truth – writes Mrs Dorman out of the narrative altogether. He states that there 'were three who took part in this; Laura and I and another man,'[110] claiming that this other man 'can speak to the truth of the least credible part of my story.'[111] The desecration of Laura by the marble corpses thus finds its parallel in the trampling of female authority throughout Jack's narrative: women are continually silenced, infantilized, and disparaged. Perhaps this explains why Laura's corpse remains crumpled and inert, in comparison to the mobility and violence exerted by the male effigies. Male corpses, in Nesbit's fiction, appear far more powerful and malevolent than female ones, who either remain (like Laura and May) completely passive, or else return from the dead only to be eradicated for a second time (as in the two stories discussed subsequently). Nonetheless, 'Man-Size in Marble' suggests that men too will suffer through the enforcement of unequal marital dynamics. In accompanying its destruction of a woman with an evocation of castration, this tale complicates the ostensible enforcement of patriarchal power.

The final image of Laura's corpse fails to represent a straightforward triumph of misogynistic masculinity, imposing control over a woman attempting to escape the constraints which inhibit her sex. Laura's horrified expression and general dishevelment

---

[107] '"You needn't mind about telling me. I'm not like the young people, who make fun of such things."
Which was partly true.' Nesbit (1893), pp. 124-25.
[108] 'I had to admit that her description was a thousand times more graphic than mine.' He also subsequently interrupts Mrs Dorman's admission of her fears with '(another good phrase, Mrs Dorman)'. Nesbit (1893), p. 125.
[109] Nesbit (1893), p. 124.
[110] Nesbit (1893), p. 113.
[111] Nesbit (1893), pp. 113-14.

echo that of May in 'John Charrington's Wedding,' and critics concur that the phallic marble finger, clutched in Laura's dead hand, is symbolic of a macabre double-rape.[112] But the closing image also significantly invokes the concept of castration, insofar as Laura has wrested the phallic object from its masculine owner. While Freud's theory of castration anxiety was not introduced until the early twentieth century, the ritual of castration has long been understood as an 'emasculating practice' which 'both reinforces and threatens masculinity.'[113] Although Lee's castrato narratives capitalise on castration's dissolution of gendered dichotomies as a source of enchanting influence, it was more commonly linked to the loss of 'masculine' markers such as strength and virility. Holger Brandes, discussing Freud, suggests that the beginning of the twentieth century saw the term 'castration' gain resonance as a metaphor 'in the sense of anxiety about the loss of masculine power or autonomy or as a symbolic emasculation.'[114] 'Man-Size in Marble' – whose very title invokes 'manly' strength and solidity – anticipates this destabilisation of masculinity through the trope of the 'castrated' marble finger.[115] The effigies represent a troubling patriarchal authority which lays claim to all, but their form of masculinity is eroded through Laura's pyrrhic victory over its threatening phallic instrument.[116]

Jack and the marble effigies might war over Laura's body, but the story's closing tableau implies that the systematic subjugation of women will incur a substantial price for the masculine perpetrators. While Jack remains haunted by his wife's death, the presence of the marble finger suggests that traditional masculinity itself – encoded in the fierce virility of the effigies – will itself become emasculated in its attempts to subdue the late Victorian New Woman. Laura, as a working writer with an aversion to housework, was not

---

[112] '[A] helpless young woman is raped by the stone statues, their inhuman coldness and hardness characterising the rape itself, as experienced by the victim.' Briggs (1987), p. 174. 'The suggestion of symbolic rape makes this story all the nastier, with Laura still clutching the phallic finger while her hair lies "loosened and fallen on the carpet."' Freeman (2008), 462. The description of the living men as 'fierce and wicked men, marauders by land and sea' also lends credence to these readings. Nesbit (1893), p. 121.

[113] That is, it reinforces the masculinity for the perpetrator, and threatens it for the victim. '[W]ielded by foes or political opponents it becomes a means of solidifying power (regardless of how much the recourse to brutality may destabilise that power).' Larissa Tracy, 'Introduction: A History of Calamities: The Culture of Castration', in *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Larissa Tracy (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), pp. 1-28 (pp. 8-9).

[114] Holger Brandes, 'Castration Anxiety', in *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural and Historical Encyclopaedia*, ed. by Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson (California: ABC-CLIO, 2004), pp. 127-28 (p. 127).

[115] Intriguingly, Carolyn Dever suggests that 'even castration anxiety, the most central determining structure of Freudian psychoanalysis, is traceable to the loss of the mother.' Although I will not explore this idea in detail, Dever's insight establishes a further connection between 'Man-Size in Marble' and 'From the Dead', discussed later in the chapter. Carolyn Dever, *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 42.

[116] We also might chart this erosion through the misogynistic, but potentially effeminate, Jack. As Freeman argues, Jack's 'effeminate performance' (461) – that is, his plea to Laura to stop crying, 'or I shall have to cry too' (p. 118) - '[i]ronizes conventional notions of masculinity while at the same time avoiding useful action.' Freeman (2008), 461.

able to avoid the deathly fate to which meek May Forster was also subjected. But her demise nonetheless proved costly for the patriarchal authority which destroyed her.

Gothic Incarceration and the Returning Female Lover/Mother: 'Hurst of Hurstcote' (1893) and 'From the Dead' (1893)

In the two ghost stories considered so far, the woman's death corresponds with the closure of the narrative, as the partially traumatised male narrator falls silent on the image of the prostrate female body. Nesbit's female corpses, however, do not always remain inert. Debates about cremation in late Victorian Britain centred on the corpse's ambivalent status as both emotional relic and piece of waste, and the 1890s, as George K. Behlmer claims, 'witnessed an explosion of popular concern about how dead bodies should be treated and, more fundamentally, about ensuring that the dead were truly dead.'[117] The motif of the reanimated corpse, rather than being merely the stuff of Gothic nightmares, thus enshrines a genuine concern about 'Victorian medicine's capacity to distinguish life from death at […] physiological frontiers.'[118] The two stories discussed in this section evoke these late-century ideas through a focus on the dead female body. In exploiting anxieties surrounding liminal physical states, these texts chart how male-orientated regulation of women's bodies can inhibit their (post-death) mobility. One tale centres on the return of a female spirit whose husband has forbidden her soul to leave her physical form, and the other involves the reanimation of a female corpse. Crucially, these returning women lack the authority wielded by John Charrington and the marble effigies. 'Hurst of Hurstcote' reworks the materials of the Gothic in transforming the stock figure of the medical practitioner into an experimenter in black magic, thereby undermining the dichotomy (established in previously-discussed tales) between masculine rationalism and feminine intuition. In doing so, it implies that the supernatural can be just as damaging to women as rationalism when wielded by wayward men. 'From the Dead' focuses on the figure of the returning mother to explore the tensions between objectified 'woman' and the horrifying female corpse. In closing on an image of a non-responsive child (rather than a beautiful dead woman), the tale draws attention to other (non-female) subjects who suffer through patriarchal oppression. Drawing on Kristeva's abjection, I argue that this child's objectified status signals the necessity of maternal influence in an infant's development,

---

[117] George K. Behlmer, 'Grave Doubts: Victorian Medicine, Moral Panic, and the Signs of Death', *The Journal of British Studies*, 42. 2 (April 2003), 206-35 (207).

[118] Behlmer (2003), 221. The divide between life and death was thereby complicated by problematic liminal states, such as '[t]rance, coma, syncope, catalepsy, insensibility, suspended animation, human hibernation, and anaesthesia.' Behlmer reads this list in terms of the Victorians' 'opulent if unstable vocabulary to designate bodily conditions that hovered between the fully animate and the irrecoverably dead.' Behlmer (2003), 208.

even as the story itself counters the notion of motherhood as a woman's prerogative. 'From the Dead' thus draws on Gothic themes of inheritance, heredity, and the 'sins of the fathers' in staging its New Woman analysis of maternity.

The morally-dubious doctor and/or scientist is a familiar figure in Victorian Gothic fiction. William Hughes suggests that '[t]he Satanic, theologically informed tempter' of the first-wave Gothic is 'in many respects eclipsed in Victorian medical Gothic by the astute but irresponsible secular medical practitioner.'[119] This (almost exclusively male) character usually invites the reader's scrutiny and suspicion,[120] in being 'as compromised and as problematic as the subject he purports to diagnose and cure.'[121] Although this medically-connected individual might conduct experiments on his own self (as with the infamous Dr Jekyll) or cast a coldly analytical eye on the sufferings of other men (as with Dr Hesselius in Le Fanu's 'Green Tea' [1869]), he can also be seen looming ominously over a prostrate female body. In Arthur Machen's 'The Great God Pan' (1890/1894), for example, the transcendentalist surgeon Dr Raymond's assurance that his operation on his young female ward is 'a perfectly simple one' with 'absolutely no physical danger' results in her transformation into a 'hopeless idiot.'[122] Raymond's belief that his ward's 'life is [his], to use as [he] see[s] fit' intensifies the ghastliness of the situation, hinting at the problematic gender inequalities which prompted it.[123]

'Hurst of Hurstcote' employs a similarly gendered model of the passive female and the interrogative male: in aligning this figure with occult experimentation,[124] Nesbit departs from the previously-discussed theme of the female intuitive failing to convince the masculine rationalist of her superior knowledge.[125] We have seen, earlier in this chapter, that the motif of the prostrate female body often took the form of a mesmerised women being controlled by a man in popular fiction. Rather than using this image to capitalise on the empowering cultural myths surrounding femininity (as Auerbach argues in relation to

---

[119] William Hughes, 'Victorian Medicine and the Gothic', in Smith and Hughes (2012), pp. 186-201 (p. 188).
[120] Hughes (2012), p. 188.
[121] Hughes (2012), p. 200.
[122] Arthur Machen, 'The Great God Pan' (1890/1894), in Luckhurst (2009), pp. 183-233 (pp. 183, 190).
[123] Raymond justifies this belief on the basis that he 'rescued [the girl] from the gutter, and from almost starvation, when she was a child.' Nonetheless, Mary's appearance as a 'blushing' seventeen-year-old girl, 'dressed all in white' suggests that her 'feminine' innocence and trust in her mentor also facilitates her victimization. It is ironic, too, that this masculine act of apparent heroism ('rescuing' Mary from poverty) leaves her vulnerable to a far more horrible fate. Machen (2009), pp. 186-88.
[124] Of course, as discussed in Chapter Two, the borders between natural science and occult experimentation were far less stable in the Victorian period than in today's twenty-first-century world.
[125] Arthur Machen's 'The Inmost Light' (1894) also features a sinister occult scientist who performs experiments on his reluctant wife. This woman (unlike Kate) eventually agrees to be subjected to processes which will draw out her soul, on the condition that her husband will kill her afterwards. The woman's soul is transferred to an opal, which is then deliberately shattered by a horror-stricken man who discovers the train of events.

Trilby and others), Nesbit instead employs it to chart the suffocating effects of marriage on female identity. This critique is performed through a destabilisation of the Gothic trope of the haunted house. While the 'Hurstcote' of the title appears to provide the site of female incarceration, the truly horrifying prison is the institution of marriage. That the wife's captivity is produced by her marital union and accomplished through her body once again foregrounds the alliance between wives and corpses that recurs throughout Nesbit's horror fiction.

'Hurst of Hurstcote' – first published in 1893 in *Temple Bar* and reprinted in Nesbit's *Something Wrong* collection in the same year[126] – is a macabre tale in which a woman is hypnotised by her husband on their honeymoon, leading her ghost to haunt her spouse following her death. The doctor-narrator, Bernard, recounts a visit to his former school friend, John Hurst, and his beautiful wife, Kate (a woman for whom Bernard once had feelings). Hurst, though arousing a 'strange infatuation' in women,[127] was generally unpopular with his male acquaintances at university, as a studious youth with a taste for black magic, which he now no longer practises. Bernard receives an invitation from Hurst stating that he has unexpectedly come into possession of his derelict ancestral home, Hurstcote, which he is currently renovating. Bernard spends a pleasant trip with the love-struck couple, but Kate falls ill with marsh-fever, and Bernard perceives that it will soon prove fatal. Hurst, on being told, claims blithely that his wife cannot die. When he is proved wrong, Hurst 'would not understand – would not believe; […] still sat by her, […] calling on her by every name that love could teach him.'[128] He continues to insist that Kate is only under the influence of 'some form of catalepsy,'[129] eventually developing brain-fever. Bernard arranges Kate's funeral when Hurst is ill, leading the latter to miss his wife's burial. When Hurst recovers, he admits that he had given up black magic on Kate's wishes, but just following their marriage had hypnotised her: 'while she was completely under [his] control,' Hurst 'forebade her soul to leave its body till [Hurst's] time came to die.'[130] Since her death, Kate had continually appeared to her husband reiterating her final words to him: 'Let me go, John – let me go.'[131] Hurst – who believes that his wife '*is dead,*

---

[126] Edith Nesbit, 'Hurst of Hurstcote' [published anonymously], *Temple Bar*, 98. 391 (June 1893), 262-72; E[dith] Nesbit, *Something Wrong* (London: A. D. Innes & Co., 1893), pp. 7-36.

[127] Nesbit (1893), 262.

[128] Nesbit (1893), 268.

[129] Nesbit (1893), 268.

[130] Nesbit (1893), 269. Other ghost stories which feature an ethereal soul involuntary tied to their bodily remains include Madame Blavatsky's 'The Ensouled Violin' (1892) and F. Marion Crawford's 'For the Blood is the Life' (1905), as mentioned in Chapter Three.

