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**Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny and Scenes of Writing**

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September 2006

## Abstract

Writers at the end of the nineteenth century were fascinated by the supernatural, and returned again and again to themes of ghostliness in their writing. While writers such as Vernon Lee and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle attempted to abject the supernatural from their work, they were also irresistibly drawn to it, both evoking and exorcising the ghostly in their stories. *Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny and Scenes of Writing* demonstrates that writers, mental scientists and spiritualists at the *fin-de-siècle* were haunted by their impossible desire to contain the inchoate elements of the supernatural within the fixity of print. By examining technologies of writing such as the automatic writing of the spiritualist séances, discursive technologies like the telegraph and the photograph, different genres and late nineteenth-century technologies of mental science, this thesis will show that despite writers' attempts to use technology as a way of translating the supernatural, these tools are incomplete and the supernatural remains only a partially legible script. In addition, the thesis examines how both new technology and explorations into the ghostly aspects of the mind problematised agency. Is the author dictating to the typewriting machine, or is the machine the secret dictator regulating the author's stylistic choices? Is the spirit at the séance ghostwriting the text?

Issues of uncanny authorship are explored in the first chapter, in particular through a close reading of Henry James's 'The Private Life' (1891). The uncanny effects of new technology on the body are also explored in James's 'In the Cage' (1898), and Kipling's 'Wireless' (1901). In this chapter, technologies such as the telegraph demonstrate the mechanising effect of the machine on the body, blurring distinctions between the wireless machine and the telegraphist. Instead of ridding scientific innovation from the supernatural, new technologies heightened the effect of

the uncanny within technology, as is outlined in Chapter Two. This chapter takes the example of Doyle and how he used the photograph as a technology to attempt to capture the supernatural, suggesting the concern of the *fin-de-siècle* writer to fix the unfixable. In an examination of Doyle's writings on photography as well as the reception of photography at the end of the century, this chapter demonstrates that Sherlock Holmes can be reconceptualised as an occult figure.

While both Chapter One and Chapter Two are interested in mechanical technologies, Chapter Three looks at mesmerism as a technology of the mind. Although the traditional model for mesmerism suggests that the mesmerist controls his patient, this chapter argues that the site of power in mesmerism is one of shared exchange between mesmerist and mesmerised. Just as earlier chapters suggest the elusive nature of the supernatural, this chapter expands the argument to include ideas about the intangible nature of power and identity within discussions of the supernatural.

Chapter Four is also concerned with power and identity in late nineteenth-century writing and indicates that traditional notions of Victorian womanhood, as well as writings on mental science, implied that women themselves were ghostly. Ghost stories written by women at the *fin-de-siècle* reveal affinities between women, ghostliness and the mind, demonstrating that women were haunted by their gender in their writing. Furthermore, I suggest that women powerfully access heightened states of perception like dreaming and hypnosis in order to inspire their stories. Indeed, multiplied consciousness is a key theme in this thesis, since a close reading of *Trilby* and New Woman fiction shows that texts at the end of the century are rehabilitating hysteria from its negative associations in the male medical community and reclaiming it as a vehicle for women's empowerment and creative expression.

Chapter Five turns to Vernon Lee, for whom the ghost story blurs literary genres, making indistinct fiction and non-fiction, ghost story and critical essay. While Lee argues that the supernatural cannot be captured in art, she evokes the supernatural in all of her writing. Lee acts as a case study for the ways in which writers were haunted by the uncontrollable elements of the supernatural at the *fin-de-siècle*, how spiritualism, the Society for Psychical Research, mental science, and technologies played a crucial role in the creation of the haunted writer, and how the concept of the haunted writer can link to themes of agency, sexuality, and identity.

Chapter Six returns to a discussion of the ways in which paranormal perception inspires women writers. An examination of Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* (1897) and George Paston's *A Writer of Books* (1898) implies that New Woman writers find the altered states they access in their writing both ecstatic and agonising. A re-examination of the uncanny effects of technology through a close reading of Grant Allen's *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897) shows that in New Woman fiction, women have the freedom to engage with writing technologies like the typewriter either actively or passively. This chapter assesses the slippery distinctions between sites of agency, between moments of visionary trance and intense depression, and between the New Woman's serious political agenda and relish for the supernatural in her writing.

Finally, the conclusion suggests that despite attempts to police identities and texts, writers at the end of the century were both haunted by and haunting scenes of writing. In resurrecting ghosts in their writing, authors raised questions about agency, the literary canon, and the nature of identity at the *fin-de-siècle*.

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## Introduction

The Lord thy God is the invisible stranger at the gate in the night, knocking. He is the mysterious life-suggestion, tapping for admission. And the wondrous Victorian age managed to fasten the door so tight, and light up the compound so brilliantly with electric light, that really, there was no outside, it was all in. The Unknown became a joke: is still a joke.<sup>1</sup>

Looking back on the Victorian period, D.H. Lawrence saw an age consumed by sterile faith in reason. In this passage he dismisses the Victorian interest in the 'Unknown' as a joke, using language evocative of the spiritualist séance: the 'knocking' on the door might be the rapping of spirits, eager to communicate messages from the other world. 'Spirit-rappings' were one of the first ways in which spirits communicated with the living. In 1848, the Fox sisters of New York heard rappings in their house and reported that they were messages from the spirit world. The girls quickly became celebrities, and spiritualism was born, spreading rapidly from the United States to Britain. For Lawrence, however, spiritualism is rendered ridiculous in the harsh light of Victorian rationalism. But the deeper forces Lawrence trivialises are central to my thesis, which examines 'the mysterious life-suggestion, tapping for admission' in the late Victorian period, and the ways in which writers and mental scientists of the *fin-de-siècle* were deeply conflicted between a desire to police the boundaries of science, identity, and the mind, and conversely, to experience the obscure thrill of the 'Unknown'. Although elements of the unknown like telepathy, spiritualism and spirits, mesmerism and extrasensory perception threatened to compromise their

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<sup>1</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, ed. by Bruce Steele, intro. by Macdonald Daly (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 285.



rational borderlines, they were also intoxicating and inspiring, both dangerous and delightful.

While my principal focus is on Gothic literature written in the 1880s and 1890s, this thesis recognises and cuts across strict boundaries, since texts like Henry James's (1843-1916) 'The Private Life' (1891) and 'In the Cage' (1898), Rudyard Kipling's (1865-1936) 'Wireless' (1901), Arthur Conan Doyle's (1859-1930) Sherlock Holmes stories, George Du Maurier's (1834-1896) *Trilby* (1894), ghost stories by women like Vernon Lee (1856-1935), and New Woman novels like Sarah Grand's (1854-1943) *The Beth Book* (1897), and George Paston's (d. 1936) *A Writer of Books* (1898) negotiate themes associated both with the Victorian and modernist periods such as psychical research, mass marketing (especially literature), and new technologies. Indeed, this thesis suggests that Gothic literature itself blurs boundaries, not only between literary periods, but also between genres. As Julian Wolfreys suggests, 'the gothic becomes truly haunting in that it can never be pinned down to a single identity'.<sup>2</sup> In my use of the term Gothic I refer not to the traditional tropes associated with the Gothic, like ruined castles, wicked villains, and helpless heroines, but a Gothicism specific to the end of the century which is concerned with instances of the uncanny within a text. The Gothic also comprises moments in the text when characters come face to face with supernatural entities like ghosts, as well as when characters use trance states like mesmerism, hysteria, or dream states in order to access other powers within themselves. I am particularly interested in texts which are not placed in the Gothic genre, but which nevertheless conceal Gothic themes like horror about identity and doubling: New Woman fiction and Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, for example, both evoke and condemn supernatural themes.

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<sup>2</sup> Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 11.

I suggest that Gothic fiction, and the discourse surrounding mental science, spiritualism and new technologies of the 1880s and 1890s, blend and bleed into one another, reflecting their subject matter, which also blurs together differing forces. For example, discussions of ‘imponderable fluids’ like ectoplasm blur distinctions between the material and the immaterial, since ectoplasm can both be visible and invisible, tangible, and intangible. Furthermore, strict separations between the scientific and the supernatural begins to break down as scientific bodies like the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) increasingly investigate sites of the unknown like mesmerism and spirits, and spiritualists use scientific methodologies in order to authenticate, verify and categorise the supernatural.

My thesis examines terms and preoccupations like mesmerism, telepathy, spiritualism, and double consciousness that have been overlooked, marginalized or misinterpreted in critical studies of the Victorian period. I am attempting to resuscitate the neglected voices of the 1880s and 1890s, and bring peripheral texts (like women’s ghost stories, mesmeric handbooks, mental science and medical texts, Doyle’s spiritualist writings, and forgotten New Woman novels) to the centre of critical study of the *fin-de-siècle*. Furthermore, I address the destabilisation of the self during scenes of writing and in interactions with technologies of writing like the typewriter and the telegraph. How does technology problematise/haunt the notion of agency in writing? Who has agency, the writer, the machine, or the medium? How does the notion of a spiritualist medium come to change conceptions of the working medium like the typist and telegraphist? I explore how, when notions of agency are suspended, authorship becomes uncanny, both a familiar practice and a deeply unfamiliar one, and suggest that this uncanniness is both terrifying and thrilling.

Indeed, this thesis addresses the *intoxicating* moments in the dialogue between science and the supernatural. The OED suggests that to intoxicate is both ‘to poison’, ‘to stupefy, render unconscious or delirious, to deprive of the ordinary use of the sense of reason’, ‘to corrupt morally or spiritually’, and ‘to render unsteady or delirious in mind or in feelings; to excite or exhilarate beyond self-control’. Writers at the *fin-de-siècle* find moments of heightened perception both corrupting and exhilarating. The moments of multiplied consciousness are themselves moments of ecstasy. The OED defines ecstasy as ‘[p]oetic frenzy or rapture’, but it is also a trance state which causes ‘anxiety, astonishment, fear or passion’. This thesis suggests that writing at the *fin-de-siècle* is an ecstatic process, both entrancing and nightmarish. For example, Henry James and New Women writers are both repelled by and drawn towards public acceptance and popularity. Furthermore, women writing ghost stories use horror as a powerful means of creating thrilling stories, but also of voicing concerns about the ways in which women were politically invisible in the late nineteenth century. While much of the literature of the 1880s and 1890s is posited on a faith in rational progress as inevitable (Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, for example, seems to represent the triumph of logic), writers are still grappling with energies like telepathy and mesmeric fluids, which cannot be contained within the crisp contours of rational discourse. Finally, this thesis explores the ways in which *fin-de-siècle* writers are haunted by their attempts (and inevitable failures) to police the supernatural.

Recently, critics like Andrew Smith, Robert Mighall, and Kelly Hurley have also focused on late nineteenth-century Gothic fiction in relation to Victorian science. Smith’s examination of degeneration, sexology and masculinity is ‘about how medical texts and contexts construct problematic models of pathologised masculinity [and] how the Gothic stages a very similar debate about disease and “maleness” at the

same time'.<sup>3</sup> While Smith discusses the concerns of the medical community regarding the representation of masculinity, he ignores the ways in which both scientists and fiction writers were trying to police identity (including gender constructs), and finding that identity could not be contained within the strict limits they imposed.

Like Smith, Mighall examines the exchange between fictional and non-fictional discourses. However, while Mighall focuses on the 'historical, geographical, environmental, and discursive factors which have played an important part in making Gothic representations credible at any given time', his decision to exclude entirely psychological readings of the Gothic weakens his argument.<sup>4</sup> I contend that all of the factors he lists *and* psychology are crucial to a reading of the Victorian Gothic. While Hurley sees the importance of using both psychology, and readings of medical and mental science texts in an understanding of *fin-de-siècle* literary culture, she is primarily concerned with examples of degeneration in Gothic texts rather than with haunted scenes of writing.<sup>5</sup>

Julian Wolfreys's *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* does consider what is haunting about writing. Although Wolfreys poses questions which underpin my thesis, like 'What does it mean to address the text as haunted? How do the ideas of haunting and spectrality change our understanding of particular texts and the notion of the text in general?' (p. ix), he is ultimately preoccupied with the haunting effect on the reader/audience rather than on the writer. Problematically Wolfreys suggests that 'the spectral effect [. . .] needs structure' (p. 5), implying hauntings are dependent on materialism, whereas my thesis argues that

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. xiv.

<sup>5</sup> Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

what concerned Victorian writers and mental scientists was the possibility that ghosts were both material bodies and immaterial presences. Furthermore, Wolfreys situates his understanding of the haunted nature of writing in the mid-Victorian period, but uses his idea that ghosts disrupt texts to refer to Gothic fiction spanning from Dickens's 'A Christmas Carol' (1843) to Stephen King's *The Shining* (1977). While ghosts and ghostliness do transcend distinctions, and while my thesis examines the blurring of boundaries between literary genres, and scientific and supernatural discourses, I argue that the 1880s and 1890s are key to a discussion of haunted writing: during no other time were writers and mental scientists as anxious about the ways in which the supernatural was affecting the written word and the world of mind.

Pamela Thurschwell's *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* is central to studies on *fin-de-siècle* fiction, psychical research, and nineteenth-century perceptions about new technology.<sup>6</sup> Although Thurschwell discusses the eroticism that interactions with the occult and technology could evoke, as well as the ways in which late nineteenth-century fiction and mental science served as the precursors to psychoanalysis, she does not examine in sufficient detail how new technologies changed and made uncanny both the writer, and the act of writing.

Although these recent critics claim to offer an insight into neglected aspects of the Victorian Gothic, non-canonical writers are noticeably absent from their analyses. Although Kelly Hurley brings some marginalized writers like Richard Marsh and Arthur Machen into her discussions, she and the other critics ignore women's writing entirely, focusing on canonical male Gothic writers like Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Bram Stoker. My aim is to discuss well-known authors like Henry James and Arthur Conan Doyle, alongside lesser known, but

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<sup>6</sup> Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

significant writers like Anna Bonus Kingsford (1846-1888) and Mary Louisa Mowseworth (1839-1921), not only to bring neglected voices to the forefront of literary study, but to demonstrate that these voices articulate nagging anxieties about writing in the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, a recovery of women writers is crucial to my thesis. Although Diana Basham has made strides towards examining Victorian women's writing and its links to the occult, she focuses on the mystical associations of women and menstruation and ignores other important aspects of women's fiction, in particular, the uncanny scenes of writing that figure women's relationship to fiction itself.<sup>7</sup> I devote my last three chapters to women's writing to suggest that women are central voices in a study of late Victorian Gothic, spiritualism and psychical research.