[131] On her deathbed, Kate had cried out: 'John! John! Let me go! For god's sake let me go!' Nesbit (1893), 267, 269.

but [that] her soul has not left her body'[132] – insists that he must see her corpse in the crypt, but Bernard offers to go in his place. Instead, he shirks his duty, lying to Hurst that there is no doubt that Kate is dead. The next morning, Bernard finds a note from his friend stating his discovery of the untruth, as Kate had again appeared to him pleading for freedom. Bernard rushes to the crypt, finding Hurst's dead body clutching that of his wife. Although Bernard's own spouse believes Hurst must have been mad, Bernard himself cannot quite fathom why Kate's five-week-old corpse should be as 'perfect and beautiful as when first he clasped her in his arms, a bride.'[133]

Critical approaches to this tale have foregrounded its Gothic credentials, while not always recognising its gendered politics. Although James Noble Ashcroft derided the story as 'not a great success' in 1893,[134] modern readers have been more appreciative of its effects, interpreting it in terms of transcendental or eternal love. David Stuart Davies, acknowledging the influence of Edgar Allan Poe, argues that 'Hurst of Hurstcote' demonstrates 'how powerful love can transcend the corruption of the grave,'[135] and Gina Wisker similarly points to Hurst's devotion:

> When his lovely bride was alive, Hurst was mesmerised by her and he cannot imagine her gone. His bond with her lasts beyond death […] Hurst joins her in death, but the narrator […] finds them both equally fresh – she was either a ghostly returner or one who did not actually die. Eternal love is terrifying.[136]

Wisker's use of the term 'mesmerised' as a synonym for 'fascinated' problematically confuses the story's gendered dynamics, especially as she fails to mention Hurst's hypnotic command over Kate. The 'bond' which ties them beyond Kate's death has less to do with 'eternal love' than with Hurst's exercise of power over his wife. Wisker's analysis thus fails to appreciate how the tale reworks one of Nesbit's favourite motifs: the destruction of the woman due to male callousness which links marriage to a morally-dubious form of possession. While 'Man-Size in Marble' portrays a woman killed by the pig-headedness of masculine rationality, 'Hurst of Hurstcote' contrastingly depicts its representative of this rationality (Bernard) competing with the occultist Hurst, in an ideological dispute in which the woman's body becomes a mere pawn. As Victoria Margree and Bryony Randall astutely point out, the story's two men 'represent different poles of a "masculine"

---

[132] Nesbit (1893), emphasis in original.
[133] Nesbit (1893), 272.
[134] James Noble Ashcroft, 'New Novels', *The Academy*, 1115 (September 16th 1893), 227-28 (228).
[135] Davies (2006), p. 11.
[136] Gina Wisker, *Horror Fiction: An Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 65.

relationship to the supernatural, leading each to fail the woman both men love.'[137]
Moreover, Hurst's misguided use of hypnotic power 'signals a critique of attempts by men,
even devoted husbands, to assert their power over women.'[138] Indeed, Hurst's very name
encodes an unsettling capacity to inflict pain (*hurts/her*) and his mesmeric authority over
his wife (reminiscent of the joke directed at John Charrington) implies a menacing sexual
threat.

Crucially, this sexual threat is encoded through the tale's Gothic overtones, which
both evoke and undermine tropes of the genre. Margree and Randall's discussion of the
story synthesises it within this tradition; so too does Chris Baldick's inclusion of it in a
modern anthology of Gothic works, fulfilling as it does Baldick's aforementioned criteria
of invoking 'the tyranny of the past […] with such weight as to stifle the hopes of the
present […] within the dead-end of physical incarceration.'[139] The ambiguity surrounding
Kate's demise and return incites what Behlmer terms 'the nightmarish potential of
misdiagnosed death,'[140] and even the very title – like Poe's 'The Fall of the House of
Usher' (1839) and Lee's 'Oke of Okehurst' (1886/1890) – invokes the Gothic theme of
aristocratic lineage (and its implicit failure). The male aristocrat and his ancestral home
converge in a troubled mapping of identity onto an ancient domestic space. *Fin de siècle*
Gothic writers sometimes substituted earlier Radcliffean trapped heroines for male
protagonists navigating urban spaces, as exemplified by the comparative absence of
women in some of the most famous late Victorian Gothic texts.[141] 'Hurst of Hurstcote',
however, imitates the earlier Radcliffean motif in line with the author's implicit feminist
politics, by entrapping the heroine. While the space of incarceration might appear to be the
macabre Gothic mansion Hurstcote, it is instead embodied by two twinned sites with clear
connections to female oppression: the institution of marriage and the female body.

The story's sense of claustrophobia thereby emerges not, as Wisker argues, from
the atmosphere of Hurstcote,[142] but from the disturbing patriarchal authority of the central

---

[137] Victoria Margree and Bryony Randall, 'Fin-de-Siècle Gothic', in Smith and Hughes (2012), pp. 217-33
(p. 226).
[138] Margree and Randall (2012), p. 227.
[139] Baldick (2009), p. xix.
[140] Behlmer (2003), 207. The story also draws on the dubious liminal states discussed by Behlmer,
particularly in Hurst's conviction that his wife is only suffering some form of catalepsy.
[141] The most obvious example is Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), but
Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) also features virtually no women. In other seminal late
Victorian Gothic texts, women are destroyed (as in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [1890/1]) or must
rely on their male companions for rescue (as in Marsh's *The Beetle* [1897]).
[142] Wisker's reading seems to privilege the atmosphere of Hurstcote – which she describes as a 'ghoulish,
Gothic house in which […] the Liberty prints in the room don't overcome the clematis that grabs at your
hair' – over the important fact that Hurst hypnotises his wife before their marriage. Wisker (2005), p. 65.

male exercising influence over a woman's body, in a process apparently authorised by their union. Although Hurst laughingly points out the manor's Gothic credentials – stating that '[t]he clematis spends its time […] clawing at one's hair, and we are always expecting the ivy to force itself through the window and make an uninvited third at the table'[143] – the truly threatening 'haunted house' is the institution of marriage which sanctions husbands' control over wives.[144] Kate states that Hurst's pre-marriage mesmeric experiments on her were 'horrible' and 'wicked' processes which 'frighten[ed]' her,[145] and Hurst persists in refuting her wishes by placing a hypnotic spell on her without her knowledge. This act is significantly performed on their honeymoon, again associating marriage with suspect sexual ownership. Similarly, Bernard's closing words align Kate with Nesbit's other female newlyweds, positing marital consummation as a ghastly precursor to death for women. The real danger thus emerges, not from the foliage which might spring to life, but from the masculine agency determined upon controlling Kate. While the marriage acts as the first stage of this troubling possession, Kate's own body provides the site at which her full subjugation takes place. As with Nesbit's other women, Kate's transformation into a corpse is anticipated by the men's continual objectification of her.

Although the possessive Hurst is the primary source of masculine power within the text, both he and Bernard continually flag their apparent superiority in relegating Kate to the status of a beautiful object. Bernard repeatedly reduces his former beloved to her blue eyes (in contrast to his own wife's brown ones), and he comments that the room 'lacked its chief ornament' when Kate fails to show up at breakfast.[146] Moreover, Hurst prioritises his friend's enjoyment of this meal over alleviation of his wife's pain with his callous remark to Bernard: 'Kate's awfully queer […] she's been off her head most of the night, talking the most astounding nonsense. You must see her after breakfast. Will you pour out the coffee?'[147] This objectification reaches its climax in the revelation that Hurst – in perceiving his wife as a possession – has convinced Kate to cling to him beyond her death. Paradoxically, the process of objectification has prevented her ultimate transformation into a corpse. Nevertheless, Kate's return, rather than exemplifying a potent exercise of dominance as with the male corpses in the previous two stories, is an involuntary and painful procedure in which she must beg for release. She may eventually succeed in her aims (thereby 'killing' her husband) but, as with May and Charrington, the conclusion's

---

[143] Nesbit (1893), 264.

[144] It may be the unhealthy environment surrounding Hurstcote which instigates Kate's fatal fever, but the real horror of the story revolves around her distressing post-death entrapment in the material world.

[145] Nesbit (1893), 266.

[146] Nesbit (1893), 266.

[147] Bernard, however, offers to see her immediately. Nesbit (1893), 266.

unification of the lovers reminds the reader of the troubling gendered hierarchies which determine their relationship.

In validating the husband's supernatural power, 'Hurst of Hurstcote' importantly aligns the occult with both masculine authority and feminine subjugation, but this masculine agency is eventually destroyed by the consequences of its dubious actions. We have seen, in the previous story analyses, that the apparent alliance between women and the supernatural could contribute to their persecution. Nesbit's female characters May and Laura are implicitly linked to the occult through intuition, but to their male contemporaries they lack the evidence, conviction and influence to support their feelings of impending doom.[148] Conversely, Hurst's relationship with the supernatural emphasises his authority, in that his interest in black magic is pursued through academic study and scientific testing, and his patriarchal bias convinces him to use his unwilling wife for his experiments. Kate may ultimately succeed in drawing her husband to his death to facilitate her own rest, but her supernatural power crucially emerged from her male lover's experiments. Once again, this tale highlights the persistence of the controlling male and the submissive female within marriage, even as it recasts the gendered facets of the supernatural.

'Hurst of Hurstcote' thus mimics eighteenth-century female Gothic in using a selection of generic conventions – the derelict ancestral house, the love-struck couple divided by death, the imprisoned female and her male captor – to critique masculine authority. But while earlier female Gothic, according to Hoeveler, often 'presents a blameless heroine triumphing through a variety of passive-aggressive strategies over a male-created system of oppression and corruption, the "patriarchy,"'[149] Nesbit's 'Hurst of Hurstcote' is seemingly more cynical in presenting the dual destruction of both husband and wife. The story offers its female corpse post-life mobility, but one characterised by fear, pain, and inequality, emerging directly from masculine authority. Again, we might synthesise this sense of dejection with New Woman fiction's often-gloomy prognoses about women's ability to achieve happiness within a patriarchal culture. Another of Nesbit's 1893 tales similarly uses the motif of the returning female lover to critique the attempted objectification of women. Crucially, this revenant emerges, not as a trapped

---

[148] Nesbit would later return to the type of the rational/callous male academic and his intuitive/emotional female spouse in 'The Five Senses' (1909), in which a vivisectionist is forced to break his engagement with his beloved as she cannot bear his experiments. When the vivisectionist is buried alive after testing a formula on his own self, it is his former fiancée who rescues him from the crypt. Unusually for Nesbit's horror fiction, this tale ends happily with the fulfilment of female desire: the male character suffers only briefly, feminine intuition is vindicated, the couple marry, and the vivisectionist never again returns to his former experiments.

[149] Hoeveler (1998), p. 9.

spirit, but as a reanimated corpse keen on fulfilling her/its own desires. The most active and powerful of Nesbit's dead women, this female corpse emphasises both the opportunities and limitations facing Victorian women at the *fin de siècle*, especially in terms of maternity.

'From the Dead' fuses the idea of the corpse as a valuable vestige of a former person with its status as a gruesome locus of horror: ultimately, the narrator's physical revulsion towards the reanimated cadaver temporarily overwhelms and kills his desire for his deceased wife. While some contemporary representations of the returning dead – such as Margaret Oliphant's *A Beleaguered City* (1879) and John Everett Millais' *Speak! Speak!* (1894-5) – convey communion with the dead as a potentially consolatory experience suffused with the pain of loss, 'From the Dead' is much bleaker in its portrayal of what the narrator terms 'the unreasonable terror that killed love in that hour.'[150] The weak male protagonist's attempted communications with his wife's spirit are completely shattered by his involuntary reluctance to embrace the materials of the grave.

The story is narrated by the central character, Arthur, who breaks off his engagement with his then-fiancée Elvira when his friend Ida shows him a letter in which Elvira seemingly declares her love for another man. Arthur realises that Ida loves him herself, and becomes besotted with her in return. The pair marry, but quarrel soon after the wedding when Ida admits that she forged the letter which revealed Elvira's betrayal. (This act was not as self-interested as it might seem, as Ida was aware Elvira loved another man, and so sought to save both parties from an unhappy union.) Livid, Arthur condemns his wife as a liar and a forger, and storms out to walk on the beach. As with two of the previously-discussed Nesbit's stories, the man's unwise desertion of the beloved female and the domestic space will ultimately prove fatal to the woman. Arthur soon repents his angry words, but when he hurries back to make amends, he finds Ida gone. After spending a miserable few months attempting to trace her, he receives a cryptic note from Ida urging him to come to her as she is dying. Arthur hurries to reach her, but is just too late: Ida is already dead, but their recently-born child lives. Distraught with guilt and grief, Arthur lies awake in bed that night, and is disconcerted to hear soft sounds from the next room, in which Ida's corpse lies. He longs to see his beloved again, but is horrified by the thought of her reanimated cadaver. The door to his room opens and 'the figure of [his] dead wife

---

[150] Edith Nesbit, 'From the Dead', in Nesbit (1893), pp. 77-109 (p. 108).

came in' reeking of 'lavender' and looking at Arthur with 'love unspeakable.'[151] Ida attempts to make amends, explaining her reasons for the forgery. Terrified, Arthur assures Ida she is forgiven, but when she requests a kiss he is overwhelmed by horror and shrieks aloud. Instantly repentant, he cries out for Ida's return, but instead discovers her corpse in (that most recurrent position for women in Nesbit's ghost stories) a crumpled heap in the hall. It was thus her revived dead body and not her ethereal spirit which had returned to him. Ida does not appear to Arthur again, and he explains that he has been left alone with the(ir) child, which has never spoken and never smiled.

Rather than using the inert female corpse to promote its critique, 'From the Dead' revises the trope of the monstrous reanimated feminine to condemn the troubling forms of masculine authority which seek to objectify women.[152] Crucially, this story exceeds the others discussed insofar as the female corpse – rather than simply providing the horrifying closing tableau, or pleading for release from masculine influence – functions as a means through which the woman can subvert attempts to control her. For Arthur, the materials of the grave attached to Ida's body subsume her identity (*she*) within the gender-ambiguous thingness of the corpse (*it*), but this attempted objectification is far from successful. Although Arthur's reactions send Ida (both soul and body) back to the grave, his apparent reinscription of patriarchal power remains highly unstable. Ida, even more so than Laura, leaves the mark of her presence on the masculine authority which endeavours to restrict her, thus shattering any possibility for redemption for both husband and offspring.

Arthur – like Jack in 'Man-Size in Marble' – appears as a bluff, self-centred misogynist, and his descriptions of his female lovers convey his troubling view of women as material possessions. When mourning his lost Elvira, he states that he 'cried like a child […] over my lost plaything – the little, dark-haired woman,'[153] reducing his lover to a malleable piece of property whose pleasure derives from ownership and aesthetics. This ignorance towards women's true value also resurfaces in his meditations on why he fell in love with Ida, which (in an echo of May's supposed attributes) reference her beauty, her popularity, and his own sense of guilt. As with Jack's description of Laura, Ida's status as living, feeling human is lost beneath the superficial veneer of femininity. Contrastingly, Ida's perception of love is couched in terms of honesty and spiritual communion, although

---

[151] Scents associated with death – such as lavender, camphor, and narcissus – often feature in Nesbit's macabre fiction, for example 'The Three Drugs' (1908) and 'The Five Senses' (1909). Nesbit (1893), pp. 105-06.

[152] For an example of this motif in *fin de siècle* Gothic fiction, see Lucy Westenra in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).