Haunting this thesis is the notion of the supernatural and the uncanny. Nicholas Royle argues that 'the uncanny is not simply synonymous with the supernatural [. . .], but is more accurately *suggestive* of – "associated with", or "seeming" to have a basis in – the supernatural'.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, 'uncanny' and 'supernatural' are two distinct terms, but the separation between them is more profound than Royle implies. Whereas the supernatural relates to the external, to disturbances in the exterior world, the uncanny is psychological, representing disturbances in the internal body, or mind: in other words, the supernatural is a cause and the uncanny an effect.

'Supernatural' meant many things in the nineteenth century, which, as Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurshwell have argued, was part of its appeal. They define it as 'slipper[y]' and 'resistan[t] to definition' suggesting it had a 'protean quality of being a cause, a place, a kind of being, a realm, a possibility, a new form of

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<sup>7</sup> Diana Basham, *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 10.

nature, [and] a hope for the future.’<sup>9</sup> Richard Noakes argues that the Victorian interest in spiritualism was key in redefining ways of thinking about the supernatural:

Victorian investigators of Spiritualism believed that the erratic phenomena of the séance could be reduced to natural laws and that their enterprises could thereby gain scientific credibility. However, this was a difficult goal to achieve since many critics of Spiritualism questioned the very possibility of a naturalistic approach to phenomena that were ostensibly beyond nature, and actively defined the natural sciences in opposition to Spiritualism.<sup>10</sup>

Noakes reveals how supernatural events in spiritualism such as full-form materialisations, automatic writing, and table-rappings could be construed not only as elements outside of nature, but as new kinds or manifestations of nature that had simply been overlooked or misconstrued in the past. Different interpretations of the supernatural could allow spiritualists to believe in other-worldly presences, and sceptics like William Benjamin Carpenter to argue that the phenomena at séances were a result of ‘the laws of mental action’ (Noakes, p. 32). The psychic investigator William Crookes, in fierce and public opposition to Carpenter, believed that spirit manifestations could be explained if new natural laws could be discovered (Noakes, p. 32).<sup>11</sup>

My thesis interrogates all of these rich contemporary definitions, as well as the modern definition listed in the OED, ‘[t]hat is above nature; belonging to a higher

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<sup>9</sup> Nicola Bown, 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 (p. 8).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Noakes, ‘Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural in Mid-Victorian Britain’, in *Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell, pp. 23-43 (p. 24).

<sup>11</sup> For more on the debate between Crookes and Carpenter, see for example, William Crookes, *Correspondence upon Dr. Carpenter's Asserted Refutation of Mr. Crookes's Experimental Proof of the Existence of a Hitherto Undetected Force* (London: Quarterly Journal of Science, 1872).

realm or system than that of nature; transcending the powers of the ordinary course of nature', in order to discuss a supernaturalism that is a 'mysterious life-suggestion' (Lawrence, p. 285), a spectral concept haunting the writing of the 1880s and 1890s.

My use of the word 'uncanny' is heavily influenced by Freud's essay 'The Uncanny' (1919), and I intend the term to resonate with all of his layered definitions of the word.<sup>12</sup> For example, Freud suggests that 'on the one hand [uncanny] means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight' (p. 224-25). Freud lists 'things, persons, impressions, events and situations which are able to arouse in us a feeling of the uncanny' (p. 226), such as 'doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self' (p. 234), the 'factor of the repetition of the same thing' (p. 236), 'death', 'spirits', 'ghosts' (p. 241), 'magic and sorcery', [and] 'the omnipotence of thoughts' (p. 243). Although Freud is tentative about including the 'intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one' as 'a condition for awakening uncanny feelings' (p. 233), this 'condition' is a valuable means of discussing uncanny technologies at the end of the century, particularly in relation to the emergence of women in the workforce: were automatic writers (a term referring to spiritualist mediums and typists) becoming uncanny in their interactions with technology? Were they becoming mechanised? Could new technologies reproduce human actions better than people could?

In my understanding of the uncanny, I also draw on some of Nicholas Royle's theories, which suggests that uncanniness is about intimacy and distance (*Uncanny*, p. 6). Although the differences between the supernatural and the uncanny are greater

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<sup>12</sup> See Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Freud*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey, 24 vols, (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974) XVII, pp. 219-56.



than he assumes, his definition of the uncanny is useful to a study on blurred distinctions between sites of power and identities. Royle defines the uncanny as

ghostly. It is concerned with the strange, weird, and mysterious, with a flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural. The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced. Suddenly one's sense of self (of one's so-called 'personality' or 'sexuality', for example) seems strangely questionable. (*Uncanny*, p. 1)

My thesis explores the moments in which writers conjure up and then exorcise the supernatural in their fiction, playing out their fears and desires for the unknown. Finally, I suggest, as Freud, Royle, and others have done, that the uncanny has everything to do with the writing process.<sup>13</sup> In a discussion of writers producing uncanny effects, Freud argues that

[the writer] can even increase his effect and multiply it far beyond what could happen in reality, by bringing about events which never or very rarely happen in fact. In doing this he is in a sense betraying us to the superstitiousness which we have ostensibly surmounted; he deceives us by promising to give us the sober truth, and then after all overstepping it. ('Uncanny', p. 250)

Freud expresses the anxiety that writers in the late nineteenth century felt about the act of writing. Writers promised to give 'the sober truth', and to have absolute control of their body of work, both during the writing process and once it was published and became part of the public market. But uncannily, there were always outside energies, 'tapping for admission' (Lawrence, p. 285), and the work was never entirely as tidy,

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<sup>13</sup> See Freud, 'Uncanny', Royle, *Uncanny*, and Hélène Cixous, 'Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (The "Uncanny")', trans. by Robert Denomé, *New Literary History*, 7 (1976), 525-48.

contained and uninfluenced, as writers would have liked. Although Freud insists that writers betray and deceive the reader, it is really the writers' own intent that is deceptive: despite being anxious about the supernatural, *fin-de-siècle* writers secretly desired to 'overstep' ('Uncanny', p. 250) their self-imposed boundaries.

In Chapter One I examine the ways in which mental scientists and writers of the 1880s and 1890s were striving to maintain 'academic neatness', both in studies of the mind, and in writing. Henry James's 'The Private Life' shows that writing always escapes perfect order: rather than offering unity to the author, scenes of writing actually split the writing self between public and private personae, and the author is haunted by the figure of his own celebrity. Furthermore, a discussion of James's typist Theodora Bosanquet shows that the typewriter increased James's uneasiness about the act of writing. As a medium for James's message, Bosanquet gained an agency in the act of transcribing which suggested the site of authorship itself was unstable. Finally, in a close reading of James's 'In the Cage' and Rudyard Kipling's 'Wireless', this chapter also examines the uncanny ways in which new technologies fragmented identity. Despite attempts to police the boundaries of the self, new technologies and new understandings of the mind only increased the haunting nature of writing itself.

In Chapter Two I continue my discussion of the uncanny effects of technology by discussing how photography was perceived in the late nineteenth century, both as it was connected to death and the supernatural, and as it was linked to policing and the figure of the detective. An examination of Francis Galton's (1822-1911) composite portraits, and the use of photography in criminal investigations (such as the mug shot), as well as spirit photography suggests that at the end of the century the photograph was both representative of evidential proof and truth, and also was strongly connected to the supernatural. This chapter discusses Doyle's own

photographic work, and how his interest shifted from the scientific process of developing pictures in the dark room to his fascination with spirit photography and spiritualism. Like other spiritualists and mental scientists of the period, Doyle wanted, impossibly, to scientifically contain and control the supernatural. This chapter connects conflicting ideas about the photograph and about Doyle himself in order to re-examine conceptions about Sherlock Holmes to suggest that he is not representative of rational triumph, but is rather connected to criminality. Like the camera, Holmes is meant to find the truth and catch the criminal. However, also like the camera, Holmes can be closely connected to the supernatural as in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901), when Holmes himself is mistaken for a monstrous entity on the moors. Finally, this chapter connects Sherlock Holmes to Dupin, Edgar Allan Poe's (1809-1849) master detective, making links between the photographic writings of Doyle and Poe, and examining both writers' interest in mesmerism in relation to their detectives.

In Chapter Three I continue my discussion of mesmerism in order to explore the exchange between the mesmerist and the mesmerised in the context of the *fin-de-siècle*, analysing its treatment in the field of mental science, spiritualism and the Gothic literature of the 1880s and 1890s. In critical and literary discussions of mesmerism, the site of power has been traditionally located within the mesmerist, who has full control of his or her subject. An examination of mesmeric manuals and hypnosis handbooks, however, suggests that both the mesmerist and the mesmerised share power, and that mesmerism is the site of exchange of that power. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the absorption of mesmerism into hypnotism at the end of the century was an attempt by mental scientists to try to police the boundaries between science and the supernatural. Although they suggested that the processes were

distinct, closer examination reveals that the processes actually merge into one another. In a close reading of George Du Maurier's *Trilby* I demonstrate that not only do Trilby and Svengali share sites of power in the text, but also that Trilby is able to reclaim hysteria from its debilitating reputation in the male medical community, and to use her trance state as empowering.

Indeed, empowering trance states are crucial to a discussion of women's writing in Chapters Four and Six. For example, Chapter Four examines how women in ghost stories see ghosts in altered states of perception like hysteria, hypnosis and dream states, and identify with them. Furthermore, women ghost story writers use the ghost as a symbol for their political invisibility. While mental science was attempting to police the mind, medical science was attempting, through the discourse on hysteria, to police the female mind and body. Through a close reading of W.T. Stead's *Real Ghost Stories* (1891) I argue that theories of the unconscious mind as a haunted site were symbolic of the ghostly role of women politically, socially, and legally. In a discussion of non-canonical women ghost story writers and their work, I show how women were both haunted and empowered by writing about ghosts.

In Chapter Five I turn to a case study of Vernon Lee. Lee is particularly significant in a thesis which explores the ways in which mental scientists, writers, and psychical researchers of the 1880s and 1890s were both drawn to and radically anxious about discussing the supernatural because her writing is always a struggle between science and supernaturalism. This chapter focuses on the links between aestheticism and ghostliness that Lee rejected and yet evoked, and demonstrates that Lee's attempts to dissociate aesthetics and the supernatural only pushed them more closely together. While Lee's psychological aesthetics were designed to be an empirical study of the body's reactions to art, her methods closely resembled those of

the spiritualists and the members of the SPR in their interest in and attempts to record physiological reactions of the body to ghosts. Furthermore, while she insists on the fundamental materialism of aesthetics, her art is instead haunted by its inability to produce that materialism. This chapter also explores themes of writing and the uncanny and how genre itself in Lee becomes haunted, as Lee's fiction and non-fiction texts become increasingly indistinct. Finally, this chapter places Lee within the context of the *fin-de-siècle*, and demonstrates that although she is usually considered to be an exception to the literary trends and social concerns of the end of the century, she is very much a part of *fin-de-siècle* culture, not only in her sexual choices, but also in her interest in the supernatural and in mental science

Finally, in Chapter Six, I return to a discussion of the ways in which women writers use altered states of perception creatively. In a discussion of New Woman texts like Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* and George Paston's *A Writer of Books*, I show that for women writers like Beth and Cosima, heightened perception is the site of ecstatic inspiration: writing with multiplied perception is both rapturous and debilitating. This chapter also returns to a discussion of the uncanny effects of technology, and in a close reading of Grant Allen's (1848-1899) *The Typewriter Girl* (1897), suggests that in New Woman texts, technology like the typewriter actually grants women like Juliet the freedom to choose whether they will engage with machines analytically or mechanically. This chapter is about blurred distinctions between automatic and active writing, between exhilaration and despair, and between realist and supernatural fiction.

From Henry James's anxieties about controlling the writing self and sites of agency, to Doyle's concerns about capturing the immaterial on the sensitive plate of the camera, and from mental scientists' assurances that they could exercise

mesmerism from the occult by using occult language and themes, to the attempts by mental scientists to contain the female mind and body within the same discourse as haunted states of mind, this thesis is about the desire and failure to rigidly control identities, minds, and scenes of writing which preoccupied writers, mental scientists and spiritualists at the *fin-de-siècle*. Finally from Lee's insistence on making strict separation between science and the supernatural which her ghost stories would always overstep, to New Woman fiction writers who revelled in and were repelled by the supernatural in their political texts, writers of the 1880s and 1890s were always haunted by and haunting scenes of writing.

## Chapter One:

### (Ghost)Writing Henry James: Mental Science, Spiritualism and Uncanny

#### Technologies of Writing at the *Fin-de-siècle*

##### Introduction

[T]he human mind [. . . ] was largely an abstraction. Its normal adult traits were recognized. A sort of sunlit terrace was exhibited on which it took exercise. But where that terrace stopped, the mind stopped. [. . .] But of late years the terrace has been overrun by romantic improvers, and to pass to their work is like going from classic to Gothic architecture, where few outlines are pure and where uncouth forms lurk in the shadows. A mass of mental phenomena are now seen in the shrubbery beyond the parapet. Fantastic, ignoble, hardly human, or frankly non-human are some of the new candidates for psychological description. The menagerie and the madhouse, the nursery, the prison, and the hospital, have been made to deliver up their material. The world of mind is shown as something infinitely more complex than was suspected; and whatever beauties it may still possess, it has lost at any rate the beauty of academic neatness.<sup>1</sup>

This passage, taken from William James's commemoration lecture on F.W.H. Myers,<sup>2</sup> maintains the mind had long been studied in a factual way, as orderly and linear.<sup>3</sup> James offers the metaphor of a well-groomed terrace and asserts that, with the formation of the

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<sup>1</sup> William James, 'Frederic Myers' Service to Psychology', in *A William James Reader*, ed. by Gay Wilson Allen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), pp. 155-64 (p. 156).

<sup>2</sup> F.W.H. Myers (1843-1901) passed away in the same year as the lecture was given. Myers was a distinguished researcher in mental science, and a founding member and president (1900) of the SPR.