[153] Nesbit (1893), pp. 82-83.

her claim to Arthur that 'I am yours – body, soul and spirit' invokes the unsettling post-death masculine possession of the woman which emerges in the previous tales.[154] Intriguingly, this phrase recurs three times in the narrative: Ida's forged letter from Elvira also states 'it is you I love – body, soul and spirit,'[155] and Arthur (despite his perception of her as a plaything) repeats the idiom in regretting his lost Elvira.[156] Perhaps the story insists on this expression ironically to anticipate how easily these supposedly interdependent forms of love – physical, emotional, spiritual – will soon be wrenched apart. In fact, the disparity between them has already been signalled by Arthur's descriptions of his supposedly beloved women in material and economic terms. Arthur's attempted ownership of Ida is thus justly punished when she returns as a disturbing thing.

Arthur's idealization of a subservient, compliant wife finds its disturbing manifestation in Ida's beautiful, silent corpse. Rather than being characterised by dishevelment or horror, Ida's dead body at first seems much more peaceful than those belonging to May and Laura:

> She did not look like one dead. Her lips were still red […] It seemed to me, too,
> that if I kissed her she would awaken, and put her slight hand on my neck […]
> So I stopped and laid my lips to hers […]
> But the red lips were like marble, and she did not waken.[157]

In a sinister reversal of the Sleeping Beauty myth, Ida's cold body refuses to respond to Arthur's touch. Nevertheless, this passage anticipates her return. Readers of 'Man-Size in Marble' might rightly remain distrustful of the simile employed to describe Ida's apparently lifeless lips, and the reference to the potential reawakening and reaching-out for Arthur's neck implicitly connotes vampirism. As noted earlier, Bronfen suggests that the motif of the beautiful female corpse continually recurs in Western art and literature in order to cast anxieties about death onto a body 'clearly marked as other, as being not mine.'[158] For Bronfen, '[t]he aesthetic representation of death lets us repress our knowledge of the reality of death precisely because death occurs *at* someone else's body and *as* an image.'[159] In this sense, Ida's dead body is both distressing (an abject object whose liminal status evokes revulsion) and reassuring (death has come to Ida and not to Arthur). Both of these reactions, however, are premised on the idea that Ida remains

---

[154] Nesbit (1893), p. 86.
[155] Nesbit (1893), p. 80.
[156] Nesbit (1893), p. 83.
[157] Nesbit (1893), p. 101.
[158] Bronfen (1992), p. xi.
[159] Bronfen (1992), p. x.

inanimate. Her material return might then represent a violent reaction to this double process of objectification, in Bronfen's terms, constituting a rebellion against a male-orientated culture which seeks to control women through aesthetics.

When Ida's passive body transforms into a living, speaking subject, Arthur suffers intense semantic bewilderment between the corpse as subject and the corpse as object, invoking abjection. Echoing his previous attempt to reduce women to things, he describes Ida variously as 'the figure of my dead wife,' 'it,' 'my wife,' 'she,' and 'the poor ghost.'[160] This semantic perplexity anticipates Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, and Arthur's claim that '[a]bject terror paralysed me'[161] precludes his own collapse into similar subject/object confusion. As discussed in the introduction, Kristeva links the feeling of disgust invoked by the liminal or ambiguous to early attempts to distance oneself from the maternal: 'a violent, clumsy, breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling.'[162] In-between things thereby provoke a traumatic remembrance of infantile endeavours to establish subjectivity, thus unsettling the conception of 'I'. For Kristeva, the corpse is 'the utmost' in abjection: 'the most sickening of wastes, [it] is a border that has encroached upon everything […] seen without God and outside of science, […] it is death infecting life.'[163] 'From the Dead' intimates that Arthur's terror, aroused by the walking Ida, sends him straight *back* to the state in which this detachment from the maternal was incomplete (infanthood) and at the same time *forward* to the point at which subjectivity dissolves (death). He mimics both a baby and a corpse in his reactions to Ida's sexual advances, shrieking and mummifying himself, and winding the bed-sheets around his head and body. The power of the maternal thus appears to be invoked and reinscribed through the walking, speaking Ida.

But if Ida's resuscitation implicitly privileges matriarchal influence through invoking abjection, it also queries the concept of motherhood as a woman's prerogative through Ida's apparent disinterest in her child. Ida might be expected to impart some caring words or gestures to her new-born offspring, in line with the Victorian idea that 'the potentiality of motherhood' constituted 'the "eminent jewel of [a woman's] soul".'[164] While New Woman writers might have been expected to challenge these limiting assumptions, several prominent New Women figures instead championed them, to the

---

[160] Nesbit (1893), pp. 105-07.
[161] Nesbit (1893), p. 106.
[162] Kristeva (1982), p. 13.
[163] Kristeva (1982), p. 108.
[164] Miss Frances E. Willard's contribution to 'The Tree of Knowledge', *The New Review*, 10. 61 (Jun 1894), 675-90 (689).

extent that motherhood became 'probably the unifying theme of the very diverse body of New Woman's literature from the 1880s and 1890s.'[165] Nesbit, however, crucially queries the necessity of motherhood, insofar as Ida's desires are sexual and conciliatory, rather than maternal. The dead Ida, who both (when still) corresponds to and (when active) completely shatters Arthur's ideal of a compliant wife, thereby poses a challenge to yet another Victorian assumption that located female identity within the biologically-determined body.

The reversal of the roles of the living and the dead – Ida walking and speaking, Arthur speechless and swaddled in bed – appears to undermine the gendered hierarchies which recur in Nesbit's fiction. Nonetheless, the conclusion, in which Arthur rushes from the room to find Ida's motionless body – as the now-familiar 'huddled heap […] Dead, dead, dead'[166] – closes down the possibilities for positive change intimated by Ida's speaking corpse. Although 'From the Dead' features a deceased woman who returns, there is no doubt that Ida's almost-immediate second 'death' is caused by the weakness of the male protagonist. Like both May and Laura, Ida becomes a mere faceless mass of material, yet another tragic female sacrifice to an arrogant Victorian patriarch.

Nonetheless, 'From the Dead' importantly intimates that Ida is not the only, or indeed the most pitiable, victim of Arthur's attempted exertion of masculine authority. The story reworks the Gothic motif of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children, in its presentation of a non-responsive child. Mirroring his confusion over how to label Ida's returning corpse, Arthur refuses to authenticate his offspring's subjective status by granting it a name, or even a gender: he merely terms it 'the child' and, rather troublingly, 'it.'[167] Robbed of a wife to control and bereft of her 'feminine' influence, Arthur cannot establish any meaningful connection with his offspring: patriarchal authority is thus devastated by the loss of the woman. As argued in this study's introduction, some feminist scholars have taken issue with Kristeva's implicit designation of the maternal as speechless and disgusting; however, Kristeva's theory also privileges its centrality to the development of infant subjectivity (even although that centrality takes the form of a rejection or breaking away). 'From the Dead' invokes Kristeva both in its sense of revulsion surrounding the

---

[165] Sally Ledger, 'The New Woman and feminist fictions', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 153-68 (p. 161). As Ledger goes on to explain, this preoccupation with motherhood was often bound up with 'the rise of the Eugenics Movement and its accompanying vocabularies of race improvement,' and 'a good deal of New Woman writing was thoroughly implicated with the languages of eugenics and imperialism.' Ledger (2007), p. 163. See also Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[166] Nesbit (1893), p. 108.
[167] Nesbit (1893), p. 109.

corpse and in its implication that the maternal remains essential to the child's transition from 'thing' to person. The fact that Ida's absence and Arthur's neglect results in a non-speaking, thing-like child implies the inefficacy of masculine endeavours to substitute for the maternal in safeguarding Britain's future.[168]

'From the Dead' presents the destruction of a family, but in a change to Nesbit's usual fictional pattern, both living characters (father and child) lack the speech and determination which characterises the (female) returning corpse. Furthermore, the story's portrayal of a reanimated woman who expresses no desire to see her new-born poses a challenge to sentimental assessments of motherhood, indicating dubiousness about the cultural belief that saw childbearing as a woman's prime duty. 'From the Dead' thus employs the image of an active female corpse as a corrective to ideals about femininity, thereby situating Ida alongside Nesbit's other inert women as vehicles for feminist critique. In darkly parodying the idealised Victorian wife, these female corpses indicate *fin de siècle* marriage's entanglement with questionable power dynamics, its gender inequalities ultimately damaging to husbands, wives, and children.

Conclusion

'Horror', for many critics, is intrinsically connected to physicality. According to seminal first-wave Gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe, horror (distinct from the more ennobling 'terror') 'contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates' a subject's faculties.[169] Similarly, modern critic Fred Botting emphasises horror's debilitating bodily effects:

> Bound up with feelings of revulsion, disgust and loathing, horror induces states of shuddering or paralysis, the loss of one's faculties, particularly consciousness and speech, or a general physical powerlessness or mental confusion […] Horror dissolves a being's sense of definite identity, a dissolution often metaphorically linked to absolute darkness and death.[170]

These responses might convey psychological repression, in which horror 'acts as a vehicle for us to face up to and face down what we avoid, repress, ignore, or can see no escape

---

[168] The idea of women as the guardians of the future of the race was also often employed in New Woman fiction. While this concern was sometimes framed through a problematic implicit reliance on eugenics and/or an assumption that maternity was a woman's prerogative, New Woman writers explored these issues in a variety of diverse ways. See Richardson (2003).

[169] Ann Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, 16. 61 (Jan 1826), 145-52 (149).

[170] Fred Botting, 'Horror', in Mulvey-Roberts (2009), pp. 184-92 (p. 185).

from.'[171] For Freud, Kristeva, and numerous other critics, horror remains entangled with traumatic encounters, and with the troubled nature of subjectivity and self-control.

The experience of horror seem especially relevant to women, in that its limiting and incapacitating effects parallel the constraints placed on women throughout history. These resemblances perhaps explain why, as Claire Knowles comments, 'Gothic fiction has, almost from its inception, been concerned with exploring the sufferings visited upon women by the patriarchal cultures in which they live.'[172] Horror threatens a subject's individuality in reminding them of their own encumbrance with a terrifyingly uncontrollable physical form, comparable to the ways in which the seemingly 'permeable, leaking and absorbing' female body was assumed to determine and govern female identity.[173] The horror encounter blurs the boundary between subject and object (as in the objectification of women), and its dissolution of identificatory characteristics is paralleled in the pervasiveness of feminine stereotypes within patriarchal culture. Although it might take different forms, the sense of 'powerlessness' was a familiar sensation for late Victorian women, in being excluded from the social and professional arenas which might have facilitated their progress. The horror encounter – in being entangled with physicality, entrapment, fear, and the loss of identity – thus echoes the darkest aspects of women's lived experiences within a male-dominated society.

This study's introduction sought to question readings of women as victims that can infiltrate feminist studies of supernatural fiction;[174] however, Nesbit's use of the female corpse as a vehicle for her feminist critiques draws on the concept of female victimisation to chart the parallels between horror and women's submission within patriarchal marriage. The author's grim tales continually rework the motif of a beautiful bride being destroyed by male callousness, in a nightmarish cycle in which marital union immediately precedes the death of the woman. This cycle, however, shifts slightly with each repetition. Meek

---

[171] Wisker (2005), p. 10.

[172] Similarly, if we accept Diane Long Hoeveler's claim that the female gothic deals with the fact that 'middle-class women can only experience the male-identified patriarchal-capitalist home as either a prison or an asylum,' the links between horror and women's experience within patriarchy become even more apparent. Claire Knowles, 'Sensibility Gone Mad: Or, Drusilla, Buffy and the (D)evolution of the Heroine of Sensibility', in *Postfeminist Gothic: Critical Interventions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Benjamin A. Brabon and Stéphanie Genz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 140-53 (p. 141); Hoeveler (1998), p. 19.

[173] Bashford (2000), p. 78.

[174] As Marie-Luise Kohlke notes in relation to Neo-Victorian appropriations of the female gothic, 'women writers' turn to Gothic in formulating critiques of past gender inequalities and injustices' risks 'reproduc[ing] patterns of victimisation, which preclude rather than enable female self-actualisation.' Marie-Luise Kohlke, 'Neo-Victorian Female Gothic: Fantasies of Self-Abjection', in *Neo-Victorian Gothic: Horror, Violence and Degeneration in the Re-Imagined Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben (Amsterdam: Rodopi B. V., 2012), pp. 221-50 (p. 221).

May in 'John Charrington's Wedding' seems almost complicit in her own subjugation, but the fact that working writer Laura suffers a similar fate suggests that even progressive New Women can be destroyed through the institution of marriage. While several of Nesbit's tales portray the familiar stand-off between the female intuitive and the male rationalist, 'Hurst of Hurstcote' instead depicts a male practitioner of the supernatural as the primary oppressor. Finally, 'From the Dead' uses a returning female corpse as a means to query the centrality of motherhood to a woman's existence. All four stories discussed present women as victims of patriarchy, demonstrating that women's alliance with the passive female body facilitated their eventual symbolic deaths. They also invoke, to varying extents, the ways in which men and children might also suffer within this highly skewed system.

This concern with marriage posits Nesbit as an understudied New Woman writer whose short popular horror tales occupy an important place in feminist literary history. These brief narratives, with their darkly comic undertone, are conspicuously different from other New Woman writing from the same period: including (but not limited to) the vitriolic novels condemning the sexual double standard, the texts that advocated motherhood, or the dreamlike short stories which sought to explore the ambiguous female psyche.[175] This distinction, however, merely highlights the diversity of New Women writing at the *fin de siècle*.

This chapter has also sought to emphasise the diversity of the ghost story form, particularly as it became more focussed on physicality, gore, and malevolence as the century approached its close. Nesbit's intensely material ghosts, less ethereal wisps than grotesque reanimated corpses, pose a direct challenge to the mistaken idea that women's spectral tales are inherently more 'subtle' and less 'vengeful' than those by male writers.[176] These brief and gratuitous narratives thus exemplify a crucial development in the female-authored ghost story, with their links to horror fiction and the *fin de siècle* Gothic emphasising the multiplicity of the ghost story form. Nesbit's tales uses images of prostrate and active female corpses to critique the deadening effects of marriage on female identity, staging a vitriolic challenge to the regulation of women's bodies in late Victorian Britain. This focus aligns them with the other ghost stories considered in this study, all of which utilise the genre as a vehicle to query cultural assumptions about woman's role and

---

[175] See Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), Ménie Muriel Dowie's *Gallia* (1895), and George Egerton's *Keynotes* (1893) respectively. While some texts suggested that maternity was a woman's social and biological prerogative, Dowie's eponymous protagonist chooses to bear children for her own personal fulfilment (though the novel itself remains somewhat ambivalent about whether this endeavour will be successful). As mentioned briefly earlier, much New Woman fiction was relatively pessimistic about women's ability to achieve happiness within a male-dominated culture.

[176] Ashley (2008), p. vi.

temperament in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. We will now explore briefly how the analyses forged in the preceding chapters can be revised and extended beyond this study's chosen authors, illuminating exciting new avenues through which to approach female-authored ghost stories from the Victorian period through to the present day.

Conclusion

Recent critics have acknowledged the importance of 'the master trope of spectrality and haunting' in Neo-Victorian fiction,[1] perhaps because, as Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham argue, Victorianism itself can function 'as a form of revenant, a ghostly visitor from the past that infiltrates our present.'[2] The Victorian period, like the spectre, persists beyond its temporal lifespan. But while the nineteenth-century past's rich material culture might enable its dead participants to 'speak' to us, these exchanges, like spectral encounters, remain subjective, troubled, and ambivalent. This mysteriousness is mirrored and redoubled in the modern fascination with Neo-Victorian haunting, as evidenced by the current wide range of popular and literary fiction, as well as glossy television dramas such as *Ripper Street* and *Penny Dreadful*. The uncanny echoes engendered by these cultural manifestations find an appropriate representative in the spectre, aligned with both the past and the present, visibility and invisibility, being and nothing, materiality and ethereality. Neo-Victorianism is thus replete with hauntings, many of which are connected to specific women.[3] That so many texts capitalise on the trope of ghostliness – from the bewitching imprisoned medium in Sarah Waters' *Affinity* (1999) to the catastrophic fraudulent spirit communication which opens John Harwood's *The Séance* (2008), the red-herring haunting in Charles Palliser's *The Unburied* (1999) and the Jamesian echoes of Bly in A. N. Wilson's *A Jealous Ghost* (2005) – suggests that the modern world has little desire to exorcise its Victorian spectres.

If contemporary revisions of Victorian culture in the twenty-first century can be understood as forms of revenants, it must surely be beneficial to comprehend how the Victorians themselves dealt with the complexities of the revenants which recurred in their supernatural fiction, particularly as sites for material critique. The ghost functions as an effective symbol for our relationship with the Victorian period, but our nineteenth-century predecessors were also aware of the spectre's potential for evoking complex questions about history, contemporaneity, and identity.[4] Neo-Victorianism enables us to compare the

---

[1] Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham, 'Introduction', in *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past*, ed. by Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. xi-xxvi (p. xi).
[2] Arias and Pulham (2009), p. xv.
[3] It is especially intriguing that the female mediums in Sarah Waters' *Affinity* and John Harwood's *The Séance* emerge as frauds, suggesting women's intentional turn to supernaturalism as a means of empowerment.
[4] As Mark Llewellyn acknowledges, even as modern readers 'are obsessed by knowing, summoning up, and possessing/being possessed by the Victorians [they] are enacting a specifically nineteenth-century

material realities of the present with those of the past; so too does the Victorian ghost story provide a means through which to analyse the intricacies of real nineteenth-century lives, even if such lives (like the spectres themselves) remain just beyond our reach. This focus is especially relevant in light of (actual and literary) Victorian ghosts' reliance on things, bodies, and ways of knowing, such as haunted objects, the physical forms of mediums, and intuitive or non-visual epistemological apparatuses. In its entanglement with the past and the present,[5] and being and nothing, the ghost provided a potent vehicle through which to reflect upon the everyday world.

These temporal and ontological interchanges partially explain the ghost story's allure for women writers: it enabled them to critique the current material conditions of their lives, through a trope which invoked the past and envisioned the future. At the same time, the material forms of their intervention – that is, their publication of commercial stories – empowered these writers not only to query, but to alter their own status in a culture whose developing modernity was hampered by the legal and social restrictions placed on their gender. The fact that their feminist critique was framed through the ghost's alliance with material culture – objects, bodies, and epistemology – functions as a comment on contradictory assumptions about womanhood as being tied to both bodily and spiritual forces, determined by biological make-up yet influenced by a higher sphere.

Through my examination of works by four female authors published between 1870 and 1900, I have demonstrated how Victorian women writers used the medium of the ghost story to interrogate and critique their own investments in a patriarchal culture which continually justified their subjugation via dubious expectations about femininity. These authors analysed the professional venues from which they were excluded (finance and science) and the social stereotypes which inhibited their behaviour (woman as beautiful object, frivolous dreamer, and idealised wife). That they did so through often-pseudonymously-published popular stories enabled them to criticise gendered inequalities without explicitly connecting their names to feminist endeavours. Earlier in the century, Charlotte Brontë had attributed her family's use of gender-ambiguous literary monikers to

---

preoccupation with the spectral, s(p)ecular, and reflective possibilities of the historical mirror.' Mark Llewellyn, 'Spectrality, S(p)ecularity, and Textuality: Or, Some Reflections in the Glass', in Arias and Pulham (2009), pp. 23-42 (pp. 24-25).

[5] As Buse and Stott note, 'in the figure of the ghost, we see that past and present cannot be neatly separated from one another, as any idea of the present is always constituted through the distance and deferral of the past, as well as anticipations of the future.' Buse and Stott (1999), pp. 10-11.

their 'vague impression that authoresses [were] liable to be looked on with prejudice.'[6]

Almost thirty years later, Lee's concern that 'no-one reads a woman's writing on art,

history or aesthetics with anything but unmitigated contempt'[7] intimates that this sense of

apprehension continued to afflict female writers throughout the period.[8] Support for

women's rights developed as the turn of the century approached, generating more

opportunities for women to denounce their limited legal and social rights in increasingly

visible ways. The mid- to late-century ghost stories we have encountered here can be

situated within this rich tradition of feminist literary history.

The investigations embedded in these ghost stories were developed, not only

through the use of the spectre as an emblem for disenfranchised women, but through

sensitive explorations of the genre's interconnections with the material world. The ghost

story, as Richard Dalby argues, is always attempting to 'write from within *[two] worlds at

once'* in its careful use of both 'the language of social realism and the language of the

subterranean, the not-explained.'[9] This sense of a double purpose or double language

indicates why women writers found the ghost story an appropriate venue for their

condemnations of patriarchy. Importantly, the four chosen writers deal differently with this

balancing act between the fantastic and the normal, especially with regards to gender.

The ghostly tales discussed here thus have a complex relationship to the material

world and its things: while all, to varying extents, sought to reflect upon, intervene in, and

even improve the conditions of women's lives, their stances on materialism's gendered

parameters are diverse. As we have seen, some, such as those by Oliphant and Nesbit,

reiterate the trope of feminine susceptibility to the ethereal, reinvoking the traditional

stand-off between male rationalist and female intuitive. Although these tales might initially

seem to confirm the division between masculine materialism and feminine ethereality, they

---

[6] 'Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because – without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine" – we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise.' Charlotte Brontë, 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell' (1850), in *Wuthering Heights (Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism)*, by Emily Brontë, ed. by Linda H. Peterson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992 [1847]) pp. 15-20 (p. 16).
[7] Lee (2006), p. 105.
[8] This understandable anxiety was justified by the often vitriolic backlash against *fin de siècle* New Woman fiction. See, for example, an 1888 response to Mona Caird's 'Marriage', in which the writer puns on Caird's name in reiterating variants of 'nobody Caird for she' in a comic poem. Anonymous, 'Mrs Mona Caird's Craze', *Fun*, 48. 1215 (Aug 22nd 1888), 78.
[9] Dalby is speaking about examples from the following century, but his claim also resonates with Victorian ghost stories. Richard Dalby, 'Introduction', in *The Virago Book of Ghost Stories: The Twentieth Century, Vol. 2*, ed. by Richard Dalby (London: Virago, 1991), pp. x-xv (p. xi), emphasis in original.

instead condemn or revise the power dynamics embedded in this opposition, through championing 'feminine' epistemology and/or reviling its devaluation by rationalist men. Others stories, such as those by Lee, specifically challenge these gendered distinctions, in relocating susceptibility to the supernatural into the masculine realm. The complications surrounding the gendered material/ethereal divide once again speak to the multiplicity of women's contributions to the ghost story form. For some feminist critics, 'the very history of reason, or rationality, and the materialistic, atheistic philosophy that accompanies it, are inseparable from masculinity and phallocentric power.'[10] Rosemary Jackson argues that women writers often draw on supernatural or 'non-realist narrative' as a feminist 'challenge to the dominant notions of reality and representation upheld by a patriarchal culture.'[11] Women's supernatural fiction thus, according to Jackson, attempts to 'dissolve the whole edifice of positivism, rationality, and secularism that has become synonymous with patriarchal culture, and to suggest that […] its "realism" is in fact a misnomer and an anomaly.'[12] Women writers did indeed sometimes destabilise rationalism and phallocentric power within their ghost stories, by valuing emotion, intuition, and 'feminine' susceptibility. But they also, as we have seen throughout *Haunted Matters*, used the master's tools to contest patriarchy's underpinning regulations, arguing for women's rights *through*, rather than in opposition to, money, science, object culture, and marriage. The ghost story genre therefore possesses feminist potential outwith the gendered binaries articulated by Jackson. Rather than solely attempting to disrupt patriarchy through a straightforward rejection of materialism, these female writers instead used material things and bodies to show that *women matter*. Whether supporting or refuting the gendered distinction between 'the substantiality of matter' and 'the insubstantiality of spirit,'[13] the materialistic rationality of patriarchy and the apparently intuitive, intangible realm of the feminine, writers like Riddell, Oliphant, Lee, and Nesbit were able to critique the dominant culture through interrogations of material things.

These interrogations, as we have seen, were shaped differently according to each writer's concerns and convictions. Thus, Riddell's male-orientated narratives condemn women's legal and financial subjugation, while her varied portrayals of middle-class females speak to the difficulties facing women forced to earn or borrow money without diverging from the socially-sanctioned feminine role. In making the financial market more

---

[10] Jackson (1989), p. xvii.
[11] Jackson (1989), pp. xvii-xviii.
[12] Jackson (1989), p. xviii.
[13] Jackson (1989), p. xviii.

terrifying and less ontologically stable than the ghost, these supernatural stories critique an economic system in which women are alternately more vulnerable, marginal, or disturbing than the returning spectres.[14] Oliphant's tales seemingly promote an anti-materialist form of feminine epistemology, but her invisible spectres exert significant power over material things and people, again complicating the gendered distinction between the physical and the ethereal. These stories' challenge to visual science, in particular, both evokes and destabilises traditional gendered power hierarchies, in supplanting sight as the primary means of knowing the world, and in querying the idea of woman as an object of the male gaze. Lee's ghost stories are perhaps the most radical of the ones considered here in terms of blurring gendered boundaries. These tales, in connecting haunted objects specifically to women or feminised figures, evoke the processes of mythmaking surrounding femininity, and especially the *femme fatale*. While these feminine figures facilitate an object's transformation into a 'thing', male characters are largely responsible for their subsequent mutation into a supernaturally-attenuated 'fetish', thereby subverting the notion of 'feminine' susceptibility to the supernatural. At the same time, these ghost stories promote the peculiar enduring power of both 'woman' and 'things' even beyond their material lifespans. Of all our primary examples, Nesbit's horror narratives are potentially the most gratuitous. Their images of murdered women synthesise her within two distinct literary traditions of the *fin de siècle*: the late Victorian Gothic, which often portrayed inert females; and New Woman fiction, which queried the institution of marriage and the stereotype of the dutiful wife. In aligning the idealised Victorian woman with the passive female corpse, Nesbit's narratives promote feminist analyses through the medium of popular fiction. Whether chilling or consolatory, subtle or lurid, domestic or exotic, the ghost stories by these four women writers staged denunciations of patriarchal culture by asserting the importance of things and materialist theory to women's lives, in stories published in the commercial literary market.

Of course, there was much material (no pun intended) that this thesis was unable to cover, and its gendered focus illuminates avenues for further research.[15] A different selection of women writers whose tales also prioritise objects or bodies would have produced disparate results. B. M. Croker's colonial ghost stories, for example, often feature neglected Indian houses, in which past tragedies are endlessly re-enacted to the

---

[14] That is, women performing traditionally 'masculine' forms of labour, such as Miss Gostock in 'Nut-Bush Farm', prove disturbing to men indebted to traditional gender roles.

[15] A whole dissertation might have been written solely on haunted objects in Victorian women's ghost stories; however, extending the criteria to include bodies and epistemology seemed important in charting the diversity of women's experiments in the form through a focus on four key practitioners.

distress of their new ex-pat residents.[16] These macabre abodes speak to the traumatising

effects of empire on the Victorian psyche, especially for the women attempting to establish

domesticity in the doubly hostile alien environment of a haunted house in an unfamiliar

culture. India at first seems to offer bright opportunities for the female relatives of imperial

officers in tales such as '"To Let"' (1890) and 'The Dak Bungalow at Dakor' (1893), but

these women are ultimately chastened by revelations of past misfortunes which blight their

sense of freedom and adventure. The fact that Croker's fictional families are eventually

forced to relinquish their tenancies illustrates the sense of fear, dispossession, and loss of

identity which shadows Britain's imperial project, with the derelict haunted house

representing the damaged and sickly country keen to exorcise its colonial oppressor.[17] A

future study might, for example, compare Riddell's British haunted rentals with Croker's

fictional foreign residences, interrogating how each author unsettles concepts of ownership

and domesticity through their focus on rented houses. Why are the material sites of the

hauntings important? What forms do the visitations take? Why are women, in Croker's

fiction, often the only middle-class tenants inhabiting these weird abodes?[18] Such research

would not only illuminate the ghost story's feminist potential in the wider context of the

British Empire, but would disclose important correspondences and divergences between

Victorian women's material lives at home and abroad, and the ways in which spectral

narratives articulated and interceded in these far-removed existences. Similarly, other

themes and tropes which have been examined only peripherally within this thesis – for

example, the genre's engagement with class anxieties, masculinity, and domesticity, as

---

[16] '"To Let"' (1890) and 'The Dak Bungalow at Dakor' (1893) both feature a disturbing death (one accidental, the other a murder) which repeats itself at intervals. 'The Khitmatgar' (1891) slightly revises this theme in centring on a murdered servant who tempts new tenants to their death through the offer of drinks.

[17] Becky DiBiasio's analysis of Croker's ghostly tales argue that the author's fictional 'military wives and daughters are sensitive to the resentment and the folklore of the people they are there to govern' and that '[t]he only way the women can survive is to retreat […] behind the walls and habits of empire.' Becky DiBiasio, 'The British and Irish Ghost Story and Tale of the Supernatural: 1880-1945', in *A Companion to the British and Irish Short Story*, ed. by Cheryl Alexander Malcolm and David Malcolm (Chichester: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 81-95 (p. 85).