<sup>3</sup> William James (1842-1910), Henry James's brother, was president of the SPR (1894-95) in America, a psychologist, and philosopher and one of the most widely read psychologists of the nineteenth century. For more on James and spiritualism, see, for example, Richard Milton Gale, *The Divided Self of William James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, c2002).

SPR in 1882 and especially with the influence of Myers, studies in psychology at the end of the century turn not only to what is on the terrace, but to what lies beyond it: what exists beyond and beneath the charted depths of the mind?

James's description of the transformation of the terrace from garden to jungle uses literary language. That the terrace is overrun by 'romantic improvers' implies that the field of mental science has been invaded by novelists whose imaginative 'material' seeps into psychological studies and blurs distinctions between scientific fact and fiction. His account of earlier researches into the mind as classical implies that, as in the classical period, earlier researches emphasised established analysis and 'academic neatness'. Researches by the *fin-de-siècle*, however, were, like the Gothic literature he evokes, revelling in the 'menagerie and the madhouse'.<sup>4</sup> Although the 'beauty of academic neatness' is lost, James suggests there is something delightful, if frightening, in an inchoate version of the mind.

Significantly, the emergence of James's 'Gothic architecture' of mental science at the end of the century coincides with a revival of Gothic literature.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, late nineteenth-century Gothic writers and mental scientists were in negotiation with one another. Roger Luckhurst gives the example of how Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886) had been influenced by F.W.H. Myers's theories on subliminal consciousness. Upon reading the novel, Myers had written Stevenson a letter expressing his admiration, but

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<sup>4</sup> *Fin-de-siècle* Gothic fiction deals with themes like menageries, madhouses and monsters. For example, part of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) is set in an insane asylum where Dracula visits the patient Renfield. While not quite a menagerie, Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), (Peterborough: Broadview, 2004) is about a terrifying creature which sometimes takes the form of an enormous beetle, and which terrorises the politician Paul Lessingham.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) (ed. by Richard Drury [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004]); H. Rider Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure* (1887) (London: Longmans, 1887); Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1890) (London: 1913); Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970); George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), Marsh's *The Beetle* and Stoker's *Dracula*.



also giving advice on how Stevenson could make ‘medical and psychological improvements’.<sup>6</sup> Mental scientists and writers of Gothic fiction, and as this chapter will show, in particular Henry James, were no longer certain of the stability of identity and were haunted by the possibility that selfhood was itself a collection of illusional material.

While William James suggests that the ‘Gothic architecture’ of mental science can no longer be contained within the conventional rubrics of psychological research, his brother Henry is anxious about the potential loss of ‘academic neatness’ in his writing. Henry employs an architectural metaphor in his discussion of the ‘house of fiction’:

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million [. . .] every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable [. . .] by the need of the individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness of report than we find. They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other. He and his neighbours are watching the same show, but one seeing more where the other sees less, one seeing black where the other sees

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<sup>6</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 192. Luckhurst argues that in the late nineteenth century, ‘psychology and Gothic fiction informed each other’ (p. 193). In *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, Robert Mighall also theorises a direct interchange of information between novelists and scientists of the period, arguing the idea that scientists derived as many of their ideas about human identity from fiction as they did from scientific investigation (pp. 165-68). I suggest that Gothic and scientific writing influenced and *inspired* one another.

white one seeing big where the other sees small, one seeing coarse where the other sees fine. And so on, and so on; there is fortunately no saying on what, for the particular pair of eyes, the window may *not* open [. . .]. The spreading field, the human scene, is the ‘choice of subject’; the pierced aperture [. . .] is the ‘literary form’; but they are [. . .] as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher – without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. Tell me what the artist is, and I will tell you he has *been* conscious.<sup>7</sup>

Henry James’s ‘house of fiction’ seems to be a haunted house, with ghostly guests lurking at every window. The structure also evokes William’s overrun terrace, a Gothic mansion that is architecturally incoherent, unwieldy and rambling, filled with shadows, spectral presences, and incongruous parts, straining away from the ‘academic neatness’ of a conventional house. The metaphor of the ‘house of fiction’ suggests that fiction itself cannot be regulated and has little unity, but rather a million vantage points, and that even the act of writing is a vexed, haunted endeavour. Indeed, the house of fiction seems to be haunted by James himself, whose consciousness is the watcher in the windows.

Authorship and ghostliness are inextricably intertwined at the *fin-de-siècle*.

Nineteenth-century authorship itself has always been a problematic concept; as Tim Armstrong, Michel Foucault, Bette London, and many others have suggested, authorship

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<sup>7</sup> Henry James, ‘The Portrait of a Lady’, in *Literary Criticism: French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*, ed. by Leon Edel (New York: Library of America, 1984), pp. 1070-85 (p. 1075). In a discussion of James’s ‘house of fiction’ metaphor, Leon Edel outlines James’s anxiety about writing and criticising novels: ‘One draws boundaries round novels at one’s peril. [. . .] the critic of fiction is asked to accommodate himself not only to the novel’s rhetoric but to the precise *field of vision* of the novelist, not to speak of his instruments of vision’. From *The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel by Henry James* (London: Hart-Davis, 1957), p. 11. While Edel explores James’s problems as a literary critic, I suggest his concerns about not being able to create boundaries within his writing are linked to his anxieties about the ghostly and uncanny nature of writing itself.

cannot be defined or limited easily.<sup>8</sup> Where, after all, does authorship begin, and who should be credited for the final text? In the nineteenth century, automatic writers recording the voices of the dead faced an entirely new problem of authorship: should ghosts be given credit for published works, or the mediums who transcribed them?<sup>9</sup> Lisa Gitelman's *Scripts, Grooves and Writing Machines* investigates the technological automatic writers of the nineteenth century, putting into question not specifically who is the author, but how writing machines radically refashion writing itself. After all, the technologies of the nineteenth century were all conceived discursively.<sup>10</sup> The phonograph (1877), the typewriter (c.1868), and the telegraph machine (1838), for example, were all meant to be writing machines, but does writing on such devices fundamentally alter the content of what is written or the mindset of the writer? Friedrich Kittler argues that not only does it modify content, but also individualities: identity fragments because of writing technologies.<sup>11</sup>

In an examination of Henry James's 'The Private Life' (1891), this chapter addresses the faltering attempts of writers and mental science alike to police the boundaries of identity and map the mind. Close readings of James's 'In the Cage' (1898) and Rudyard Kipling's 'Wireless' (1901) suggest that the technological innovations that

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<sup>8</sup> Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972); Bette London, *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). Sword suggests that this was problematic even in library catalogues, which often list books published by mediums under the author heading of the mediums' spirit guide (pp. 28-29). For more on influence and the problems of assigning agency in writing, see also Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Douglas-Fairhurst suggests that 'detecting another hand in one's writing raises awkward questions about what it means for one's self to be influenced and therefore not one self only' (p. 5).

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 1-20.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, trans. by Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, c.1990).

were themselves writing machines contributed to the development of an uncannily multiplied selfhood. This chapter also examines Henry James's desire and inability to find 'academic neatness' within his 'house of fiction', looking in particular at James's anxieties about his writing when it reaches the reading public. Who owns the 'house of fiction'? How does celebrity become a haunting figure in James's short stories? For James, in spite of himself, all scenes of writing are haunted ones.

### **Authorship and the Uncanny: James's 'The Private Life'**

Henry James's 'The Private Life' disturbingly indicates that authorship demands that the writer must suffer a separation into two distinct but dependent identities, the public self and the private self.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps James wants to imply that a public life is perversely necessary in order to preserve the private one: does the public self ironically make the private self more significant? In 'The Private Life' writing has an uncanny effect on selfhood. In 'On the Uncanny' (1919), Freud suggests that the uncanny is the fear we feel when something 'is familiar and agreeable [and] concealed and kept out of sight' (pp. 224-25). It is within this conception of the uncanny that we find Clare Vawdrey, the writer who is almost shockingly consistent, who 'never talk[s] about himself, and like[s] one subject [. . .] precisely as much as another' (p. 191), and whose 'opinions were sound

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<sup>12</sup> Henry James, 'The Private Life', in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, ed. by Leon Edel, 10 vols, (London: Hart-Davis, 1962-64), VIII, pp. 189-227. James may have used his title as a pun on the popular use of the words 'private life' in titles of biographies of royalty, famous actors and politicians, etc. in the nineteenth century. See, for example, John Banvard, *The Private Life of a King* (New York: Literary and Art, 1875); Lathom G. Browne, *Wellington, or The Public and Private Life of Arthur, First Duke of Wellington* (London: 1888); Jeanne Louise Henriette Genest, *The Private Life of Marie Antoinette* (Bentley, 1890), and *Public and Private Life of that Celebrated Actress, Miss Bland* (London: Duncombe, 1886). This last work is particularly significant, since one of James's characters in 'The Private Life' is 'Blanche Adney, the greatest [. . .] of our theatrical glories' (p. 189). Perhaps James is also punning on names, for while Miss Bland seems mild and pleasing but generally unremarkable, Blanche Adney seems to have 'carte blanche' in the theatrical world.

and second-rate' (p. 192); he is, in effect, boring.<sup>13</sup> And yet Vawdrey's creative outpourings are stunningly beautiful and exciting: he is 'the greatest [. . .] of our literary glories' (p. 189). That he is dull in public and a brilliant writer in private is not, however, what makes him so singular, since what makes him so singular is that Vawdrey is in fact double. He has a bland, reliable, public self and a private genius self. The division between writer and the writing self seems an unequal one, since the writer seems to have consumed the personality of both.

James's story reveals that the writer is haunted by a ghostly other self who is both himself and someone else, making authorship within the text slippery: who is it holding the pen and controlling the words that flow from it? Who owns the work when it becomes part of the literary marketplace? James's story touches on concerns about the act of writing at the *fin-de-siècle*. Indeed, the symbolic importance of writing in the second half of the nineteenth century was already beginning to be invested with new meaning, particularly as a result of the fascination with spiritualism and developments in mental science. The mediums who practised automatic writing and other phenomena at séances (such as table-rapping, and even bodily appearances of ghosts) enthralled Victorian audiences.<sup>14</sup> The scene in which the narrator finds Vawdrey writing alone in the dark evokes the spiritualist séances in which the medium would sit while spirits manifested themselves outside. Like a medium, Vawdrey is in a 'fit' of 'abstraction' (p. 206), so

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<sup>13</sup> Clare Vawdrey is based on Robert Browning (1812-1889). See James, 'The Altar of the Dead, The Beast in the Jungle, The Birthplace, The Private Life, Owen Wingrave, The Friends of the Friends, Sir Edmund Orme, The Real Right Thing, The Jolly Corner, Julia Bride', in *Literary Criticism*, pp. 1246-68 (p. 1255). James was puzzled by the fact that Browning could write so well and yet socialize so badly.

<sup>14</sup> For more on the history of spiritualism at the *fin-de-siècle*, see, for example, Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), and Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989).

possessed by the act of writing that he devotes all of himself to it: in turn, his public self becomes a materialised spirit, only the ghost of a personality.

Automatic writers believed their hands to be guided by the dead. Studies by the SPR on the activities of mediums and particularly automatic writing, however, implied that it was the subconscious mind, rather than spectral entities, which was responsible for the spiritualistic phenomena (Oppenheim, pp. 123-33). Eminent mental scientist, and President of the SPR, F.W.H. Myers, wrote an article 'Automatic Writing or the Rationale of the Planchette' (1885) arguing that automatic writing is the result of unconscious cerebration: writing could be physical evidence for activity in the brain of which a person is completely unaware.<sup>15</sup> In the field of mental science, studies on a 'secondary self' within indicated that it was not only the séance that was haunted but also, disturbingly, the mind. While automatic writing highlighted that the mind could no longer be contained within the tidy boundaries of 'academic neatness', 'The Private Life' shows that creative writing also denies writers this precision and clarity. Instead, the act of writing transforms the writer into an unfathomable, ghostly, and multiplied presence.

In 'The Private Life' writing destabilises boundaries to such an extent that selfhood itself is negotiated by literary language. Lord Mellifont's public identity, for example, is described in terms of a novel. His dress, manners, and all his actions are the 'topic' of discussion, the 'subject' (p.196) gracing everyone's lips, and setting the 'tone' (p. 197) for every occasion. In fact, he seems to *write* popular society, for without his presence 'it [society] would scarcely have had a vocabulary' (p. 133). Just as Vawdrey writes himself in two, Mellifont's 'writing' has transformative power so that social trends

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<sup>15</sup> F.W.H. Myers, 'Automatic Writing or the Rationale of the Planchette', *The Contemporary Review*, 47 (1885), pp. 233-49.

are reinvented. Mellifont not only reinvents social identity, shaping moods and styles in the fashionable world, he is also written himself. He is constantly compared to an actor who never forgets his lines, and whose part has been so carefully composed that it seems 'his very embarrassments had been rehearsed' (p. 196). Indeed, Mellifont's very being must be written by those around him, his lines foisted upon him, and without another's gaze he cannot contextualize himself. He is a 'legend' (p. 196), the perfect socialite, created through the public's ceaseless talk of his actions and sayings. But in authoring the latest social trends, Mellifont, like Vawdrey with his creative writing, is at the mercy of the masses, and has nothing but a ghost of himself left for his private life.

James's story is particularly anxious about the possibility that in writing (whether Mellifont's symbolic writing of social fads or Vawdrey's fiction) the successful writer must literally become a stranger to himself in order to achieve critical and commercial prestige. In making this division, however, the writer is in danger of having his secret or private life discovered. In Mellifont's case, the terrible truth in his private life is that he does not have one, (perhaps because there are so many windows in the house of fiction that the public can always see in), whereas Vawdrey's unsettling secret is that his public face is only an imitation of his private one. If Vawdrey's private life is discovered then everyone will know that his public self has simply been mechanically, uncannily performing social duty. When Blanche Adney realises the truth about the public Vawdrey, the narrator observes that 'she shrank from him, without a greeting; with a movement that I observed as almost one of estrangement' (p. 226). For her, by the end of the story, 'the other' Vawdrey (the private Vawdrey) becomes 'the real one' (p. 222). The

price Vawdrey pays for artistic success is the sacrifice of the 'academic neatness' of his identity.