[18] While it remains for future academic work to stage a comprehensive comparison, a cursory analysis might note that Riddell's hauntings often take place *within* the home, while Croker's frequently focus on the boundary between home and exterior, sometimes featuring some kind of invasion. Riddell's ghost stories often present women as more horrifying and/or deathly than the actual ghosts, but rarely chart the traumatising effects of haunting on female identity. Conversely, Croker's narratives regularly revolve around gung-ho women who are chastened by spectral encounters when their male relatives are absent. Both Riddell and Croker focus on the ghostly repetition of a particular act, but while Riddell's ghosts reiterate actions to unveil illicit inheritors, Croker's repeated hauntings are often horrific and seemingly unmotivated. These differences might signal anxieties about the vulnerability of the foreign rental for women frequently left alone, juxtaposing female desire for agency and independence against the real dangers presented by another culture. That so many of Croker's confident women are evicted from haunted houses might portray women's precarious position in being both a ruler of the domestic space and a potentially defenceless dependent – anxieties compounded by their expatriate status. Ghost stories by Riddell and Croker also share a specific concern with class, often connected to the home; as mentioned, it remains for future studies to fully analyse their similarities and differences.

well as the periodical press's potential as a venue for feminist enterprise – will provide productive avenues for future research in the field of Victorian women's ghost stories.[19]

A subsequent study might also push the historical parameters of this study forward, to chart how women's developing legal and social powers altered the female-authored ghost story, and especially its presentation of objects, bodies, and epistemology. Such a project might discuss how stereotypical models of femininity, and the trope of 'woman as body', continued to shadow modern ghost stories long into the twentieth century. H. D. Everett's 'The Death Mask' (1920), for example, revolves around a domineering wife who wields influence over her younger husband even following her death. The ghostly woman seeks to prevent her widower from remarrying, and thus her unsettling death-mask continually manifests itself in a range of household items whenever her living spouse attempts to woo a pretty female neighbour. Although the reader is superficially encouraged to sympathise with the luckless husband,[20] the tale evokes and lampoons a culture in which women's desirability is predicated on their youth, physicality, and malleability.[21] Additionally, the fact that this haunting takes shape through domestic *things* invokes new feminist problems created by increased professional opportunities for women, namely the cultural expectation that a working or otherwise active wife would continue to perform her duties as the primary housekeeper. While 'The Death Mask' ostensibly focuses on a woman as the source of oppression, its use of household objects might equally speak to women's inescapable social bond to the domestic role even into the twentieth century. Future studies of women's ghost stories might also consider how growing cultural candour about sex and sexuality influenced the genre, for example in May Sinclair's 'The Nature of the Evidence' (1923), in which a spectral wife has intercourse with her living husband,[22]

---

[19] Similarly, I was unable to discuss each writer's heritage and its relevance to the ghost story's relationship to national identity. Charlotte Riddell's Irish background and Margaret Oliphant's Scottish ancestry seem to distance them from mainstream English culture, and so too does Vernon Lee's adoption of Italy as her true home. As Hay acknowledges, '"British" ghost stories are precisely not 'English,' if only because so many of the key writers of ghost stories in the nineteenth century were not English. British ghost stories are insistently concerned with the margins of Britishness they themselves occupy.' Hay (2011), p. 22.

[20] The tale utilises a framing device, in which the first narrator asks his friend why he does not let his house and consider remarrying, since it is four years after the death of his wife (whom the narrator privately admits that he had never liked). His friend then narrates his experiences with his wife's ghost.

[21] This story might also be read in terms of inequalities among women, as at the time of its publication, only property-owning women over the age of thirty were allowed to vote. This political inequality emphasises the differences between the domineering deceased wife and the docile living girl.

[22] This tale forms an intriguing companion piece to 'The Death Mask', insofar as it uses the same trope (a dead woman's attempts to prevent her husband from remarrying) but reverses the feminine stereotypes (that is, the dark, domineering woman is the marital usurper, while the deceased wife is a delicate young girl). Thus, while 'The Death Mask' describes a widower's claustrophobic and terrifying experience, 'The Nature of the Evidence' instead outlines the female ghost's rescue of her husband from a mercenary second marriage. The fact that the types of the oppressive, domineering woman and the youthful, idealised girl

and Daphne du Maurier's 'The Pool' (1959), which aligns a girl's first menstruation with her disbarment from a glorious, secret, preternatural world.[23] In making the female body alternately a source of pleasure and pain, affinity and exclusion, such tales articulate the slippery relationship between physicality and identity which continues to inform women's perception of their bodies.[24] These narratives thus speak to the empowering, disappointing, and ambivalent aspects of women's experience in a society which claimed to be increasingly attuned to their physical and emotional desires. Other crucial events in feminist history, such as the extension of the franchise and the 1923 Matrimonial Causes Act, can also be keyed into studies of the female-authored ghost story, by considering portrayals of property, wealth, and the power dynamics within sexual or marital relationships. Hauntings between women, in later ghost stories, also provide intriguing supplementary material to the feminist movement. Penelope Lively's 'Revenant as Typewriter' (1978), for example, revolves around a female academic, Muriel, who is gradually possessed by the spirit of a woman who used to occupy Muriel's new, renovated home. In love with her married colleague, Muriel is appalled when her usually intelligent and measured behaviour degenerates into vulgarity, for which the ghost is seemingly responsible. The fact that the haunting takes shape through frivolous 'feminine' things speaks to the insidiousness of gendered stereotypes, the potential irreconcilability of different forms of female identity, and the competing cultural demands which continue to influence women's behaviour. That the story closes with an ambiguous laugh (from Muriel, the ghost, or both) signals the unresolved tensions shrouding women's opportunities for personal fulfilment even in the modern world.

The fact that the twentieth-century female-authored ghost story also explores women's changing role through things, bodies, and ways of knowing again foregrounds the genre as an appropriate site for material critique. Of course, prospective studies must

---

resurface even in these twentieth-century ghost stories illustrate the pervasiveness of such stereotypes even beyond the Victorian period.

[23] Although menstruation is conveyed in a coded way, its manifestation is relatively unambiguous, especially compared to its absence within Victorian ghost stories. At the end of the story, the servant Agnes asks the young protagonist, Deborah:

'"Have you got a pain? It's usual, the first time."

"No," said Deborah.

What had happened to her was personal. They had prepared her for it in school, but nevertheless it was a shock, not to be discussed with Agnes. […] The heaviness of knowledge lay upon [Deborah] like a strange, deep sorrow. "It won't come back," she thought. "I've lost the key." The hidden world, like ripples on a pool so soon to be filled in and fenced, was out of her reach forever.' Daphne du Maurier, 'The Pool' (1959), in Dalby (1991), pp. 57-80 (p. 80).

[24] As the title of a book review by Terry Eagleton puts it, 'It is not quite true that I have a body, and not quite true that I am one either.' Although Eagleton suggests that all individuals experience this sense of slipperiness, it seems especially pertinent for women, who throughout history have been aligned with their bodies. Terry Eagleton, 'Review of Peter Brooks' *Body Work'*, *London Review of Books*, 27. 5 (1993), 7.

continue to acknowledge the very specific material contexts of women's ghost-story production in nineteenth-century Britain, and should not perform a homogenising reading of the genre's broad subsequent range into the following century. But understanding how Victorian ghost stories related to women's material lives hints at further avenues through which to comprehend how modern examples speak to the twentieth century's shifting gender politics, in providing frameworks against which to interrogate and critique cultural expectations about femininity. Whether focussing on troubled bodies, the uncanny power of things, or the persistence of 'feminine' susceptibility to the supernatural, the ghost story's preoccupation with objects, bodies, and epistemology remains a highly fruitful subject for future research.

Haunted Matters has aimed to contribute to the exciting field of scholarship on the Victorian ghost story, particularly in terms of a gendered reappraisal of the works of four female practitioners of the form. While it can be tempting and indeed productive to view the genre in terms of an expression of the 'constellation of anxieties' which afflicted the Victorians,[25] I instead have argued that the ghost story provided a more positive means through which women writers could critique aspects of the patriarchal culture which continually sought to relegate them to the margins. This critique was not necessarily, as some critics have claimed, always framed through aligning women with ghosts (which, as we have seen, could sanction and reify the constraints imposed on the former), but through material things and ways of knowing the world that women used in their daily lives. Women writers, rather than merely reflecting on their reduced social status, actively sought to change it, contributing to a variety of cultural debates through popular fiction forms. Additionally, these stories did not always correspond to gendered dichotomies, but instead alternately invoked and destabilised such dichotomies in a variety of exciting ways. In making objects, bodies, and epistemology central to their spectral tales, these authors challenged the paradoxical cultural perception of women as excessively bodily or spiritual, overly preoccupied with material reality or bound to the otherworldly realm. These ghost stories thereby occupy an important position within feminist literary history, in exemplifying how women writers used the medium of popular fiction to analyse, critique, and improve the material conditions of their lives.

---

[25] Eve M. Lynch, 'Spectral politics: the Victorian ghost story and the domestic servant', in Bown et al. (2004), pp. 67-86 (p. 70). Lynch's list of such anxieties includes: 'fear of deranged spatial and psychological boundaries, feelings of desertion and isolation, ancestral longings and guilt, ambivalence about domestic privacy, fears of domestic imprisonment, and madness.' Lynch (2004), p. 70.

Bibliography

Alexander, Sarah, *Shopping for Pleasure: the Fashion Lover in Victorian Fiction* (Michigan: ProQuest, 2008).

Allan, Janice M., 'Mrs Robinson's "Day-book of Iniquity": Reading Bodies of/and Evidence in the Context of the 1858 Medical Reform Act', in *The Female Body in Medicine and Literature*, ed. by Andrew Mangham and Greta Depledge (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012 [2011]), pp. 169-81.

Anonymous, 'The Ghost in the Bank of England' (1879), in *Victorian Ghost Stories* (London: Senate, 1995 [1936]), pp. 242-87.

Anonymous, 'Minor Notices', *Saturday Review*, 55. 1420 (Jan 13th 1883), 59-61.

Anonymous, 'Mrs Mona Caird's Craze', *Fun*, 48. 1215 (Aug 22nd 1888), 78.

Anonymous, 'Our Library Table' [Book Reviews], *The Athenaeum*, 3418 (April 29th 1893), 535.

Anonymous, 'The Decline of Literature', *Bow Bells*, 25. 325 (Mar 23rd 1894), 298.

Anonymous, 'Mrs Oliphant: By One Who Knew Her', *Academy*, 52. 1313 (July 3rd 1897), 15-16.

Arata, Stephen, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Identity and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Arias, Rosario, and Patricia Pulham, 'Introduction', in *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past*, ed. by Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. xi-xxvi.

Armstrong, Isobel, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination, 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Ashley, Mike, 'Introduction', in *Unforgettable Ghost Stories by Women Writers*, ed. by Mike Ashley (Mineola: Dover, 2008), pp. v-vi.

Ashley, Mike, and William G. Contento (eds.), *The Supernatural Index: A Listing of Fantasy, Supernatural, Occult, Weird, and Horror Anthologies* (Westport: Greenwood, 1995).

Auerbach, Nina, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

--- 'Ghosts of Ghosts', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32. 1 (2004), 277-84.

Austen, Jane, *Northanger Abbey* (London: Reader's Digest, 2008 [1817]).

Baldick, Chris, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, ed. by Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1992]), pp. xi-xxiii.

Baldwin, Dean, *Art and Commerce in the British Short Story, 1880-1950* (London and Vermont: Pickering & Chatto, 2013).

Baldwin, Louisa, 'The Weird of the Walfords', *Longman's Magazine*, 15. 85 (Nov 1889), 47-62.

--- 'Many Waters Cannot Quench Love' (1895), in *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*, ed. by Richard Dalby (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1992 [1988]), pp. 255-62.

Bann, Jennifer, 'Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency: The Changing Figure of the Nineteenth-Century Spectre', *Victorian Studies*, 51. 4 (2009), 663-86.

--- 'Review of *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism: The Haunting Interval*' [reviewed 8/2/13], *Review 19* <http://test.nbol-19.org/view_doc.php?index=266> [accessed 4/4/14].

Basham, Diana, *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

Bashford, Alison, *Purity and Pollution: Gender, Embodiment and Victorian Medicine* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000 [1998]).

de Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, trans. by H. M. Parshley (London: Picador, 1988 [1949]).

Beer, Gillian, '"Authentic Tidings of Invisible Things": Vision and the Invisible in the Late Nineteenth Century', in *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, ed. by Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 83-98.

Behlmer, George K., 'Grave Doubts: Victorian Medicine, Moral Panic, and the Signs of Death', *The Journal of British Studies*, 42. 2 (April 2003), 206-35.

Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 217-51.

Bennett, Andrew, and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory: Key Critical Concepts* (Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995).

Berthin, Christine, *Gothic Hauntings: Melancholy Crypts and Textual Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Black, Clementina, 'On Marriage: A Criticism', *Fortnightly Review*, 47. 280 (April 1890), 586-94.

Blackwood, Algernon, *The Complete John Silence Stories*, ed. by S. T. Joshi (Mineola: Dover, 1997 [1908/1917]).

Blain, Virginia, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy (eds.), *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1990).

Blair, David, 'Introduction', to *Gothic Short Stories*, ed. by David Blair (Ware: Wordsworth, 2002), pp. viii-xxvi.

Blavatsky, Madame, 'The Ensouled Violin', in *Nightmare Tales* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892), pp. 98-133.

Bleiler, E. F., 'Introduction', in *The Collected Ghost Stories of Mrs. J. H. Riddell* (New York: Dover, 1977).

Bordo, Susan, 'Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body' (1993), in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, ed. by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 246-57.

Botting, Fred, 'Horror', in *The Handbook of the Gothic (Second Edition)*, ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009 [1998]), pp. 184-92.

Bown, Nicola, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell, 'Introduction', in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1-19.

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth, 'The Cold Embrace' (1860), in *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*, ed. by Richard Dalby (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1992 [1988]), pp. 43-50.

--- 'The Shadow in the Corner', *All the Year Round*, 23. 573 (Nov 22nd 1879), 1-11.

Brake, Laurel, and Julie F. Codell, 'Introduction: Encountering the Press', in *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers* , ed. by Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 1-7.

Brake, Laurel, and Marysa Demoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (London: Academia Press, 2009).