One of Freud's definitions of the uncanny is that of something which is familiar, or of the home, and by extension of the paradoxical definition of the German word, that which is also unfamiliar, and strange to the home ('Uncanny', p. 220). Significantly, Mellifont 'would not be at home' (p. 207) with initiating a discussion about Vawdrey's private life since it lies too closely with his own particular problem. Furthermore, Lady Mellifont is 'not at home with him [Lord Mellifont]' (p. 413) herself. The critic Paul Coates has suggested that one's lover is always one's other, or double<sup>16</sup> – his 'intenser self' (p. 213), as James suggests. And yet Lady Mellifont's double has become completely unfamiliar. She both knows and refuses to register the truth about her husband who is indeed not at home with himself or with her. Mellifont has to play the part of a devoted husband, implying that his identity is always a role carefully refined through artifice. He is threatening to the narrator, not because of his all-encompassing presence, but because of the absence that must lurk beneath: 'I [. . .] had wondered what blank face such a mask had to cover, what was left to him for the immitigable hours in which a man sits down with himself' (p. 213).

The revelations of Vawdrey's private life and Mellifont's public one, and the new familiarisation with their identities in an unfamiliar place, indicate that the very choice of setting for the story is uncanny. The hotel is a transitional space for its guests, and lacks any specific private and public areas. The narrator enters Vawdrey's chamber as easily as if it were his own. The hotel also evokes James's elaborate 'house of fiction' metaphor,

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Coates, *The Double and the Other: Identity and Ideology in Post-Romantic Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), pp. 10-11.



which is filled with figures in every window looking out and each seeing something fresh or unexpected. While Lady Mellifont does not (or perhaps refuses) to see that her husband has lost or forsaken his private life, the narrator surveys all aspects of him, both present and absent. In the context of this story James's 'house of fiction' metaphor becomes a metaphor not only for writing, but also for the mind. Thomas Hardy's discussion of the mind as a palimpsest in *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) is here useful. Hardy's narrator suggests that 'man, even to himself, is a palimpsest, having an ostensible writing, and another beneath the lines'.<sup>17</sup> The house of mind, as evidenced by Vawdrey, can hold many guests or identities, and hides unexplored resources, inscriptions, and erasures: beneath the surface of Vawdrey's public self, his private self is still composing hidden meanings.

### **The Double Mind, Multiple Personality and James's Haunted House of Fiction**

James's 'The Private Life' engages with contemporary scientific theories on mental science, in particular theories of the subliminal self and double consciousness.<sup>18</sup> While treating the mind as doubled was the established scientific theory for early and mid-nineteenth-century scientists, by the *fin-de-siècle* there was a shift in understanding of the composition of the mind. Ian Hacking argues that multiple personality 'came into being'

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, ed. by Robert C. Schweik (London: Norton, 1986), p. 189.

<sup>18</sup> For more on double consciousness, see, for example *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), and Anne Harrington, *Medicine, Mind and the Double Brain: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). In 1816, Mary Reynolds 'became one of the most famous instances of double consciousness during the nineteenth century' (Robert Macnish, 'The Case of Mary Reynolds' (1830), in *Embodied Selves*, pp. 123-24 [p. 123]). In 1856, Felida X. was brought to the public attention as another sufferer of split selfhood.

in 1885 when the patient Louis Vivet was found to possess eight separate personalities.<sup>19</sup> Despite the fact that identity seemed to be increasingly nebulous, mental scientists were still certain that they could structure the mind with defined limits and clear conceptions of self. Hacking suggests, for example, that late Victorian mental scientists were ‘attempt[ing] to scientize the soul through the study of memory’ (p. 6).

Hacking’s discussion of identity structured through memory ignores the inconsistencies of systematising identity when notions of selfhood were becoming increasingly inchoate by the century’s close. The example of nineteenth-century physicians Hippolyte Bourru and Prosper Burot demonstrates the ways in which mental scientists were attempting to rigorously control the science of mind. Bourru and Burot believed that multiple personalities could be grounded within memory: ‘[t]he comparison of previous states of consciousness with present states is the relation that unites a formed psychic life with the present one. That is the foundation of personality. A consciousness that compares itself with a former one is a true personality’.<sup>20</sup> Bourru and Burot’s use of the term ‘foundation’ is significant here as, like William James, they evoke an idea of the mind’s architecture. While Bourru and Burot’s language suggests that the mind and

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<sup>19</sup> Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 180-83 (p. 180). Many works in the late nineteenth century began to address both double and multiple personality. See, for example, Hippolyte Bourru and P. Burot, *Variations de la Personnalité* (Paris: Baillière, 1888); Bourru and Burot ‘Un cas de la Multiplicité des états de Conscience Chez un Hystéro-Epileptique’ *Revue Philosophique*, 20 (1885), 411-16; John H. King, *Man an Organic Community: Being an Exposition of the Law that the Human Personality in all its Phases in Evolution, Both Co-ordinate and Disconsolate, is the Multiple of Many Sub-Personalities* (London, 1893); A.T. Myers, ‘The Life-History of a Case of Double or Multiple Personality’, reprinted from *The Journal of Mental Science* (1886); F.W.H. Myers, ‘Multiplex Personality’ (1886), in *Embodied Selves*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth, pp. 132-38.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Hacking, p. 180, from Bourru and Burot, *Variations de la Personnalité*. Bourru and Burot use different states of consciousness as a means of talking about the manifestations of different personalities in a case of multiple personality disorder. The physicians coined the term ‘multiple personality’ in 1885 when they were studying Louis Vivet. For more on Bourru and Burot and nineteenth-century theories of multiple personality disorder see Hacking, Harrington and André LeBlanc, ‘The Origins of the Concept of Dissociation: Paul Janet, his Nephew Pierre, and the Problem of Post-Hypnotic Suggestion’, *History of Science*, 39 (2001), 57-69.

identity can be comfortably housed within an academic and impermeable structure of selfhood, William James argues that the architecture of the mind is overrun, that its structure is incoherent, ambiguous, and ‘few outlines are pure’ (p. 156).

At the end of the century mental scientists were anxiously policing boundaries of the self and mind in unprecedented ways, despite the fact that cases of multiple personality only drew attention to the impossibility of mapping and delimiting identity. Indeed, the connections made between the workings of the mind and the supernatural by mental scientists and SPR members such as Edmund Gurney, William James, William McDougall, F.W.H. Myers and Charles Richet indicate not only that mental scientists strove for an unobtainable level of academic specificity within the studies on the mind, but also that the foundations of identity had become incorporeal and ghostly.<sup>21</sup> Hacking points out, for example, that psychic research on spiritualism led to the hypothesis that ‘alters [alternate personalities in cases of multiple personality] were departed spirits; mediumship and multiplicity grew close’ (pp. 135-36). F.W.H. Myers’s *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903) examines this very phenomenon, suggesting that alternative personalities are in fact the manifestations of ghosts

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<sup>21</sup> These mental scientists and SPR members serve as examples of the ways in which studies on the supernatural and psychology worked in tandem in the late nineteenth century. While never taking up a profession, Gurney (1847-1888) studied both psychology and medicine and published for the SPR. In *Phantasms of the Living*, 2 vols (London: Trubner, 1886), which he co-wrote with Myers and Frank Podmore (1855-1910) and published in 1886, Gurney suggested that a telepathic message from the mind could manifest itself in the form of a ghostly apparition. William James was interested in the effect of ghosts, the supernatural and phenomena like telepathy on the human mind. See, for example, ‘The Reality of the Unseen’ (c.1901) in *A William James Reader*, ed. by Gay Wilson Allen, pp. 165-81; ‘Suggestions of Mysticism’ (1910), in *A William James Reader*, ed. by Gay Wilson Allen, pp. 204-10, and *Essays in Psychological Research*, ed. by Frederick Burkhardt, *The Works of William James*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). William McDougall (1871-1938) was a psychologist interested in instinctual and social behaviour and eugenics. He was also interested in parapsychology and became the president of the SPR in 1920 and the American SPR in 1921. French physiologist Charles Richet (1850-1935) won the Nobel Prize in 1913 for his work on anaphylaxis. President of the SPR in 1905, Richet investigated paranormal activity and coined the term ectoplasm (the white substance exuded by mediums during a séance, which purportedly materialises into spirits). See for example Charles Richet, *Thirty Years of Psychological Research: Being a Treatise on Metaphysics*, trans. by Stanley de Brath (London: Collins, 1923).

attempting to contact the living.<sup>22</sup> The mind could host both other selves and ghosts, defying logical reason. Mental scientists are haunted by the immaterial nature of mind, their attempts to produce a ‘materialist science of the self’ (p. xiii) as Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth phrase it in *Embodied Selves*, ‘express[ing] a profoundly ambivalent sense of self’ (p. xiv).

While certainly ‘academic neatness’ in William James’s ‘world of mind’ was lost, the field had gained ‘romantic improvers’ (p. 156) who opened up new lines of investigation into the mind. James’s ‘The Private Life’ is influenced by *fin-de-siècle* theories of the mind, but it also suggests anxiety about where the boundaries of identity lie in another way: who owns the rights to the public and private selves, and to the writing itself? Is it the author, another self within, another separate ghostly self, or the reading public that ultimately has agency in the act of writing?<sup>23</sup>

In ‘The Private Life’ James tries to circumvent these fears by attempting to make sharp distinctions between public and private identities. While this division uncannily doubles the self, it also artificially seems to offer James a means of imposing ‘academic neatness’ on his text: there is one public Vawdrey, and one private Vawdrey. This attempt quickly disintegrates, however, when it seems clear that there are already other selves within the text. ‘The Private Life’ is haunted by a ghostly third presence who the other characters think they know, a hybridised mixture of the public and private selves. Vawdrey’s identity is dispersed throughout the hotel: like James’s ‘house of fiction’ metaphor in which guests stand at every window, Vawdrey’s selves manifest themselves

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<sup>22</sup> F.W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1903).

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between the artist and the public in ‘The Private Life’ see Adam Bresnick, ‘The Artist that Was Used Up: Henry James’s “Private Life”’, *Henry James Review*, 14 (1993), 87-98.

in the various chambers, writing in darkened rooms and socialising in salons. The hotel is comparable to the mind itself, populated by ghostly other selves, but lacking solid structure, with obscure corridors (p. 204), and ‘vague[. . .] apertures,’ with ‘flitting illumination’ (p. 205).<sup>24</sup> It is the apparitional nature of identity that haunts and fascinates James, who yearns to restrain the self within concise and unadulterated prose, yet realises the ultimate futility of such a project.

‘The Private Life’ expresses many of the anxieties James himself felt about the effect of writing on his own private circumstances. In 1909 he burned much of his correspondence, destroying forever the discursive records of a lifetime.<sup>25</sup> Lyndall Gordon suggests that this was an attempt to resist biography, and therefore adverse judgement by the public (both his contemporaries and future readers).<sup>26</sup> For example, when in 1894 James’s friend and writer Constance Fenimore Woolson plummeted to her death from a balcony in Venice, James went to the house and searched desperately for a will. Gordon argues James felt ashamed about his negligence of his friend, fearing the will might contain a letter to him that would betray his thoughtless behaviour (Gordon, pp. 284-92).

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<sup>24</sup> The ‘flitting illumination’ may refer to early kinds of moving pictures like the praxinoscope (c. 1877) which, according to the OED is ‘[a] scientific toy resembling the zoetrope [c. 1867], in which a series of pictures, representing consecutive positions of a moving body, are arranged along the inner circumference of a cylindrical or polygonal box open at the top, and having in the middle a corresponding series of mirrors in which the pictures are reflected; when the box is rapidly revolved, the successive reflexions blend and produce the impression of an actually moving object’. James may be using the multiple, unstable images in early cinematographic technology as symbols for the multiple and unstable representations of identity in ‘The Private Life’.

<sup>25</sup> Fred Kaplan, *The Imagination of Genius* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), p. 521.

<sup>26</sup> Lyndall Gordon, *A Private Life of Henry James: Two Women and His Art* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 371. Gordon argues that James felt guilty about aspects of his past behaviour, for example his relationships with his cousin, Minny Temple (1845-1870) and friend, Constance Fenimore Woolson (1840-1894), women who are often considered to be the models for the heroines of his work. Gordon believes that not only was James inspired by women like Temple and Woolson, but also that he ‘fed’ on them to sustain his art (p. 304). See also Alfred Habegger, *Henry James and the ‘Woman Business’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

While Gordon is interested particularly in James's sense of guilt about his relationships with women, I suggest that his concerns about biography are concerns about control of his own writing and his inability to attain the 'academic neatness' of which his brother speaks. In burning his letters James wants to bury biography so that his private life cannot be claimed or misinterpreted by both voyeuristic readers and unscrupulous publishers.<sup>27</sup> Simultaneously, however, in burying biography, James might also be resurrecting literary fame, since his destruction could incite public interest. James's particularly concern about Woolson's will symbolically suggests that he is anxious about who inherits the haunted house of fiction: when James dies, who will possess the deed to his writing and unlock its secrets? How can he maintain 'academic neatness' in his work once it has passed into the public sphere, beyond his grasp?<sup>28</sup>

'The Private Life' reveals that the literary marketplace has an uncanny effect on writers. The ghostly third in the story might also be the spectre of celebrity that haunts the author in its promise of literary greatness and fame, and also in its potential poisoning of the author's private life. For James writing is a cycle of the conjuring and exorcism of ghosts: the unsettling revelation of his private life, and then the enshrouding of his personage again.

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<sup>27</sup> See also Colin Meissner, "What ghosts will be left to walk": Mercantile Culture and the Language of Art', *Henry James Review*, 21 (2000), 242-42. Meissner suggests that James's 'aesthetic sensibilities' were horrified by 'the essential hollowness or vacancy behind the façade of America mercantile and social culture' (p. 244). Although Meissner focuses on mercantile culture, his article is significant to an understanding of James's anxieties about the literary marketplace.

<sup>28</sup> For information on the history of publishing practices in the nineteenth century, public reception, and issues of copyright law, see, for example, *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors and Readers*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005); *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed. by John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and Alexis Weedon, *Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market, 1836-1916* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

### The High Priestess of the Remington: James, the Typewriter, and Agency

Forgive a communication very shabby and superficial. It has come to this that I can address you only through an embroidered veil of sound. The sound is that of the admirable and expensive machine that I have just purchased for the purpose of binding our silences. The hand that works it, however, is not the lame *patte* which, after inflicting on you for years its aberrations, I have now relegated to the shelf, or at least to the hospital – that is to permanent, bandaged, baffled, rheumatic, incompetent obscurity.<sup>29</sup>

James's letter to W. Morton Fullerton on 25 February 1897 was among the first that he ever dictated, after writer's cramp in 1896 forced him to hire an amanuensis and buy a typewriter. While the letter seems to endorse the 'admirable' typewriter, it also reflects on how using a typewriter changes the nature of communication.<sup>30</sup> In this case, communing from a distance with an old friend means James's writing is not only in danger of becoming 'shabby and artificial' with the intervention of a typewriter, but it is also no longer a means of directly engaging with Fullerton. For James this mediated process is haunted, the letter's language and imagery implying supernatural communication over distance and the spiritualist séance. The notion that the typewriter can 'bind their silences' implies a kind of spiritual or ecclesiastical binding, the magical power of a spell, or even a telepathic link in which James is uncannily connected to Fullerton over a great distance. The word also implies that James wishes to symbolically cover the wounds made by their periods of non-communication with the aid of the

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<sup>29</sup> Henry James, 'To W. Morton Fullerton', in *Henry James Letters*, ed. by Leon Edel, 4 vols (London: Macmillan, 1974-1984), IV (1984), pp. 41-42 (p. 41).

<sup>30</sup> Mark Seltzer's 'The Postal Unconscious', *Henry James Review*, 21 (2000), 197-206 problematically argues that James was comfortable with using new technology. I suggest that James was uneasy about switching to the typewriter, and that this new process of writing was an uncanny one.

typewriter. While the typewriter seems to promise intimacy over distance, James is anxious about the fact that he may be even further from attaining direct communication: not only are his words separated from Fullerton spatially, but also by the bodies of the typewriter and the typist.

Indeed, the 'veil of sound' through which James now communicates suggests not only that the sound of the typewriter prevents him or distracts him from really communicating with Fullerton, but also associates him with the ghosts of spiritualist séances. The 'veil of sound' could be associated with the audible manifestations during a séance in which trumpets are played by spirits above the sitters heads, wreathing them in a cacophony of sound.<sup>31</sup> The 'veil' also seems suggestive of the symbolic veil spiritualists use to discuss various aspects of spiritualism, such as the separation between this world and the spirit world, or as a way of speaking about the mysteries of spiritualism.<sup>32</sup> When James dictates, he becomes the spirit channelling his thoughts through the medium (the typist/typewriter), which then filters through to the sitters at the séance (Fullerton).

James tells Fullerton that 'the hand' working the typewriter is not his own, but another's. While this is meant to show he has hired a typist, the act of using another agency problematises issues of authorship. Who can be credited as the author?<sup>33</sup> That James has 'relegated' his hand to 'obscurity' is significant here because it suggests that he finds the act of writing by hand obscure and anachronistic, deficient both in clarity and

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<sup>31</sup> See Owen, *Darkened Room*, and Richet for accounts of the use of trumpets in the séance.

<sup>32</sup> For more on the use of the term 'veil' in spiritualism see for example, John Traill Taylor, *The Veil Lifted: Modern Developments in Spirit Photography* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1994), originally published in 1894, and W.T. Stead, *The Blue Island: Experiences of a New Arrival Beyond the Veil* (London: Rider, c.1922). Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (London: Dent, 1880), first published in 1852, describes a 'veiled lady', a mysterious, ghostly woman, said to possess mesmeric power.

<sup>33</sup> See Katherine Rowe, *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) for a discussion of agency and hands.



intelligibility, but also lacking currency: writing by hand was technologically out of date, ‘bandaged, baffled, rheumatic [and] incompetent’.

Here James turns away from the private writing he describes in ‘The Private Life’, and towards a more public style of composition, in which amanuensis and typewriter are witness to the creative process. As ‘The Private Life’ shows, writing by hand is a ghostly private act, but dictating to a typist is haunting in a new way. The typist and the typewriter become part of the writing ritual, the mediums to James’s message, and what filters through might not always be entirely James’s creation. Not only might the typist alter his words, but her very presence might surreptitiously influence him.

The uncanny nature of writing technologies suggests that James’s hopes that the typewriter can restore academic neatness to his writing, and exorcise his ghosts are futile. He insists that using the typewriter gives him greater editorial control over his work, but that otherwise the process is the same as if he were writing by hand:

[t]he value of that process for me is in its help to do over and over, for which it is extremely adapted, and which is the only way I can do at all. It soon enough becomes *intellectually*, absolutely identical with the act of writing – or has become so, after five years now, with me; so that the difference is only material and illusory.<sup>34</sup>

Yet, while James remarked on the efficacy of using a typewriter, Leon Edel observes that there are many notable differences to his style once he begins dictating:

In this process certain mannerisms crept in – attempts to get away from old familiar forms of expression: displacement and splitting of verbs, the emergence of unexpected adverbs, the removal of the given phrase from

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<sup>34</sup> Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Master 1901-1916* (London: Hart-Davis, 1972), p. 130.

that part of the sentence where the reader expected to find it, into another part. James's prose was now spoken prose. (Edel, *Master*, p. 130)

James's style seems to *lose* its academic neatness, and the language and syntax becomes almost haphazard. Still, the writing is not just 'spoken prose' as Edel suggests, but rather a complex amalgam of the permanency of print and the spontaneity of speech, a blurring of the distinctions between written and oral communication. The typewriter gives James even less control over his 'house of fiction' (and its already shaky foundations) and further destabilises the notion of authorship and agency.

'[C]ertain mannerisms creep in' to James's writing at this period, but crucially for James it is the possibility for other *personalities*, those of his amanuenses, to creep into his work which preoccupies him. James had three primary amanuenses, William MacAlpine, Mary Weld, and Theodora Bosanquet (who worked for James from 1907 until his death in 1916). According to James, MacAlpine 'had too much Personality – and I have secured in his place a young lady [Weld] who has, to the best of my belief, less, or who disguises it more' (Edel, *Master*, p. 94). MacAlpine's overbearing personality contrasted with Weld's meeker one is suggestive about conventional expectations for gender roles both in the workplace and in society at large in the nineteenth century, but James seemed to feel threatened by the possibility that his employees have too much sway over his writing: 'Mr. James liked his typists to be "without a mind" – and certainly not to suggest words to him' (Edel, *Master*, p. 367). James's emphasis on MacAlpine's 'Personality' implies not only that MacAlpine has a strong character, but that he has an *overly* strong character, which might drown out James's own sense of creative potential.

James described Bosanquet as

a new excellent amanuensis, a young boyish Miss Bosanquet, who is worth all the other (females) that I have had put together and who confirms in me in the perception afresh – after eight months without such an agent – that for certain, for most kinds of diligence and production, the intervention of the agent is, to *my* perverse constitution, an intense aid and a true economy! (Edel, *Master*, p. 370)

Bosanquet occupies the uneasy position between automatic writer, mindlessly copying James's words, and active agent in the writing process. Significantly, Lisa Gitelman has shown that 'during the 1890s "automatic writing" was a phrase that applied doubly to the work done on typewriters and during séances, by secretaries and mediums, both of whom were usually women' (p. 19). Indeed, Bosanquet filled both positions: after James's death she became an automatic writer and medium and even corresponded with James's spirit.<sup>35</sup> As James's typist, Bosanquet channels James's words through the typewriter so that his story can manifest itself on the page. Superficially, it seems as if Bosanquet is passively, automatically recording James's words. Indeed, despite cultural shifts in attitudes towards the acceptability of women in the workplace, women's work was often repetitive, stifling creative intellectual endeavour.<sup>36</sup> Many women typists, telephone

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<sup>35</sup> For more on Bosanquet see Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*, pp. 86-114. See also Bosanquet's own account of working with Henry James, Theodora Bosanquet, *Henry James at Work*, Hogarth Essays, III (London: Hogarth, 1924).

<sup>36</sup> The increase of working women during the second half of the nineteenth century was due mainly to two factors. Firstly, women could be paid less than men for doing the same job (Gitelman, p. 188). Henry James, for example, was pleased to hire Mary Weld once William MacAlpine left his employ because MacAlpine 'is too damned expensive, and always has been [. . .] I can get a highly competent little woman for half' (Edel, *Master*, p. 91). Secondly, the new technologies seemed suited to feminine capability according to gender constructs of the period. Tom Standage's description of female telegraphers in Britain is useful in the context of social expectations about 'women's work' during this period, as well as an interesting summary of the 'average' female telegrapher: 'female telegraphers were usually the daughters of clergymen, tradesmen and government clerks, and were typically between 18 and 30 years old and unmarried. Women were regarded as "admirable manipulators of instruments", well suited to telegraphy (since it wasn't too strenuous) and they could spend the quiet periods reading or knitting. The hours were

operators, and telegraphers acted to transmit other people's messages, and never to author their own.

However, the relationship between Bosanquet and James challenges this dynamic. In *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*, Pamela Thurschwell discusses James's 'In the Cage' and Bosanquet, suggesting that together they 'explor[e] potential pleasures and dangers of carrying the words of others' (p. 87). While Thurschwell is particularly concerned with sexuality, and the economics of exchange in James, she does not go far enough to examine the complex ways in which James approached the act of writing, how the typewriter changed and made uncanny the ways in which he wrote, and how Bosanquet herself problematised the dynamic of the passive secretary being dictated to by the male employer. Although Bosanquet is described as an 'intense aid and a true economy' (p. 370), her intensity implies she is not only very helpful, but violently, even excessively so. She is also part of the economy of supply and demand; linked to the marketplace which disturbs James, since the marketplace (like the typist herself) might control, influence, corrupt, or reject his writing. James's description of her as an agent grants her power in the writing process and she symbolically becomes his literary agent, negotiating between the public and private. Paradoxically, he also refers to her presence as an 'intervention' (p. 370), or an interference. Bosanquet both helps and hinders James's writing process, possibly because James fears that to a certain extent the words on the page filtering through her are somehow altered, the very writing itself modified by her personality.

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long, though; most operators, including the women, worked ten hours a day, six days a week'. From Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's Online Pioneers*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998), pp. 125-27. The first typewriter reached the public in 1874, and when by the 1880s and 1890s the typewriter was in common use in businesses everywhere, the female secretary, the woman automatic writer, was employed en masse (Gitelman, p. 188).

Writing from the male-only Reform Club in London, James wrote to Bosanquet on 27 October 1911 that ‘I haven’t a seat and temple for the Remington and its priestess’.<sup>37</sup> The term ‘priestess’ implies that Bosanquet possesses spiritual and mystical capabilities despite her role as an automatic writer. Perhaps James *wants* Bosanquet to become a priestess of celebrity, protecting the ‘temple’ (or house) of fiction from the tainted literary marketplace. Although James wants Bosanquet to uphold ‘academic neatness’, nevertheless her presence during scenes of writing problematises his desire for unmediated authorship, and he is left feeling anxious that literary agency is in flux between James, Bosanquet and the typewriter.

### Uncanny Technologies of Writing at the *Fin-de-siècle*

James and his typewriter (both the woman and the machine) act as an example for how new technologies converted writing into sites of contestation. Significantly, manifestations during spiritualist séances would follow new innovations in technology, suggesting that contrivances designed for clear and easy communication had been appropriated for the mediated form of communication between this world and the next. For example, when the Morse code was introduced in the mid to late 1830s, spirits rapped in Morse, and with the invention of the telephone, disembodied voices at séances became the vogue.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, connections were made both by mental scientists and psychical researchers between technologies of writing and the supernatural possibilities of the mind. For example, with the invention of the telegraph, comparisons were made between

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<sup>37</sup> Henry James, ‘To Theodora Bosanquet’ in *Henry James Letters*, ed. by Leon Edel, IV, p. 589 (p. 589).

<sup>38</sup> Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 364-86.

this technology and the phenomenon of thought transference. The wireless telegraph (c.1894-1896) seemed only to increase the likelihood that telepathy was, in fact, possible: if electrical impulses could be sent through the air, thought waves could also be sent out and received by distant bodies. In 1882 F. W. H. Myers introduced the term telepathy, defining it as ‘cases of impression received at a distance without the normal operation of recognized sense organs’.<sup>39</sup> Myers’s definition of telepathy suggested that the wireless telegraph and thought transference could both fall into the category of telepathy. Minds and machines were beginning to echo one another’s workings, both invested with limitless and haunting possibilities, and conceptually developing co-dependently in the eyes of the public as a result of the interchange of meaning they provided for one another.

Laura Otis argues that nineteenth-century technologies were necessarily influenced by popular culture, and also used human anatomy terminology and contemporary topics of scientific interest.<sup>40</sup> The telegraph network, for example, was talked and written about in the same way that one would discuss the nerve impulses of the brain, with electrical impulses relaying messages from (nerve) centre to (nerve) centre. If the language of the body was to affect the language of technology, then bodies and technology were from the beginning very much interconnected. Myers’s telepathy seems to indicate such a relation since the etymology of the word itself implies a connection between telepathic machines and the human body. Telepathy comes from the Greek (tele-), meaning distance, and (-pathy) meaning feeling, or perception.<sup>41</sup> However, Roger Luckhurst also shows that (-pathy) comes from (pathos), connoting both intimacy

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<sup>39</sup> OED, ‘telepathy’.

<sup>40</sup> Laura Otis, *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> OED, ‘telepathy’.

and touch (*Telepathy*, p. 1). This slight change in definition allows telepathy to mean bodily intimacy over distance, a communion of minds that is also a *physically* psychic embrace.<sup>42</sup> The physicality within the term can also be linked to ‘telepathic’ machines like the wireless. Humans work the machines, the oil from their fingers greasing handsets and switchboards, hair and skin follicles left behind as a part of the process of connecting flesh and mechanical design. Mechanical automatic writers like typewriters were marked by the body, whereas human automatic writers like mediums left bodily secretions such as ectoplasm during séances.<sup>43</sup> And yet the machine, in its intense closeness to the body, is irrevocably separate from its human counterpart.<sup>44</sup> Just as James hoped that communicating with Fullerton through the typewriter would bind them more closely together, the typewriter only seemed to make their communication even more superficial and distant.