Brandes, Holger, 'Castration Anxiety', in *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural and Historical Encyclopaedia*, ed. by Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson (California: ABC-CLIO, 2004), pp. 127-28.

Braun, Heather L., 'Idle Vampires and Decadent Maidens: Sensation, the Supernatural, and Mary E. Braddon's Disappointing Femmes Fatales', in *Antifeminism and the Victorian Novel: Rereading Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*, ed. by Tamara S. Wagner (Amherst: Cambria, 2009), pp. 235-54.

--- *The Rise and Fall of the Femme Fatale in British Literature, 1790-1910* (Plymouth: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012).

Briggs, Julia, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1977).

--- *A Woman of Passion: The Life of E. Nesbit, 1858-1924* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

British Periodicals Database <http://search.proquest.com/britishperiodicals> [last accessed 9/12/14].

Bronfen, Elisabeth, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1847]).

--- 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell' (1850), in *Wuthering Heights (Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism)*, by Emily Brontë, ed. by Linda H. Peterson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992 [1847]), pp. 15-20.

Brooks, Peter, *Realist Vision* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005).

Broughton, Rhoda, 'The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth' [published under 'the author of "Cometh Up As a Flower"'], *Temple Bar*, 22 (Feb 1868), 340-48.

--- 'Behold, it was a Dream!' [published anonymously], *Temple Bar*, 36 (Nov 1872), 503-16.

--- 'What It Meant' (1881), in *Rhoda Broughton's Ghost Stories and Other Tales of Mystery and Suspense* (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995), pp. 119-30.

--- 'Betty's Visions' (1886), in Broughton (1995), pp. 71-94.

Brown, Bill, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28. 1: Things (Autumn 2001), 1-22.

Buse, Peter, and Andrew Stott, 'Introduction: A Future for Haunting', in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), pp. 1-20.

Caird, Mona, 'Marriage', *Westminster Review*, 130. 1 (July 1888), 186-201.

--- 'The Lot of Women', *Westminster Review*, 174. 1 (July 1910), 52-59.

Calder, Jenni, 'Introduction', in *A Beleaguered City and Other Tales of the Seen and the Unseen*, by Margaret Oliphant, ed. by Jenni Calder (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000), pp. vii-xviii.

--- 'Notes', in Oliphant (2000), pp. 405-11.

--- 'Through Mrs Oliphant's Library Window', *Women's Writing*, 10. 3 (2003), 485-502.

Chavez, Julia M., 'Wandering Readers and the Pedagogical Potential of *Temple Bar*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 40. 2 (Summer 2007), 126-50.

Clery, E. J., *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 [1995]).

Colby, Robert, and Vineta Colby, '*A Beleaguered City*: A Fable for the Victorian Age', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 16. 4 (Mar 1962), 283-301.

Colby, Vineta, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2003).

Colligan, Colette, and Margaret Linley, 'Introduction: The Nineteenth-Century Invention of Media', in *Media, Technology, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century: Image, Sound, Touch*, ed. by Colette Colligan and Margaret Linley (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 1-22.

Collins, Wilkie, *The Woman in White* (London: Penguin, 1985 [1859-60]).

Cooke, Simon, 'Margaret Oliphant's "The Library Window" and the Idea of "Adolescent Insanity"', *Victorians Institute Journal*, 34 (2006), 243-57.

Corelli, Marie, *The Sorrows of Satan, Or the Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2013 [1895]).

Cottom, Daniel, 'On the Dignity of Tables', *Critical Inquiry*, 14. 4 (Summer 1988), 765-783.

Cox, Michael, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century Ghost Stories*, ed. by Michael Cox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. xi-xix.

--- 'Notes and Sources', in Cox (1996), pp. 411-21.

Cox, Michael, and R. A. Gilbert, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1991]), pp. ix-xx.

--- 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Book of [English] Ghost Stories,* ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1986]), pp. ix-xvii.

Crary, Jonathan, 'Modernising Vision', in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. by Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), pp. 29-44.

Crawford, F. Marion, 'For the Blood is the Life' (1905), in *Great Vampire Stories* (London: Chancellor Press, 2002), pp. 9-21.

Croker, B. M. '"To Let"' (1890), in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1991]), pp. 346-59.

--- 'The Khitmatgar', *London Society*, 60. 360 (Dec 1891), 62-71.

--- 'The Dak Bungalow at Dakor' (1893), in *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [2005]), pp. 96-108.

Crowe, Catherine, *The Night-Side of Nature; Or, Ghosts and Ghost-Seers*, intro. by Colin Wilson (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1986 [1848]).

Cunningham, Gail, 'He-Notes: Reconstructing Masculinity', in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, ed. by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 94-106.

Cunningham, Valentine, 'Why Ekphrasis?', *Classical Philology*, 102. 1 (Jan 2007), 57-71.

Dalby, Richard, 'Preface', in *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*, ed. by Richard Dalby (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1992 [1988]), pp. vii-viii.

--- 'Introduction', in *The Virago Book of Ghost Stories: The Twentieth Century, Vol. 2*, ed. by Richard Dalby (London: Virago, 1991), pp. x-xv.

Danahay, Martin A., *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture: Literature, Art and Masculinity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

Daunton, Martin, 'Afterword', in *Victorian Investments: New Perspectives on Finance and Culture*, ed. by Nancy Henry and Cannon Schmitt (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 202-19.

Davies, David Stuart, 'Introduction', in *The Power of Darkness: Tales of Terror*, by E. Nesbit (Ware: Wordsworth, 2006), pp. 7-13.

Davis, Colin, '*État Présent*: Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms', *French Studies*, 59. 3 (2005), 373-79.

Deane, Bradley, *The Making of the Victorian Novelist: Anxieties of Authorship in the Mass Market* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

Decker, Donna, 'Reading Books and Body: New Woman and Authority', in *New Woman Writers, Authority and the Body*, ed. by Melissa Purdue and Stacey Floyd (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 89-118.

DeLamotte, Eugenia C., *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Delany, Paul, *Literature, Money and the Marketplace: From Trollope to Amis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

Denisoff, Dennis, 'Vernon Lee, Decadent Contamination and the Productivist Ethos', in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, ed. by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 75-90.

Derrida, Jacques, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, intro. by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (New York and London: Routledge, 1994 [1993]).

Dever, Carolyn, *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

DiBiasio, Becky, 'The British and Irish Ghost Story and Tale of the Supernatural: 1880-1945', in *A Companion to the British and Irish Short Story*, ed. by Cheryl Alexander Malcolm and David Malcolm (Chichester: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 81-95.

Dickens, Charles, *A Christmas Carol* (London: Vintage, 2009 [1843]).

--- *Bleak House* (London: Vintage, 2008 [1852-3]).

--- *Little Dorrit* (London: Vintage, 2008 [1855-7]).

--- 'To Be Taken with a Grain of Salt' (1865), in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1991]), pp. 55-64.

Dickerson, Vanessa D., *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996).

Dowie, Ménie Muriel, *Gallia*, ed. by Helen Small (London: J. M. Dent, 1995 [1895]).

Dryden, Linda, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Du Maurier, Daphne, 'The Pool' (1959), in *The Virago Book of Ghost Stories: The Twentieth Century, Vol. 2*, ed. by Richard Dalby (London: Virago, 1991), pp. 57-80.

Eagle Russett, Cynthia, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989).

Eagleton, Terry, 'It is not quite true that I have a body, and not quite true that I am one either' [Review of Peter Brooks' *Body Work*], *London Review of Books*, 27. 5 (1993), 7.

Easley, Alexis, *First-Person Anonymous: Women Writers and Victorian Print Media, 1830-1870* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004).

Edwards, Amelia B., 'Was it an Illusion?: A Parson's Story' (1881), in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1991]), pp. 239-55.

Egerton, George, *Keynotes & Discords*, intro. by Martha Vicinus (London: Virago, 1983 [1893/1894]).

Ehnenn, Jill R., *Women's Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

Eliot, George, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin, 1994 [1871-2]).

Ellis, S. M., *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and Others* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1951 [1931]).

Everett, H. D., 'The Death Mask' (1920), in *The Crimson Blind and Other Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2006), pp. 9-17.

Falconer, Lanoe, 'Cecilia de Noël', (1891), in *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*, ed. by Richard Dalby (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1992 [1988]), pp. 185-254.

Ferguson, Christine, 'Recent Studies in Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism', *Literature Compass*, 9. 6 (2012), 431-40.

--- *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

Fick, Thomas H., 'Authentic Ghosts and Real Bodies: Negotiating Power in Nineteenth-Century Women's Ghost Stories', *South Atlantic Review*, 64. 2 (Spring 1999), 81-97.

Fielding, Penny, 'Other Worlds: Oliphant's Spectralization of the Modern', *Women's Writing*, 6. 2 (1999), 201-13.

Finney, Gail, *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theater at the Turn of the Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

Flint, Kate, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Fluhr, Nicole, 'Empathy and Identity in Vernon Lee's *Hauntings*', *Victorian Studies*, 48. 2 (Winter 2006), 287-94.

Foreman-Peck, James, 'Quantitative Analysis of the Victorian Economy', in *New Perspectives on the Late Victorian Economy: Essays in Quantitative Economic History, 1860-1914*, ed. by James Foreman-Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 1-34.

Frank, Cathrine O., *Law, Literature, and the Transmission of Culture in England, 1837-1925* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010).

Frank, Frederick S., and Anthony Magistrale (eds.), *The Poe Encyclopedia* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997).

Fraser, Hilary, Stephanie Green and Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Frazer, Sir James, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1993 [1890]).

Freedgood, Elaine, *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Freeman, Nick, 'E. Nesbit's New Woman Gothic', *Women's Writing*, 15. 3 (2008), 454-69.

Freud, Sigmund, 'The Uncanny' (1919), in *Literary Theory: An Anthology (revised edition)*, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2001 [1998]), pp. 154-67.

Gagnier, Regenia, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987).

Galvan, Jill, *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, the Occult, and Communication Technologies, 1859-1919* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

Gardner, Burdett, *The Lesbian Imagination (Victorian Style): A Psychological and Critical Study of Vernon Lee* (New York: Gardland, 1987 [1954]).

Gardner, Viv, 'Introduction', in *The New Woman and her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre, 1850-1914*, ed. by Viv Gardner and Susan Rutherford (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 1-14.

Garrett, Peter K., *Gothic Reflections: Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

Gaskell, Elizabeth, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Penguin, 1975 [1857]).

Ghost Stories for Christmas with Christopher Lee, dir. by Eleanor Yule (BBC, 2000).

Gilbert, R. A., 'Ghost Stories', in *The Handbook of the Gothic (Second Edition)*, ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009 [1998]), pp. 124-25.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984 [1979]).

Gillies, Mary Ann, *The Professional Literary Agent in Britain, 1880-1920* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

Gissing, George, *New Grub Street* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008 [1891]).

Glover, David, and Scott McCracken, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction*, ed. by David Glover and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 1-14.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, *Theory of Colours*, trans. by Charles Lock Eastlake (London: John Murray, 1840 [1810]).

Gostick, Jesse, *The Employment of the Dead* (Cambridge: J. Neal, 1862).

Grand, Sarah, *The Heavenly Twins* (New York: The Cassell Publishing Co, 1893).

--- 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', *North American Review*, 158 (1894), 275.

Green-Lewis, Jennifer, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

Grimes, Hilary, *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny, and Scenes of Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

Grosz, Elizabeth, 'Psychoanalysis and the Body' (1992), in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, ed. by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 267-71.

--- 'Sexed Bodies' (1994), in *Continental Feminism Reader*, ed. by Ann J. Cahill and Jennifer Hansen (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), pp. 292-322.

Gurney, Edmund, Frederic W. H. Myers, and Frank Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living* (London: Trübner & Co., 1886).

H., J. C., 'The "Eternal Feminine" Question', *The Magazine of Music*, 11. 6 (Jun 1894), 125-26.

Handley, Sasha, *Visions of an Unseen World: Ghost Beliefs and Ghost Stories in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007).

Harwood, John, *The Séance: A Victorian Mystery* (London: Vintage, 2009 [2008])

Hay, Simon, *A History of the Modern British Ghost Story* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Hedgecock, Jennifer, *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat* (London: Cambria Press, 2008).

Heilmann, Ann, 'Mrs Grundy's Rebellion: Margaret Oliphant Between Orthodoxy and New Woman', *Women's Writing*, 6. 2 (1999), 215-37.

Heller, Tamar, 'Textual Seductions: Women's Reading and Writing in Margaret Oliphant's "The Library Window"', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 25. 1 (1997), 23-37.

Hendershot, Cyndy, 'Ghost Stories', in *A Guide to United States Popular Culture*, ed. by Ray B. Browne and Pat Browne (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), pp. 319-20.

Henry, Nancy, '"Rushing into Eternity": Suicide and Finance in Victorian Fiction', in *Victorian Investments: New Perspectives on Finance and Culture*, ed. by Nancy Henry and Cannon Schmitt (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 161-81.

Henry, Nancy, and Cannon Schmitt, 'Introduction: Finance, Capital, Culture', in Henry and Schmitt (2009)*, pp. 1-12.

Hepburn, Allan, 'Introduction: Inheritance and Disinheritance in the Novel', in *Troubled Legacies: Narrative and Inheritance*, ed. by Allan Hepburn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 3-25.

Hodgson, W[illiam]. H[ope]., *The Casebook of Carnacki the Ghost-Finder*, ed. by David Stuart Davies (Ware: Wordsworth, 2006 [1913]).

Hoeveler, Diane Long, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

Hogle, Jerrold E. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Horton, Susan R., 'Were They Having Fun Yet? Victorian Optical Gadgetry, Modernist Selves', in *Victorian Literature and the Visual Imagination*, ed. by Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Berkley, L. A. and London: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 1-26.

Houghton, Walter E. (ed.), *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

Houston, Gail Turley, *From Dickens to Dracula: Gothic, Economics, and Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Hughes, Linda K., 'Daughters of Danaus and Daphne: Women Poets and the Marriage Question', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34 (2006), 481-93.

Hughes, William, 'Victorian Medicine and the Gothic', in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 186-201.

Hunt, Violet, 'The Prayer' (1895), in *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*, ed. by Richard Dalby (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1992 [1988]), pp. 263-85.

Hurley, Kelly, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

--- 'British Gothic Fiction, 1885-1930', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction,* ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 189-208.

Itzkowitz, David C., 'Fair Enterprise or Extravagant Speculation: Investment, Speculation, and Gambling in Victorian England', in *Victorian Investments: New Perspectives on Finance and Culture*, ed. by Nancy Henry and Cannon Schmitt (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 98-119.