Bodies, minds, and machines at the end of the century had the uncanny ability to mingle together: minds worked like machines, machines evoked and retracted physicality and bodily proximity, bodies touched machines to make them work, and machines tapped the workings of the mind, acting as the mediums for discursive practice. Minds could touch other minds telepathically, just as machines could touch machines to transmit messages electrically. Spiritualist mediums acted as mind, body and machine combined, utilising new technology like the Morse code to transmit messages, becoming automatic

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<sup>42</sup> Nicholas Royle also defines telepathy as a force which makes distances intimate. See Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>43</sup> See Oppenheim, Owen, *Darkened Room*, and Richet.

<sup>44</sup> See Connor, *Dumbstruck*, for a discussion of the ways in which technology like the telephone, which gave the listener the impression that the speaker was almost in the ear, suggested an uncanny intimacy between bodies that were actually distant (pp. 364-68).

writing machines like the typewriter to bodily transmit writing, whether from a spirit mind or their own unconscious minds.

Of course bodies and machines have often been linked to the uncanny; for example, Terry Castle points to the eighteenth-century interest in technology, particularly in the form of automata, in order to argue that the 'eighteenth-century invention of the automaton was also an "invention" of the uncanny'.<sup>45</sup> If machines have previously been connected to moments of the uncanny, then the uncanniness of that interaction is of a different nature by the time we reach the *fin-de-siècle*, whose discursive cultural practice seems to render this change.<sup>46</sup> The merging of bodies and machines at the turn of the century, their *interchangeability*, also includes the mind, a blending of discourses which suggests that identity at the *fin-de-siècle* could come into dangerous proximity with other identities: the self might be vulnerable to outside influence.<sup>47</sup>

### **Kipling's 'Wireless' and James's 'In the Cage': Telepathy and Telegraphy**

Technologies of writing split identities. Rudyard Kipling's 'Wireless', for example, is filled with discursive figures: wireless telegraph machines, human automatic writers, and

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<sup>45</sup> Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> In *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, Tim Armstrong argues that modernism is in part defined by the interrelations between the body and technology, a concept that I argue also largely contributes to Victorian culture in the late nineteenth century.

<sup>47</sup> Anxieties about being unable to police identity from outside influences also links to Victorian anxieties about wanting to symbolically keep bloodlines pure from atavistic tendencies and foreign influence. *Dracula* exemplifies these anxieties; for example, Lucy becomes a monster once her blood has been tainted by Dracula's. See, for example, *The Gothic Other: Racial and Social Constructions in the Literary Imagination*, ed. by Ruth Binstock Anolik and Douglas L. Howard (London: Eurospan, 2004), and Paul Gilmore, 'The Telegraph in Black and White', *ELH*, 69 (2002), 805-33. Gilmore suggests that the discourse on telegraphy in the 1840s and 1850s could subversively blur distinctions between races.



the Romantic poet Keats.<sup>48</sup> These discursive machines, bodies and minds are conflated within the story fragmenting identity and blurring thresholds of self and non-self.

Who, in the story is body, machine and mind is a complicated problem. Bodies in 'Wireless' can be confused with other bodies: Fanny Brand might actually be Fanny Brawne, and Shaynor the druggist becomes the medium for Keats the druggist.<sup>49</sup> Machines can be confused with other machines, for example the messages from the 'men o' war' ships are picked up by the Morse instrument in the druggist's, but not by each other (p. 157). Finally, minds can be confused with other minds, the narrator's unconscious mind making parallels between the similarities in the course of the events of the evening with the lines of Keats's 'Eve of St. Agnes' (1819), and then transferring these connections seemingly telepathically into Shaynor's mind. However, Shaynor himself seems to be the combination of mind, body, and machine. Shaynor is an automatic writer, unconsciously, mechanically writing the words of the dead poet Keats, his fleshly body confused with that of a mechanical one. Shaynor's mind, and the disembodied mind of Keats also become confused, intermingling with each other - the mind of the dead poet entering into the mind of Shaynor's 'machine-like' body (p. 152).<sup>50</sup> And certainly Shaynor's body is bodily, secreting bodily fluid in the form of the 'bright-red danger signals' (p. 147) - the blood of the consumptive. Shaynor here seems telepathically, empathetically ill with Keats. But if Shaynor is acting as mind, body, and

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<sup>48</sup> Rudyard Kipling, 'Wireless', in *The Best Short Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1997), pp. 143-58. The story refers to the Marconi experiments in wireless telegraphy of the *fin-de-siècle*. Guglielmo Marconi (1874-1937) was the Italian inventor and developer of the wireless telegraph.

<sup>49</sup> Keats (1795-1821) was a druggist and poet who became engaged to Fanny Brawne in 1819, the same year that he wrote 'The Eve of St. Agnes' (the poem featured in 'Wireless'). He died of tuberculosis in 1821. For more on Keats, see, for example, Stephen Hebron, *John Keats* (London: The British Library, 2002).

<sup>50</sup> Kipling may also be playing with the notion of the *afflatus*, which imparts poetic inspiration: Keats is the muse who is mediated by the wireless.

machine for the outpourings of Keats's poetry, then he also seems to be acting in parallel to the signals passing from wireless to wireless – he himself is a wireless telegraph machine. The narrator remarks 'there is something coming through here, too' (p. 152), suggesting that Shaynor himself has been transformed into a wireless, his 'start[s]', 'wrench[es]' and 'jerk[ing]' movements like the tickings and stoppings of the Morse code (p. 148).

The intersections of minds, bodies and machines in 'Wireless' have the power to make humans into automatic writers, but they also have the uncanny ability to fragment selfhood. Shaynor becomes blurred with the wireless, and with the identity of a dead poet. As the narrator watches Shaynor's transformations into that which is not entirely human, he finds himself splitting apart from himself, his own identity merging with that of the technology around him: 'I heard the crackle of the sparks as he [Cashell] depressed the keys of the transmitter. In my own brain too, something crackled' (p. 152). At this point, when the narrator can no longer distinguish between mind, body, and machine he becomes doubled: 'For an instant that was half an eternity, the shop spun before me in a rainbow tinted whirl, in and through which my own soul most dispassionately considered my own soul that fought with an over-mastering fear' (p.152). The narrator dissociates himself so completely from his 'other self' (p. 152) that he can actually speak to it, suggesting the existence of a doubly uncanny moment: not only has the self uncannily separated from itself, but also one of the selves perceives the uncanny truth that there may be no scientific, rational explanation for Shaynor's 'possession'. Because selfhood in this story has no distinctive barriers between what is and what is not one's own identity, identity is free to spill over from its unified form into splinter selves.

In a text about bodies, minds, and machines merging together, invading one another, and disregarding normal boundaries of physical separation, Kipling's use of Keats's 'The Eve of St Agnes' becomes particularly significant. Keats's poem, is after all the story of Porphyro's rape of Madeline, of bodies penetrating other bodies, just as the poem itself penetrates the text of 'Wireless'.<sup>51</sup> In this context, telepathy becomes invested with a degree of perverse sexuality. For example, Shaynor's 'start[s]', 'wrench[es]' and 'jerk[ing]' (p. 148) suggest ugly and unsettling sexual behaviour. 'Wireless' also touches on *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about sexuality: what does it mean when male bodies can be possessed by other male bodies?

Significantly, telepathy in 'Wireless' becomes possessed of a haunting ability in which the projection of thoughts into the mind of another suggests not merely a rape of the mind, but the power of discursivity itself. Telepathy is, after all, a discursive practice, the reading of transmitted thoughts, and the writing and transmission of them for others to read. Keats transmits his thoughts to Shaynor, haunting him, and his 'The Eve of St. Agnes' is haunting the short story itself, leaving spectral traces of the poem's 'hare', 'moths', and the colours red, yellow, and black throughout 'Wireless'.<sup>52</sup> The writer has the power to resurrect himself, to infiltrate Shaynor's mind, but also the mind of future readers, both of Kipling's 'Wireless' and of Keats's works. Keats's poem, 'This Living

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<sup>51</sup> John Keats, 'The Eve of St. Agnes', in *Complete Poems: John Keats*, ed. by Jack Stillinger (London: Belknap Press, 1982), pp. 229-39.

<sup>52</sup> In 'Wireless', the hare is dead and frozen, hanging for sale at the butchers (p. 145), whereas in 'The Eve of St. Agnes', the hare is alive and frozen 'limp[ing] through the trembling grass' (l. 3). Shaynor's eyes in 'Wireless' are frequently compared to those of a 'drugged moth's' (p. 145) – later the narrator compares his eyes to a 'tiger moth'. The wings of tiger moth in 'The Eve of St. Agnes' are compared with the coloured panes of the window (Stanza (XXIV. 6-7). Shaynor covers himself with a 'red, black and yellow Austrian jute blanket' (p. 148); the tablecloth in 'St. Agnes' is 'crimson, gold, and jet' (XXIX. 4). The colour red is particularly significant, suggesting the blood of the consumptives Keats and Shaynor, and also the virginal blood of Madeline.

Hand' (1819) seems a fitting prophecy for Keats's resurrection in Shaynor's body.<sup>53</sup> The poem suggests that Keats's hand, 'would, if it were cold' and dead 'haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights' which it successfully does in 'Wireless'.<sup>54</sup> Cashell's conjuring the image of a 'spiritualistic séance' (p. 158) in conjunction with the night's jumbled, mis-wired reception of messages is apt indeed. 'Wireless' becomes an evocation of the power of writing itself, writing which ghost-like haunts readers. Writing in 'Wireless' is manifested with uncanny capability, fragmenting identities in blurred relations of bodies, minds, and machines, and immortalising itself by returning from the dead again and again.<sup>55</sup>

The séance-like communion with a dead poet and distant ships in 'Wireless' gives the reader 'just enough to tantalise' (p. 158), a hint at what might be possible in this collision of writing, writing machines, new technology, the human mind, and the human body.<sup>56</sup> James's 'In the Cage', another story about telegraphy, is also fascinated by that which can 'tantalise'. The 'odds and ends' Cashell finds so 'disheartening' (p. 158) are the pieces of information upon which the girl thrives. She longs for glimpses into the

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<sup>53</sup> Keats, 'This Living Hand' in *Complete Poems*, ed. by Jack Stillinger, p. 384.

<sup>54</sup> In *Dead Hands*, Rowe suggests that Keats's dead hand symbolises the 'Romantic alienation of the subject from the work of his or her hands' (p. 114). Spiritualist automatic writings of the Victorian period, however, transform the Romantic uneasiness about accepting their writing as their own to the Victorian conviction that what has been written is definitively the work of someone else.

<sup>55</sup> See Sylvia Pamboukian, 'Science, Magic and Fraud in the Short Stories of Rudyard Kipling', *ELT*, 47 (2004), 429-45. Although Pamboukian is interested in the 'apparent opposition' (p. 429) between the supernatural and technology, showing how Kipling returns again and again to these themes, she overlooks the uncanny meeting of bodies and machines in Kipling.

<sup>56</sup> Kipling was fascinated by the ghostly and the supernatural, and often returned to these themes in his writing. He was familiar with the SPR, and his sister Trix Kipling was a renowned clairvoyant. For more on Kipling's connections to spiritualism, see, for example, William B. Dillingham, 'Kipling: Spiritualism, Bereavement, Self-Revelation, and "They"', *ELT*, 45 (2002), 402-25. For critical studies on Kipling and the supernatural, see, for example, Peter Morey, 'Gothic and Supernatural: Allegories at Work and Play in Kipling's Indian Fiction', in *The Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 201-17, and E.M.G. Smith, 'Kipling's Key to the Haunted Chamber', in *The Haunted Mind: The Supernatural in Victorian Literature*, ed. by Elton E. Smith and Robert Haas (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1999), pp. 89-100.

lives of high society, for information she can ‘patch[ed] up and eke[ed] out’ into a narrative that will signify for her the ‘high reality’ and ‘bristling truth’ of the wealthy who regularly send and receive telegrams.<sup>57</sup> She desires ‘a play of mind’ (p. 144) that allows her to ‘piece together all sorts of mysteries’ (p. 145), the mysteries haunting the lives of the gentlemen and ladies that come to her, a kind of ‘knowing’ that ‘ma[kes] up for the long stiffness of sitting there in the stocks’ (p. 143), and, in effect, makes up for all that is unsatisfactory and dull in her life. She develops ‘flicker[ings] of antipathy and sympathy’ (p. 142), suggesting her development of telepathy in her ‘surrender [of] herself [. . .] to a certain expansion of her consciousness’ (p. 143), through which she gleans ‘red gleams in the grey, fitful awakings and followings, odd caprices of curiosity’ (p. 142). Like the telegraph machine which receives and transmits messages to people hundreds of miles away, the girl has ‘an extraordinary way of keeping clues’ (p. 145), receiving knowledge as it ‘floats to her through the bars of the cage’ (p. 146), and apprehending unspoken truths from a distance. Being a telegraphist allows her, as she puts it to ‘read into the immensity of their intercourse stories and meanings without end’ (p. 155).<sup>58</sup>

In effect, the girl believes herself to have achieved a kind of omniscience over the lives of her ‘clients’, a telepathic knowing through telegraphy, itself a kind of telepathic machine, and this knowledge gives her the feeling of omnipotence:

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<sup>57</sup> Henry James, ‘In the Cage’ in *Complete Tales*, X, pp. 139-242 (p. 146).

<sup>58</sup> For more on the girl’s ability to discover hidden truths from her customers, see for example Eric Savoy, ‘“In the Cage” and the Queer Effects of Gay History’, *NOVEL*, 28 (1995), 284-307. Savoy is interested in the ghostly, but rather than focusing on uncanny technologies of writing, he suggests that the girl’s ‘spectral’ and ‘speculative’ knowledge links her to ‘the regime of the closet (p. 286) and thus to the ‘text’s fundamental queerness’ (p. 287). See also Tomas Pollard, ‘Telegraphing the Sentence and the Story: Iconicity in “In the Cage” by Henry James’, *European Journal of English Studies*, 5 (2001), pp. 81-96. Pollard is also interested in hidden meanings, but focuses on syntactical and plot clues given through the telegrams within the story.

she had at moments, in private, a triumphant, vicious feeling of mastery and power, a sense of having their [the ladies and gentlemen of telegrams] silly, guilty secrets in her pocket, her small retentive brain, and thereby knowing so much more about them than they suspected or would care to think. There were those she would have liked to betray, to trip up, to bring down with words altered and fatal. (p. 154)

And yet as she begins to 'live[d] more and more in the whiffs and glimpses, and f[in]d[s] her divinations work faster and stretch further' (p. 152), the power she believes she has gained is only an illusion. Whereas the wireless telegraph and telepathy in 'Wireless' offer infinite and terrible possibilities for the capabilities of the human mind, even suggesting that the writing mind can transcend death, telegraphy and telepathy in 'In the Cage' entangle the anonymous girl in telegraph wires of powerlessness. The metal lines of the cage encasing the girl symbolise the metal lines of the telegraph network that trap her socially.