Jackson, Rosemary, 'Introduction', in *What Did Miss Darrington See?: An Anthology of Feminist Supernatural Fiction,* ed. by Jessica Amanda Salmonson (New York: The Feminist Press, 1989), pp. xv-xxxv.

James, Henry, 'The Romance of Certain Old Clothes' (1868), in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1991]), pp. 83-99.

--- 'The Ghostly Rental', *Scribner's Monthly*, 12. 5 (Sept 1876).

--- *The Turn of the Screw (Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism)*, ed. by Peter G. Beidler (Boston and New York: Bedford / St Martin's, 2004 [1898]).

James, M. R., 'Count Magnus' (1904), in *Ghost Stories*, by M. R. James (London: Penguin, 1994 [1931]), pp. 64-74.

--- 'The Diary of Mr Poynter' (1919), in *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century Ghost Stories*, ed. by Michael Cox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 46-55.

--- 'The Malice of Inanimate Objects' (1933), in *A Warning to the Curious and Other Ghost Stories* (Los Angeles: Indo-European Publishing, 2011), pp. 80-85.

Jaquet, Alison, 'The Disturbed Domestic: Supernatural Spaces in Ellen Wood's Fiction', *Women's Writing*, 15. 2 (Aug 2008), 244-58.

Jay, Elisabeth, *Mrs Oliphant: "A Fiction to Herself" – A Literary Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

--- 'Introduction', in *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant*, ed. by Elisabeth Jay (Ontario: Broadview, 2002 [1899]), pp. 7-28.

Johnson, Paul, *Making the Market: Victorian Origins of Corporate Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Johnston, Susan, *Women and Domestic Experience in Victorian Political Fiction* (Westport: Greenwood, 2001).

Kandola, Sondeep, *Writers and Their Work: Vernon Lee* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2010).

Kelleher, Margaret, 'Charlotte Riddell's *A Struggle for Fame*: The Field of Women's Literary Production', *Colby Quarterly*, 36. 2 (June 2000), 116-31.

Killeen, Jarlath, *Gothic Literature, 1825-1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009).

--- 'Gendering the ghost story? Victorian women and the challenge of the phantom', in *The Ghost Story from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century: A Ghostly Genre*, ed. by Helen Conrad O'Briain and Julie Anne Stevens (Dublin: Four Courts Press Ltd., 2010), pp. 81-96.

--- 'Victorian Gothic Pulp Fiction', in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 43-56.

Knowles, Claire, 'Sensibility Gone Mad: Or, Drusilla, Buffy and the (D)evolution of the Heroine of Sensibility', in *Postfeminist Gothic: Critical Interventions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Benjamin A. Brabon and Stéphanie Genz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 140-53.

Kohlke, Marie-Luise, 'Neo-Victorian Female Gothic: Fantasies of Self-Abjection', in *Neo-Victorian Gothic: Horror, Violence and Degeneration in the Re-Imagined Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben (Amsterdam: Rodopi B. V., 2012), pp. 221-50.

Kolentsis, Alysia, 'Home Invasions: Masculinity and Domestic Power in the Supernatural Fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Rhoda Broughton', in *Ghosts, Stories, Histories: Ghost Stories and Alternative Histories*, ed. by Sladja Blazan (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), pp. 60-80.

Kontou, Tatiana, *Spiritualism and Women's Writing: From the Fin de Siècle to the Neo-Victorian* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

--- 'Introduction', in *Women and the Victorian Occult*, ed. by Tatiana Kontou (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), pp. 1-7.

Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982 [1980]).

Lamont, Peter, 'Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence', *The Historical Journal*, 47. 4 (2004), 897-920.

Landon, Perceval, 'Thurnley Abbey' (1908), in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1991]), pp. 466-79.

Lang, Andrew, 'At the Sign of the Ship', *Longman's Magazine*, 22. 129 (Jul 1893), 273-82.

--- *Cock Lane and Common Sense* (Auckland: Aeterna, 2010 [1894/5]).

Langland, Elizabeth, 'Introduction' (2002), in *Phoebe Junior*, by Margaret Oliphant (Ontario: Broadview, 2002 [1876]), pp. 7-27.

Langley Moore, Doris, *E. Nesbit: A Biography* (London: Ernest Benn, 1933).

Laqueur, Thomas, 'Form in Ashes', *Representations*, 104. 1 (Fall 2008), 50-72.

Law, Graham, 'Sensation Fiction and the Publishing Industry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 168-81.

Ledbetter, Kathryn, *British Victorian Women's Periodicals: Beauty, Civilization, and Poetry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Ledger, Sally, 'The New Woman and feminist fictions', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 153-68.

Lee, Vernon, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (London: W. Satchell, 1880).

--- 'Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art' (1880, 1881), in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, ed. by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Plymouth: Broadview, 2006 [1890]), pp. 291-319.

--- *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: W. Satchell, 1881 [Kindle edition]).

--- 'A Culture-Ghost: or, Winthrop's Adventure' [published anonymously], *Fraser's Magazine*, 613 (Jan 1881), 1-29.

--- *Miss Brown,* 3 Vols. (London: Forgotten Books, 2013 [1884]).

--- dedicatory letter which precedes 'Oke of Okehurst; or, The Phantom Lover' (1886), in Lee (2006), p. 105.

--- 'Oke of Okehurst; Or, The Phantom Lover' (1886/1890), in Lee (2006), pp. 105-53.

--- 'Amour Dure', *Murray's Magazine*, 1. 1 (Jan 1887).

--- 'Amour Dure: Passages from the Diary of Spiridion Trepka' (1887/1890), in Lee (2006), pp. 41-76.

--- 'A Wicked Voice' (1887), in Lee (2006), pp. 154-81.

--- 'Preface' (1889), in Lee (2006), pp. 37-40.

--- 'Dionea' (1890), in Lee (2006), pp. 77-104.

--- 'The Craft of Words', *The New Review*, 11. 67 (Dec 1894), 571-80.

--- 'The Image', *Cornhill Magazine*, 26. 155 (May 1896), 516-23.

--- 'The Economic Dependence of Women', *The North American Review*, 175. 548 (Jul 1902), 71-90.

--- 'The Doll' (1927), in *What Did Miss Darrington See?: An Anthology of Feminist Supernatural Fiction,* ed. by Jessica Amanda Salmonson (New York: The Feminist Press, 1989), pp. 192-200.

Le Fanu, J. Sheridan, 'Ghost Stories of Chapelizod' (1851), in *Ghost Stories and Mysteries*, ed. by E. F. Bleiler (Mineola: Dover, 1975), pp. 116-17.

--- 'Green Tea' (1869), in *In a Glass Darkly*, by J. Sheridan Le Fanu, ed. by Robert Tracy (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), pp. 5-37.

Leighton, Angela, 'Ghosts, Aestheticism, and Vernon Lee', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28. 1 (2000), 1-14.

Liggins, Emma, 'Introduction', in *Weird Stories* [1882], by Charlotte Riddell (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2009), pp. i-vi.

Little, Jas. Stanley, 'New Novels', *The Academy*, 1101 (June 10th 1893), 501-02.

Lively, Penelope, 'Revenant as Typewriter' (1978), in *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century Ghost Stories*, ed. by Michael Cox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 331-43.

Llewellyn, Mark, 'Spectrality, S(p)ecularity, and Textuality: Or, Some Reflections in the Glass', in *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past*, ed. by Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 23-42.

Logan, Peter Melville, *Victorian Fetishism: Intellectuals and Primitives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009).

Lootens, Tricia, 'Fear of Furniture: Commodity Gothicism and the Teaching of Victorian Literature', in *Approaches to Teaching Gothic Fiction: The British and American Traditions*, ed. by Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2003), pp. 148-58.

Luckhurst, Roger, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

--- 'Introduction', in *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [2005]), pp. ix-xxxi.

--- 'The public sphere, popular culture and the true meaning of the zombie apocalypse', in *The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction*, ed. by David Glover and Scott McCracken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 68-85.

Lurie, Alison, 'The Highboy' (1990), in *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century Ghost Stories*, ed. by Michael Cox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 390-402.

Lynch, Eve M., 'Spectral politics: the Victorian ghost story and the domestic servant', in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 67-86.

Lysack, Krista, *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008).

MacDonald, George, 'Uncle Cornelius His Story' (1869), in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1991]), pp. 130-49.

Machen, Arthur, 'The Great God Pan' (1890/1894), in *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [2005]), pp. 183-233.

--- 'The Inmost Light' (1894), in *The White People and Other Weird Stories*, by Arthur Machen, ed. by S. T. Joshi (London: Penguin, 2011), pp. 1-28.

Mahoney, Kristin, 'Haunted Collections: Vernon Lee and Ethical Consumption', *Criticism*, 48. 1 (Winter 2006), 39-67.

Malon, Katherine, 'Beleaguered City, A', in *The Facts on File Companion to the British Short Story*, ed. by Andrew Maunder (New York: Infobase, 2007), p. 33.

Maltz, Diane, 'Engaging "Delicate Brains": From Working-Class Enculturation to Upper-Class Lesbian Liberation in Vernon Lee and Kit Anstruther-Thomson's Psychological Aesthetics', in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. by Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia, 1999), pp. 221-29.

Mangham, Andrew, and Greta Depledge, 'Introduction', in *The Female Body in Medicine and Literature*, ed. by Andrew Mangham and Greta Depledge (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012 [2011]), pp. 1-15.

Mannocchi, Phyllis F., 'Vernon Lee and Kit Anstruther-Thomson: A Study of Love and Collaboration Between Romantic Friends', *Women's Studies*, 12. 2 (1986), 129-48.

Margree, Victoria, and Bryony Randall, 'Fin-de-Siècle Gothic', in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 217-33.

Markham Lester, V., *Victorian Insolvency: Bankruptcy, Imprisonment for Debt, and Company Winding-Up in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

Marsh, Richard, *The Beetle*, ed. by Julian Wolfreys (Plymouth: Broadview, 2004 [1897]).

Martin, Kirsty, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Marx, Karl, 'Capital' (1867), in *Literary Theory: An Anthology (revised edition)*, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2001 [1998]), pp. 268-76.

--- *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1 – Part 1, The Process of Capitalist Production*, ed. by Friedrich Engels (New York: Cosimo Inc., 2007 [1867]).

Maturin, Charles, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008 [1820]).

Maxwell, Catherine, and Patricia Pulham, 'Introduction', in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, by Vernon Lee, ed. by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Plymouth: Broadview, 2006 [1890]), pp. 9-27.

McCorristine, Shane, 'Academia, Avocation and Ludicity in the Supernatural Fiction of M. R. James', *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*, 13 (2007), 54-65.

--- *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Michie, Ranald C., *Guilty Money: The City of London in Victorian England and Edwardian Culture, 1815-1914* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009).

Mighall, Robert, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Miles, Robert, 'Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823)', in *The Handbook of the Gothic (Second Edition)*, ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009 [1998]), pp. 76-83.

Millais, John Everett, *Speak! Speak!* [Oil on canvas], Tate, London (1894-5).

Moers, Ellen, 'Female Gothic' (1974), in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, ed. by George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher (London: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 77-87.

Moi, Toril, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990 [1985]).

Mulholland, Rosa, 'The Haunted Organist of Hurly Burly', *All the Year Round*, 16. 394 (Nov 10th 1866), 427-32.

Mulock [Craik], Dinah, 'The Last House in C– Street' (1856), in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1991]), pp. 44-54.

Mulvey, Laura, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), in *Feminism and Film*, ed. by E. Ann Kaplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [2000]), pp. 34-47.

Mulvey-Roberts, Marie, 'Dracula and the Doctors: Bad Blood, Menstrual Taboo and the New Woman', in *Bram Stoker: History, Psychoanalysis and the Gothic*, ed. by William Hughes and Andrew Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), pp. 78-95.

--- 'Introduction to the First Edition', in *The Handbook of the Gothic (Second Edition)*, ed. by Marie Mulvey-Roberts (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009 [1998]), pp. xx-xxiii.

Nelson, Carolyn Christensen, 'Introduction to Part I: Short Stories by New Woman Writers', in *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles and Drama of the 1890s*, ed. by Carolyn Christensen Nelson (Plymouth: Broadview, 2000), pp. 3-6.

Nesbit, Edith, 'John Charrington's Wedding' [published anonymously], *Temple Bar*, 93 (Sept 1891), 105-11.

--- 'The Ebony Frame', *Longman's Magazine*, 18. 108 (Oct 1891), 605-15.

--- 'The Mass for the Dead', *Argosy*, 53 (Apr 1892), 345-51.

--- *Grim Tales* (London: A. D. Innes & Co., 1893).

--- 'From the Dead', in Nesbit (1893), pp. 77-109.

--- 'Man-Size in Marble', in Nesbit (1893), pp. 111-43.

--- 'Hurst of Hurstcote' [published anonymously], *Temple Bar*, 98. 391 (June 1893), 262-72.

--- *Something Wrong* (London: A. D. Innes & Co., 1893), pp. 7-36.

--- 'My School-Days, Part III', *Girl's Own Paper* (Dec 1896).

--- 'My School-Days, Part V: The Mummies at Bordeaux', *Girl's Own Paper* (Feb 1897).

--- *Five Children and It* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1902).

--- *The Railway Children* (London: Wells, Gardner, Darton & Co., 1906).

--- 'The Three Drugs' (1908), in *The Power of Darkness: Tales of Terror* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2006), pp. 45-61.

--- 'The Five Senses' (1909), in Nesbit (2006), pp. 153-67.

Noble Ashcroft, James, 'New Novels', *The Academy*, 1115 (September 16th 1893), 227-28.

Nunokawa, Jeff, *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

O'Dowd, Mary (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Vol. 5: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

O'Malley, Patrick R., *Catholicism, Sexual Deviance, and Victorian Gothic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Oliphant, Margaret, *Miss Marjoribanks: A Novel* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1867 [1866]).

--- 'A Beleaguered City' [published anonymously], *New Quarterly Magazine*, 11. 22 (Jan 1879), 73-149.

--- 'Earthbound: A Story of the Seen and the Unseen', *Fraser's Magazine*, 601 (Jan 1880), 118-44.

--- 'A Beleaguered City' (1880), in in *A Beleaguered City and Other Tales of the Seen and the Unseen*, by Margaret Oliphant, ed. by Jenni Calder (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000), p. 1-105.

--- 'The Grievances of Women' [published under 'M. O. W. O.'], *Fraser's Magazine*, 605 (May 1880), 698-710.

--- 'The Open Door' [published anonymously], *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 131. 795 (Jan 1882), 1-30.

--- 'A Little Pilgrim: In the Unseen' [published anonymously], *Macmillan's Magazine*, 46. 271 (May 1882), 1-19.

--- 'The Little Pilgrim Goes Up Higher' [published anonymously], *Macmillan's Magazine*, 46. 275 (Sept 1882), 337-55.

--- 'The Lady's Walk: A Story of the Seen and Unseen' (1), *Longman's Magazine*, 1. 2 (Dec 1882), 229-52.

--- 'The Lady's Walk: A Story of the Seen and Unseen' (2), *Longman's Magazine*, 1. 3 (Jan 1883), 341-64.

--- 'Old Lady Mary: A Story of the Seen and the Unseen' [published anonymously], *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 135. 819 (Jan 1884), 1-45.

--- 'The Portrait: A Story of the Seen and the Unseen' [published anonymously], *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 137. 831 (Jan 1885), 1-28.

--- 'The Land of Darkness' [published anonymously], *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 141. 855 (Jan 1887), 1-36.

--- 'The Anti-Marriage League' [published under 'M. O. W. O.'], *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 159. 963 (Jan 1896), 135-49.

--- 'The Library Window: A Story of the Seen and the Unseen' [published anonymously], *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 159. 963 (Jan 1896), 1-30.

--- *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant*, ed. by Elisabeth Jay (Ontario: Broadview, 2002 [1899]).

Olverson, T. D., *Women Writers and the Dark Side of Late-Victorian Hellenism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Onslow, Barbara, 'Deceiving Images, Revealing Images: The Portrait in Victorian Women's Writing', *Victorian Poetry*, 33. 3-4 (Autumn-Winter 1995), 450-75.

Oppenheim, Janet, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Otis, Laura, 'Introduction', to *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology,* ed. by Laura Otis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [2002]), pp. xvii-xxviii.

Ousby, Ian (ed.), *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1993]).

Owen, Alex, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004 [1989]).

Oxford English Dictionary Online <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 26/6/14].

Palliser, Charles, *The Unburied* (London: Phoenix House, 2000 [1999]).

Pater, Walter, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, intro. by Kenneth Clark (London: Fontana Library, 1961 [1873]).

Penny Dreadful, Showtime and Sky Atlantic, Spring 2014.

Penzoldt, Peter, *The Supernatural in Fiction* (London: P. Nevill, 1952).

Perkins Stetson, Charlotte, 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892), in *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, ed. by Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1992]), pp. 249-63.

Peterson, Linda H., *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Phegley, Jennifer, *Educating the Proper Woman Reader: Victorian Family Magazines and the Cultural Health of the Nation* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2004).

--- 'Domesticating the Sensation Novelist: Ellen Price Wood as Author and Editor of the *Argosy Magazine*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 38. 2 (Summer 2005), 180-98.

Poe, Edgar Allan, 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839), in *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, ed. by Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1992]), pp. 85-101.

--- 'The Philosophy of Composition', *Graham's American Monthly Magazine of Literature and Art* (April 1846).

Poznar, Susan, 'Whose Body? The "Willing" or "Unwilling" Mesmerized Woman in Late Victorian Fiction', in *Women and the Victorian Occult*, ed. by Tatiana Kontou (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), pp. 138-61.

Psomiades, Kathy Alexis, '"Still Burning from this Strangling Embrace": Vernon Lee on Desire and Aesthetics', in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. by Richard Dellamora (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 21-42.

--- 'Margaret Oliphant', in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of British Literature, Vol. 4*, ed. by David Scott Kastan (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 139-42.

Pulham, Patricia, 'The Castrato and the Cry in Vernon Lee's Wicked Voices', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 30. 2 (2002), 421-37.

--- *Art and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee's Supernatural Tales* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

Pykett, Lyn, *The "Improper Feminine": The Woman's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (Oxon: Routledge, 1992).

Quigley, Christine, *The Corpse: A History* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1996).

Radcliffe, Ann, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, 16. 61 (Jan 1826), 145-52.

Reid, Julia, '"King Romance" in *Longman's Magazine*: Andrew Lang and Literary Populism', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 44. 4 (Winter 2011), 354-76.

Renaut, Alain, *The Era of the Individual: A Contribution to a History of Subjectivity*, trans. by M. B. DeBevoise and Franklin Philip (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997 [1989]).

Richardson, Angelique, and Chris Willis, 'Introduction', in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, ed. by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 1-38.

Richardson, Angelique, 'Introduction', in *Women Who Did: Stories by Men and Women, 1830-1914*, ed. by Angelique Richardson (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. xxxi-lxxxi.

--- *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Riddell, Mrs J. H. [Charlotte], *The Rich Husband* [published anonymously] (London: Charles Skeet, 1858).

--- *George Geith of Fen Court* (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1900 [1864]).

--- *Maxwell Drewitt* (London: Hutchinson and Co., date unknown [1865]).

--- 'About Poultry and Peas', *Illustrated Review*, 1. 129 (June 1874), 371-72.

--- 'Literature as a Profession', *Illustrated Review: A Fortnightly Journal of Literature, Science and Art*, 2. 132 (July 1874), 6-7.

--- *The Uninhabited House* (Marston Gate: Aeterna, 2010 [1875]).

--- 'Sandy the Tinker' [published anonymously], *London Society*, 37. 228 (Dec 1880), 21-29.

--- *A Struggle for Fame* (London: Bentley, 1883).

--- *Weird Stories* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1885 [1882]).

--- 'Nut Bush Farm', in Riddell (1885), pp. 104-74.

--- 'Old Mrs Jones', in Riddell (1885), pp. 230-314.

--- 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk', in Riddell (1885), pp. 175-206.

--- 'The Open Door', in Riddell (1885), pp. 48-103.

--- 'Walnut-Tree House', in Riddell (1885), pp. 1-47.

--- 'A Terrible Vengeance' (1889), in *Night Shivers: The Ghost Stories of [Mrs] J. H. Riddell*, by Charlotte Riddell (Ware: Wordsworth, 2008), pp. 293-330.

Rignall, John, *Realist Fiction and the Strolling Spectator* (London: Routledge, 1992).

Ripper Street, BBC and Amazon, 2012-14.

Robb, George, 'Ladies of the Ticker: Women, Investment, and Fraud in England and America, 1850-1930', in *Victorian Investments: New Perspectives on Finance and Culture*, ed. by Nancy Henry and Cannon Schmitt (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 120-40.

Robinson, Amy J., 'An "original and unlooked-for ending"? Irony, the Marriage Plot, and the Antifeminism Debate in Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks*' in *Antifeminism and the Victorian Novel: Rereading Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*, ed. by Tamara S. Wagner (Amherst: Cambria, 2009), pp. 159-76.

Robinson, Solveig C., 'Expanding a "Limited Orbit": Margaret Oliphant, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and the Development of a Critical Voice', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 38. 2 (Summer 2005), 199-220.

Royle, Nicholas, *The Uncanny: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

Salmonson, Jessica Amanda, 'Preface', in *What Did Miss Darrington See?: An Anthology of Feminist Supernatural Fiction,* ed. by Jessica Amanda Salmonson (New York: The Feminist Press, 1989), pp. ix-xiv.

Sanders, Valerie, 'Women, fiction and the marketplace', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1800-1900*, ed. by Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 142-61.

Schaper, Susan E., 'Review of *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural*', *Victorian Studies*, 42. 4 (1999), 677-79.

Schor, Esther H., 'The Haunted Interpreter in Margaret Oliphant's Supernatural Fiction', *Women's Studies*, 22. 3 (1993), 371-88.

Schor, Naomi, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 2007 [1987]).

Senf, Carol A., '*Dracula*: Stoker's Response to the New Woman', *Victorian Studies*, 26. 1 (Autumn 1982), 33-49.

Shanley, Mary Lyndon, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

Shelhamer, Mary Theresa, *Life and Labor in the Spirit World* (Boston: Colby & Rich, 1885).

Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1818]).

Shrimpton, Nicholas, '"Even These Metallic Problems Have Their Melodramatic Side": Money in Victorian Literature', in *Victorian Literature and Finance*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 17-38.

Shuttleworth, Sally, 'Female Circulation: Medical Discourse and Popular Advertising in the Mid-Victorian Era', in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, ed. by Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 47-68.

Sinclair, May, 'The Victim', *The Criterion*, 1. 1 (Oct 1922).

--- 'The Nature of the Evidence' (1923), in *Uncanny Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth, 2006), pp. 113-22.

Smajic, Srdjan, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Smith, Andrew, *The Ghost Story, 1840-1920: A Cultural History* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010).

Smith, Elton E., and Robert Haas (eds.), *The Haunted Mind: The Supernatural in Victorian Literature* (Kent: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1999).

Smyth, Dame Ethel, *What Happened Next* (London: Longmans, Green, 1940).

'Spectre, The', *Ye Vampyres! A Legend, or The National Betting-Ring, Showing What Became of It* (London: Samuel Tinsley, 1875).

Spurzheim, J. G., *Phrenology, or the Doctrine of Mental Phenomena, Vol. 1* (Boston: Marsh, Capen, and Lyon, 1833).

St Clair, William, 'Obituaries: Professor Julia Briggs, English scholar and biographer', *The Independent* (Fri 17th August 2007) <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/professor-julia-briggs-461881.html> [accessed 19/1/11].

Stephens, Elizabeth, 'Anatomies of Desire: Photographic Exhibitions of Female Bodies in Fin-de-Siècle Anatomical Museums', in *Sexuality at the Fin de Siècle: The Making of a 'Central Problem'*, ed. by Peter Cryle and Christopher E. Forth (New Jersey: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp., 2008), pp. 25-41.

Stevenson, Robert, *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2006 [1886]).

Stewart, Clare, '"Weird Fascination": The Response to Victorian Women's Ghost Stories', in *Feminist Readings of Victorian Popular Texts: Divergent Femininities*, ed. by Emma Liggins and Daniel Duffy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 108-25.

Stocking Jr., George W., 'Animism in Theory and Practice: E. B. Tylor's Unpublished "Notes on 'Spiritualism'"', *Man*, 6. 1 (Mar 1971), 88-104.

Stoker, Bram, 'The Judge's House' (1891), in *The Oxford Book of [English] Ghost Stories,* ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1986]), pp. 109-124.

--- *Dracula* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 [1897]).

Stott, Rebecca, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996 [1992]).

Sullivan, Jack, *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978).

Sutherland, Elizabeth, *Ravens and Black Rain: The story of Highland second sight, including a new collection of the prophecies of the Brahan seer* (London: Corgi, 1987 [1985]).

Sutherland, Helen, 'Margaret Oliphant and the Periodical Press', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 84-93.

Talairach-Vielmas, Laurence, *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

Thompson, Nicola Diane, 'Responding to the woman questions: rethinking noncanonical Victorian women novelists', in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. by Nicola Diane Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1-23.

Thurschwell, Pamela, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Thurston, Luke, *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism: The Haunting Interval* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012).

Tracy, Larissa, 'Introduction: A History of Calamities: The Culture of Castration', in *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Larissa Tracy (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), pp. 1-28.

Tromp, Marlene, *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

Tyler, Imogen, 'Against Abjection', *Feminist Theory*, 10. 1 (2009), 77-98.

Tylor, Edward B., *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom,* 2 Vols. (London: J. Murray, 1871).

Tynan, Katharine, 'The Picture on the Wall', *The English Illustrated Magazine*, 147 (Dec 1895), 297-304.

Uglow, Jenny, 'Introduction' (1988), in *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*, ed. by Richard Dalby (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1992 [1988]), pp. ix-vii.

Vann, J. Don, and Rosemary T. VanArsdel, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society*, ed. by J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), pp. 3-8.

Wagner, Tamara S., *Financial Speculation in Victorian Fiction: Plotting Money and the Novel Genre, 1815-1901* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010).

Walker, Leila, 'Ghosts in the House: Margaret Oliphant's Uncanny Response to Feminist
   Success', in *Antifeminism and the Victorian Novel: Rereading Nineteenth-Century Women
   Writers*, ed. by Tamara S. Wagner (Amherst: Cambria, 2009), pp. 177-95.

Wallace, Diana, 'Uncanny Stories: The Ghost Story As Female Gothic', *Gothic Studies*, 6. 1
   (May 2004), 57-68.

Walpole, Horace, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), in *Four Gothic Novels* (Oxford: Oxford
   University Press, 1994), pp. 5-80.

Warwick, Alexandra, 'Vampires and the empire: fears and fictions of the 1890s', in *Cultural
   Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge:
   Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1995]), pp. 202-20.

Waters, Sarah, *Affinity* (London: Virago, 2004 [1999])

Welldon, J. E. C., 'The Art of Reading Books', *The National Review*, 23. 134 (Apr 1894),
   213-18.

The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900 (Oxford: Taylor and Francis,
   2005).

Wells, H. G., *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (London: Penguin, 2005 [1896]).

Whelan, Lara Baker, *Class, Culture and Suburban Anxieties in the Victorian Era* (New York
   and London: Routledge, 2010).

Wilde, Oscar, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford World's
   Classics, 2006 [1890/1]).

Wilkins [Freeman], Mary E., 'The Lost Ghost' (1903), in *The Oxford Book of [English]
   Ghost Stories,* ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
   2008 [1986]), pp. 190-204.

Willard, [Miss] Frances E., contribution to 'The Tree of Knowledge', *The New Review*, 10.
   61 (Jun 1894), 675-90.

Willburn, Sarah A., *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical
   Writings* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).

Wilson, A. N., *A Jealous Ghost* (London: Hutchinson, 2005).

Wisker, Gina, *Horror Fiction: An Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

Wolfreys, Julian, 'Preface: "I could a tale unfold", or, the Promise of Gothic', in *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century,* ed. by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. xi-xx.

--- *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

Wood, Mrs Henry [Ellen], 'Reality or Delusion?' (1868), in *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1991]), pp. 115-29.

Woolf, Virginia, *Three Guineas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1938).

Wright, Angela, *Gothic Fiction: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Wright, Thomas, 'On a Possible Popular Culture', *The Contemporary Review*, 40 (Jul 1881), 25-44.

Young, Iris Marion, *On Female Body Experience: 'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Youngkin, Molly, *Feminist Realism at the Fin de Siècle: The Influence of the Late-Victorian Women's Press on the Development of the Novel* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2007).

Zorn, Christa, 'Aesthetic Intertextuality as Cultural Critique: Vernon Lee Rewrites History Through Walter Pater's *La Gioconda*', *The Victorian Newsletter*, 91 (Spring 1997), 4-11.

--- *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003).