New technologies of the late nineteenth century had a profound effect on female identity in that by the close of the century the discourse about women in the workforce suggested that the woman *is* the machine. As in the case of Bosanquet, women in the workforce often became automatic writers, but many were unable to attain agency as secretaries, telephone operators, or telegraph workers, but instead passively copied down someone else's words or transmitted someone else's voice. The girl in James's 'In the Cage' battles for agency within a workforce that expected and promoted her anonymity and her quiescence. Significantly the girl is anonymous, suggesting the very identitylessness of her function, and that she is like all of the other nameless hordes of

telegraphers, automatically, mechanically transmitting messages ten hours a day, six days a week. The technologies of the *fin-de-siècle* made female identity mechanical – ‘the poor identity of [the girl’s] function’ (p. 139) is to become an automatic writing machine.

And yet despite this, the girl attempts to remedy her non-identity by turning to the heightened powers she believes she possesses.<sup>59</sup> Lisa Gitelman points to the coincidence of writing acting as ‘both a psychophenomenon and as typing’, believing this ‘points doubly to the openness of the word “automatic” during the 1890s’ (p. 186). Automaticity in the nineteenth century thus evoked images of typewriters, and telegraphs, spiritualist séances and the *women* behind all of these operations. Bette London and Alex Owen have both argued that unlike the automatic writings done by secretaries and telegraphers, spiritualist automatic writers found an empowerment in their status as medium, giving them sexual and social freedoms that would otherwise have been denied them as women.<sup>60</sup> In passages of automatic writing, mediums express illicit desire, conjuring in their writing a sort of ‘double life’: ‘to be a medium one had to become Other to oneself [. . .]. The literature of mediumship is thus filled with allusions to the ‘double life’ of its exponents’ (London, p. 129). The girl is herself a medium, able to receive and transmit telegrams, but also, as she believes, a medium for the thoughts of the socialites she serves.

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<sup>59</sup> Jill Galvan’s ‘Class Ghosting “In the Cage”’, *Henry James Review*, 22 (2001), 297-306 argues that ‘while [the girl’s] telegraphic channelling of messages echoes the occult exploits of the séance medium, she herself is hemmed in all around by unheavenly forces and, the forces of erotic and commercial desire’ (p. 305). I suggest, however, that the girl does have a degree of agency in this story, despite her failure to free herself from her ‘cage’. For other discussions of agency and mediumship in ‘In the Cage’, see for example Richard Menke, “‘Framed and Wired’”: Teaching “In the Cage” at the Intersection of Literature and Media’, *Henry James Review*, 25 (2004), 22-43, and Menke, ‘Telegraphic Realism: Henry James’s “In the Cage”’, *PMLA*, 115 (2000), 975-90.

<sup>60</sup> See London, pp. 128-30; Owen, *Darkened Room*, pp. 226-38.

Although the girl develops a 'double life' (p. 152) of on the one hand bodily action, and on the other mental insight, and gains some agency, the empowerment of the spiritualist medium is ultimately denied her. Her telepathy gives her the impression that she can somehow effect change, that she can move upwards in the world and out of the cage by winning Everard's love. This half of her double life, however, is not 'the harmless pleasure of knowing' (p. 198), nor does it liberate her in the way spiritualist mediums had been liberated during séances in which they could take on more sexually confident roles.

The girl's telepathic powers finally imprison her in the cage, for these thoughts are a product of the very life she believes they free her from. Because her work is so stultifying, because she is so irrevocably closed off from the classes she admires, because she is married to Mr. Mudge whom she decidedly does not love, she *must* imagine for herself another life. Her mistake lies in her belief that her imaginary life can in fact somehow carry her above and through the bars of the social cage. Because she is a telegrapher she must imagine that she knows 'stories and meaning without end' (p.155) in order to find at least small satisfaction in an otherwise wholly unsatisfactory existence. Her mind automatically creates a diversion for her – her very escape-mechanism is a technology of the mind to pacify (and at the same time verify) her automatic existence.

The girl in 'In the Cage', like a medium, seems also to raise ghosts, although only in the form of dead hopes. The girl is haunted by her inability to fulfil her fantasies, but if 'her conceit, her baffled vanity were possibly monstrous' (p. 155), if she has 'insidious ways' (p. 174), then she is monstrous only because things have become monstrous for her. The automatic nature of *fin-de-siècle* technologies used in the workplace led to a



mechanisation of human endeavour, which in 'In the Cage' leads to a terrifying crumbling of the self. At the end of the story, the girl realises at last that she knows nothing and can effect nothing in the lives she touches, and that her dreams to become a lady of telegrams, instead of a transmitter of them, are only dreams. To become too involved in the invisible wires connecting minds in 'In the Cage', and to allow oneself to become automated is to uncannily be dispersed amongst the wires of the cage and the telegraph poles, and to have one's identity, finally, mechanised.

The girl's fragmented identity by the end of the story is perhaps suggestive of James's own fears about the dangers of the medium: what happens when information is filtered through someone else? Andrew J. Moody discusses nineteenth-century anxieties about the telegraph office, which could dangerously expose the secrets of its clients. Moody suggest that 'In the Cage' is ultimately about James's concerns about protecting his private life.<sup>61</sup> While I agree, I also suggest that James is concerned about how writing becomes the site of competing claims: for James, technologies intensify the haunted nature of writing, offering the possibility that outside influence, even of a mechanical nature can leave a ghostly impression of itself on the final picture.

### Postscript

By the end of 1915, Henry James was dying. However, even on his deathbed, he insisted that Bosanquet take dictation, although much of what he said was incoherent. Leon Edel writes that '[I]t is to be noted (Mrs. W.J. reported) that even after [James] lapsed into a

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<sup>61</sup> Andrew J. Moody, "'The Harmless Pleasure of Knowing': Privacy in the Telegraph Office and Henry James's 'In the Cage'", *Henry James Review*, 16 (1995), 53-65.

coma, his hands continued to move across the bedsheets as if he were writing'.<sup>62</sup> Writing with the ghost of a pen, on the ghost of paper, even at the last James was fascinated by the uncanny possibilities of writing.

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<sup>62</sup> Henry James, *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. by Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 582.

## Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes and Spirit Photography

### Introduction

‘[Sherlock Holmes] loved to lie in the very centre of five millions of people, with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little rumour or suspicion of unsolved crime’.<sup>1</sup>

Watson’s description of Sherlock Holmes in ‘The Adventure of the Cardboard Box’ (1893) seems uncharacteristic of Watson’s previous claim that his friend was ‘the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has ever seen’.<sup>2</sup> Watson’s comments imply that he wants Holmes to be like a camera, an ‘observing machine’ that captures the criminal. Indeed, the title of the story evokes the notion of the camera: from 1842 the term ‘box-camera’ was used to describe a hand-held camera shaped like a box, and in the 1880s, a type of box-camera known as a ‘detective camera’ was ‘adapted for taking instantaneous photographs’.<sup>3</sup> Although Watson wishes Holmes to be a ‘detective camera’ who instantaneously zooms in on the criminal and ‘takes’ him, in this passage he associates the detective with the imagery and language of telepathy, spiritualism and spirit photography.

Holmes is like a maze of telegraph wires, his ‘filaments’ receiving and transmitting messages of criminality across London.<sup>4</sup> He becomes a kind of network for the interception of crimes and criminals, which not only evokes the telegraph wires in ‘In the Cage’, but also the network within the body and particularly, the

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘The Adventure of the Cardboard Box’, in *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, preface by Christopher Morley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), pp. 888-901 (p. 888).

<sup>2</sup> Doyle, ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’, in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 161-75 (p. 161).

<sup>3</sup> ‘detective camera’, OED.

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘filament’ is significant in many ways to a discussion of Sherlock Holmes. The etymology of the word comes from the words *filare* ‘to spin’ and *filum*, ‘thread’ (OED), suggesting not only the threads of clues that Holmes must follow to solve the crime, but also the narrative threads that Doyle spins.

brain: filaments are like the electric currents sending impulses along the nerve centres, and Holmes's body is sparked, or charged when he connects to the criminals, stimulating him to swift and decisive action.<sup>5</sup> He does not simply transmit impulses along his filaments, he receives them as well, charged with the same energy off which the criminals feed. Furthermore, filaments can be both invisible and material (like the fibres of a spider's web): Holmes is invisibly, yet tangibly connected to the criminal underworld.

Holmes can telegraphically, telepathically detect the criminals in London, just as he reads Watson's thoughts in Baker Street a few paragraphs later. Although Holmes dismisses his 'small essay in thought reading' (p. 890) as a matter of drawing scientific conclusions, the description nevertheless suggests that the popular reputation for the triumph of logic which Watson creates for Holmes is undermined by a description which invests Holmes with the uncanny powers his scientific deduction is designed to contradict.

In 'The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire' (1924), Holmes argues that as a criminal detective he has neither time nor patience for dealing with the supernatural: '[t]his agency stands flat-footed upon the ground and there it must remain. The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply'.<sup>6</sup> However, ghosts do apply, and gain admission to the Sherlock Holmes stories. These tales are haunted by the very supernaturalism that Holmes's fastidious deductive techniques seem to preclude.

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<sup>5</sup> For more on networks, see, for example, Otis. Historically, electricity was linked to the body and in particular the workings of the brain. The term 'current' was first used to describe the 'transmission of nerve-force along a nerve' in 1855 (OED). In 'Movements as Signs of Mental Action', Francis Warner describes the action of currents in the mind in the following terms: '[i]t seems that a nerve-centre, when affected by an impression, may undergo some local molecular change, and also send efferent currents to muscles, producing visible movements at the same time' (in *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*, ed. by D. Hack Tuke, 2 vols [London, 1892], II, pp. 820-27 [p. 822]). Electrotherapy was used throughout the nineteenth century, but gained popularity from the mid-Victorian period and into the twentieth century. See, for example, Linda Simon, *Dark Light: Electricity and Anxiety from the Telegraph to the X-Ray* (London: Harcourt, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire', in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 1033-44 (p. 1034).

Indeed, in the OED 'flat-footed' is defined as 'dead, insipid, maladroit', implying it is this very rejection of the supernatural which undermines Holmes's detective work, and that ghostliness would in fact improve the agency. While not in use until the early and mid-twentieth century, the term 'flat-foot' is slang for a policeman, suggesting a pun on the inept nature of the police force, and particularly Lestrade, who is never able to solve a crime without resorting to Holmes's 'brilliant reasoning power'.<sup>7</sup> However, the term also implies that Holmes's own visual policing is ineffective against elements of the sub-rational, since these elements cannot be sufficiently regulated. Furthermore, when Holmes argues that '[n]o ghosts *need* apply' ('Vampire', p. 1034, emphasis mine), perhaps this is because the ghosts are already present: despite his assurances, it is the 'mixture of the modern and the mediaeval, of the practical and of the wildly fanciful' ('Vampire', p. 1033) that propels his detective agency.

Arthur Conan Doyle had been interested in spiritualism since 1886, and the passage beginning this chapter reflects both the language and imagery of late Victorian spiritualist practice.<sup>8</sup> In the passage, Holmes is associated with the ghostly, the filaments he extends linking him to the spiritualist séances in which mediums secreted fluid matter, often described as filament-like and which was coined by

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<sup>7</sup> Doyle, 'The Red-Headed League', in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 176-90 (p. 185).

<sup>8</sup> Doyle insists in *The History of Spiritualism*, 2 vols (London: Cassell, 1926), II, that '[i]t has been said [. . .] that the author's advocacy of the subject [spiritualism], as well as that of his distinguished friend Sir Oliver Lodge, was due to the fact that each of them had a son killed in the war, the inference being that grief had lessened their critical faculties and made them believe what in normal times they would not have believed. The author has many times refuted this clumsy lie, and pointed out the fact that his investigation dates back as far as 1886' (p. 224). For Doyle's other spiritualist writing, see, for example, *A Full Report of a Lecture on Spiritualism Delivered by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle at the Connaught Hall, Worthing, on Friday, July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1919* (Cambridge: Rupert Books, 1997); *The Case for Spirit Photography*; *The Coming of the Fairies* (New York: Weiser, 1979); *The Early Christian Church and Modern Spiritualism* (Cambridge: Rupert Books, 1998); *The Edge of the Unknown* (London: Murray, 1930); *The New Revelation, and, The Vital Message* (London: Psychic Press, 1981); *Our Reply to the Cleric: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Lecture in Leicester, October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1919, Following the Church Congress* (Cambridge: Rupert Books, 1998); *Spiritualism: Some Straight Questions and Direct Answers* (Cambridge: Rupert Books, 1998); *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921), and *What Does Spiritualism Actually Teach and Stand for?* (London: Psychic Bookshop, 1928).

Charles Richet as ectoplasm. In volume two of *The History of Spiritualism* (1926), Doyle records an account of this ectoplasmic formation: '[w]e find, too, in *The Spiritualist* that while the materialized spirit Katie King was manifesting herself through Florence Cook, "[s]he was connected with the medium by cloudy, faintly luminous threads"' (p. 90).<sup>9</sup> Richet describes ectoplasm in the following terms: '[t]his ectoplasm makes *personal* movements. It creeps, rises from the ground, and puts forth tentacles like an amoeba. It is not always connected with the body of the medium but usually emanates from her, and is connected with her' (p. 523).<sup>10</sup> Holmes emits ghostly emanations, connecting him not only to the spiritual world, but also to the criminal fraternity, again complicating his role as the 'sleuth-hound' ('Red-Headed', p. 185) in Doyle's texts.

Significantly, the notion of material flowing from the body and language like 'filament' also connects Holmes to spirit photography, which became popular in the 1860s when William Mumler of Boston produced photographs in which ghostly figures and balls of light appeared.<sup>11</sup> Dozens of theories were circulated about how the

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on the medium Florence Cook and her spirit guide Katie King, see Oppenheim and Owen, *Darkened Room*.

<sup>10</sup> Although the term 'ectoplasm' was not adopted until the early twentieth century, materialisations during séances had been documented as a regular occurrence since the 1870s, and both Doyle and Richet suggest that these were examples of ectoplasm. See, for example, Oppenheim, p. 36. Most writings on ectoplasm were published in the early part of the twentieth century. See, for example, Philip S. Haley, *A Study of Ectoplasm: A Series of Sittings with the Materializing Medium, M. J. Williams* (New York: American SPR, 1931); Felicia Rudolphina Scatcherd, *Ectoplasm as Associated with Survival* (London: Putnam, 1926) and Albert Philibert Franz von Schrenck-Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisation*, trans. by E. E. Fournier D'Albe (London: Kegan Paul, 1920). Richet and other psychical researchers based ectoplasmic theories on the sittings with Eusapia Paladino in the mid and late 1890s. See for example, Guillaume de Fonteney, *A propos de Eusapia Paladino* (Paris, 1898); Cesare Lombroso, *What I think of Psychical Research: A Report on Eusapia Paladino, Most Famous of All Mediums* (New York: Hampton, 1909), and Julian Ochorowicz, *La Question della Frode Negli Esperimenti coll'Eusapia Paladino* (Milano: Padova, 1896).

<sup>11</sup> For more on the history of spirit photography, see, for example, Clement Cheroux, *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Tom Gunning, 'Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny', in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. by Patrice Pedro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 42-71, and Bill Jay, *Cyanide and Spirits: an Inside-Out View of Early Photography* (Munich: Nazraeli Press, 1991). Many books on spirit photography were published at the end of the century, for example, James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible*:

camera could capture invisible beings, but many spiritualists believed that the end result had something to do with a fluid or psychic force captured by the sensitive plate of the camera. For example, Doyle argued that ‘the effect is produced by a sort of ray carrying a picture upon it which can penetrate solids, such as the wall of a dark slide, and imprint its effect upon the plate’ (*History*, II, p. 145). He believed that ectoplasm was another effluvium which could penetrate the camera’s plate: ‘ectoplasm once formed can be moulded by the mind’ (*History*, II, p. 117) and thus be imprinted onto the photographic plate. The spiritualist magazine *Light* suggested that spirit photographs were created with an invisible agency:

[n]ow, suppose some entity invisible to us, because of our limited vision is able to start vibrations in some way beyond the violet end of the spectrum; these vibrations striking the sensitised plate, might become less rapid or ‘be degraded’ and ‘fluoresce’, and so come into the arctic range and be photographed.<sup>12</sup>

Theories of imponderable fluids, Janet Oppenheim argues,

were useful to the spiritualist, as to the psychical researcher, seeking to explain thought transference, for as it flowed from one person to another through the nervous system, the liquid might convey the thoughts of the first to the second. It might even, through obscure interactions between animate and inanimate, provoke rappings and movements of furniture. (pp. 218-19)

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*Practical Studies in Spirit Photography, Spirit Portraiture, and Other Rare But Allied Phenomena* (London, 1911); Georgiana Houghton, *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena Invisible to the Material Eye* (London: Allen, 1882); H.A.Reid, *Unseen Faces Photographed* (Los Angeles: Baumgardt, 1901); James Robertson, *Spirit Photography* (1894); Henry T. Shekleton, ‘Spookland!’ (Sydney, 1894), and Mrs Henry Sidgwick, *On Spirit Photographs* (London: Trubner, 1891). For Journals which published on spirit photography, see for example *Gallery of Spirit Art* and *Light Magazine*.

<sup>12</sup> Anonymous, ‘Spirit Photography’, *Light*, 25 November 1893, p. 562.

In particular she credits Reichenbach's theory of the odic force, another imponderable fluid which was believed to effect psychic phenomena, as highly influential on the researches of the SPR (p. 219).<sup>13</sup> While Oppenheim primarily links ideas about psychic fluids to mesmerism, a subject which I will return to later in this chapter and in Chapter Three, the notion of a powerful effluvium was one which particularly influenced spirit photography.

Photography is the process of producing a picture with the help of light, recalling Doyle's theories of spirit photography which involve the action of a 'ray'. In the passage beginning this chapter, Holmes's filaments could describe 'a narrow thread-like streamer from the sun's chromosphere or in its corona',<sup>14</sup> linking his emanations not only to ectoplasm, but also to the sun itself which helps develop the photograph. A filament is also used in the bulb for flash photography, invented in 1893, the same year as 'Cardboard Box' was published.<sup>15</sup> Holmes is described as being 'responsive' (p. 888) in the passage opening this chapter, which links him firmly to photographic language: he is responsive to rumours of crime as a photographic plate is sensitive to light. In being responsive to 'every little rumour', however, he also becomes oversensitive to gossip, furtively fascinated by the private lives around him.<sup>16</sup> Just as the camera picks up the dark and sordid elements of London, so too can Holmes: he relishes the snippets of information he finds.<sup>17</sup> While

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<sup>13</sup> See Karl von Reichenbach, *The Mysterious Odic Force*, trans. by Leslie O. Korth (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1977).

<sup>14</sup> 'filament', OED.

<sup>15</sup> The OED gives 1881 as the first time the term 'filament' was used to describe the conductor placed in the glass bulb.

<sup>16</sup> See also Catherine Spooner, 'Mysteries of the Visible: Dandies, Cross-Dressers and Freaks in Late-Victorian Gothic', in *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 86-127. Spooner examines the Victorian fascination in photographing 'freaks'. Just as Victorians relished using the camera to capture 'oddities' in the human race, Holmes delights in cases which bring him the oddities of the criminal underworld.

<sup>17</sup> See Walter Benjamin, 'The Flâneur', in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 35-66. Benjamin suggests that in large cities, the idle watcher or flâneur becomes like a detective who can delight in observing the private



Watson wants to invest Holmes with the cool objectivity of the camera, Holmes is in fact a 'private-eye', whose watching is not scientific observation but guilty invasion.<sup>18</sup>

Like the sensitive plate of the camera, Holmes can be imprinted with criminal emanations, and like a *tabula rasa* he can be written by the criminal elements around him. The invention of x-ray photography in 1895, for example, brought up anxieties about the dangers of invisible forces: x-rays could magically capture the interior of the body, portraying ghostly images of the skeleton, but they also seemed to have the potential to invade the body, sparking concern about the effects of such an intrusion.<sup>19</sup> In this case, what gains admission into Holmes's sensitive plate? Is it invisible spirits, ectoplasm, dangerous fluids (filament can also refer to semen), radiation, other ethnicities and races?

A link can be made between the figure of Sherlock Holmes and the discourse on photography in the late Victorian period. Both photography and Holmes were seen as the epitome of ruthless, rigorous figuring; however, Holmes and photography can also be linked to the ghostly, and that which eludes the structures of reasoning. Indeed, Doyle's writings are themselves marked by a similar confusion between the rationality and order of the Sherlock Holmes adventures, and the provisionality of the spiritualist writings. This is an opposition which proves to be superficial: not only does Holmes himself have supernatural qualities, but Doyle's spiritualist writings

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lives of the people around him. Benjamin suggests that inventions like the Bertillon system and photography were means to police the identity of people who otherwise would be lost in the crowd.

<sup>18</sup> According to the OED, the term 'private eye' enters into popular speech in the late 1930s, but the term 'private detective' was used from the late 1860s onward. The status of being a 'private' detective also meant that these investigations were unofficial, and that detectives were involved in spying on and prying into people's private lives.

<sup>19</sup> Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen (1845-1923) invented x-ray photography. For more on the ways in which x-ray photography captured the Victorian imagination, and the connection between x-rays and the ghostly, see Simon, and Allen W. Grove, 'Röntgen's Ghosts: Photography, X-Rays, and the Victorian Imagination', *Literature and Medicine*, 16 (1997), 141-73.

demonstrate a desire to incorporate both evidential proof, and scientific tests sympathetic to spiritualist belief.<sup>20</sup>

Although Ronald R. Thomas is also interested in the issue of policing boundaries in the Sherlock Holmes stories, he does not explore the crucial ambiguity that Holmes delights in overstepping distinctions between the rational, criminal and supernatural elements within the stories.<sup>21</sup> While Thomas discusses links between the Sherlock Holmes stories and photography, he argues that Holmes is the 'literary embodiment of the elaborate network of visual technologies that revolutionised the art of seeing in the nineteenth century'.<sup>22</sup> For Thomas, this new art of seeing was the photographic promise of reason, logic and truth, the very kind of vision that Jonathan Crary rejects as being too simplistic.<sup>23</sup>

Crary's more attractive suggestion is that 'the camera, in a sense, was a metaphor for the most rational possibilities of a perceiver within the increasingly dynamic disorder of the world'.<sup>24</sup> The camera is thus both the photograph it creates, and what that photograph says, or does *not* say.<sup>25</sup> Crary demonstrates how vision in

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<sup>20</sup> Doyle's *History of Spiritualism* lists dozens of mediums that he assures the reader have been put through rigorous testing. Mediums were photographed, tied up, and locked in rooms to ensure they weren't frauds. See also Oppenheim and Owen for the ways in which spiritualists and members of the SPR attempted to scientifically test the authenticity of mediums.

<sup>21</sup> Ronald R. Thomas, 'The Fingerprint of the Foreigner: Colonizing the Criminal Body in the 1890s Detective Fiction and Criminal Anthropology', *ELH*, 61 (1994), 655-83.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas, 'Making Darkness Visible: Capturing the Criminal and Observing the Law in Victorian Photography and Detective Fiction', in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. by Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 134-68 (p. 135).

<sup>23</sup> For recent discussions of visuality and photography in the nineteenth century, see for example Helen Groth, *Victorian Photography and Literary Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Lindsay Smith, *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry: the Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Alan Thomas, *The Expanding Eye: Photography and the Nineteenth-Century Mind* (London: Croom Helm, 1978); *Transactions and Encounters, Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst and Josephine McDonagh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), and *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. by Christ and Jordan.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> As Crary and Thomas suggest, the nineteenth century saw the beginning of what was to be a new way of seeing. For Crary, the nineteenth-century observer was no longer dependent on the 'stable and fixed' modalities of visuality that the camera obscura encouraged (*Techniques*, p. 14). Instead, vision was

the nineteenth century became inseparable from the human body,<sup>26</sup> which meant that vision could be studied empirically (*Techniques*, p. 19). Increased knowledge about human anatomy, the workings of the brain and the eye itself allowed Victorians to capture vision, to diagram the process of vision in anatomy textbooks, and to measure more precisely how people saw. But as Crary argues, if the individual is in control of visuality, the systems of visuality become subjective, not scientifically objective: internalising vision into the body suggests that visuality cannot be studied empirically but instead that it is chaotic and erratic.<sup>27</sup> Visuality is part of a system that both adheres to and destroys categorisation, both because it is studied empirically and because its location in the body means it challenges objective study.

I apply this theory of visuality to Victorian photography, demonstrating its effect on the Sherlock Holmes stories at the *fin-de-siècle*. Furthermore, I argue that Doyle himself is haunted by his desire to capture spirits within the sensitive plate of the camera, attempting to rigorously control and constrain the inchoate elements of the spirit world. An examination of Francis Galton's experiments in photography

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now marked by disruption, discontinuity and disorder – vision had gained a 'new autonomy and abstraction' (*Techniques*, p. 14). In particular, the industrial and technological changes that took place in the nineteenth century had the effect of disrupting earlier ways of seeing. For example, the railroad not only visually scarred landscapes, but also changed conceptions of time and its relation to space. (A journey that once seemed long could be made with relative ease and speed). For Crary, concepts of seeing changed in order to admit disorder as a part of the visualisation process.

<sup>26</sup> Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), pp. 11-75. The camera obscura which defined vision before the nineteenth century confined visuality to an enclosed space with defined peripheries. Crary argues that the nineteenth-century observer was interested in what was outside of the peripheries, including the observer himself. For Crary, the abandonment of the camera obscura, was also the rediscovery of the body as the origin of seeing (*Techniques*, p. 41). Significantly, the new type of visuality that emerged was simultaneously free of uniformity and quantifiable by scientific methodology. The breaking free of the well-defined limits of the camera obscura model of vision meant that vision was unpredictable and erratic.

<sup>27</sup> Crary, *Suspensions*, p. 3. Crary's theories about the instability of vision in the nineteenth century can be contextualised by the impressionist movement (c.1860-1900). The impressionists were interested in capturing the elusive, transitory moments in their paintings. Writers were also interested in trying to capture the ephemeral in their art. As Thomas Hardy wrote in his preface to *Jude the Obscure* (1896), '*Jude the Obscure* is simply an endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions, the questions of their consistency or their discordance, of their permanence or their transitoriness, being regarded as not of the first moment'. From *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings: Prefaces, Literary Opinions, Reminiscences*, ed. by Harold Orel (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 32-36 (pp. 32-33).

exemplifies how the discourse on photography revelled in the shared energies of science and the supernatural at the end of the century. Holmes is haunted by the uncanny side of the photographic art, and even as 'the highest court of appeal in detection',<sup>28</sup> who makes light of darkness, he cannot chase away every shadow. Nor would this be desirable: just as the camera needs both shadow and light to capture an image, so too does Doyle need the criminal and sub-rational elements in the texts to write a good detective story.

### **Conan Doyle's Supernatural Photography**

In the 1890s, Doyle became interested in optics and travelled to Vienna in order to study in that field. He opened an eye practice in London, but with the success of the Sherlock Holmes stories, he gave up the business, sold it, and used the proceeds to buy a camera. His interest in photography seems to date from the 1880s, feeding into the period in which he developed an interest in spiritualism. From 1881 to 1885, Doyle submitted a number of essays on photography to the *British Journal of Photography*. In the 1890s, he compiled albums of photographs, although unfortunately none of his own photographs remain today.<sup>29</sup> During the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, Doyle was fascinated primarily by the mechanism of the camera itself, and his writings on the subject are preoccupied with the chemical changes that work to create a photograph. His essays on the subject are for the most part technical discussions of the photographic process; they describe the type of

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<sup>28</sup> Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 89-158 (p. 90).

<sup>29</sup> For more information about Doyle's early photography, see, for example, John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green, 'Introduction', in *The Unknown Conan Doyle: Essays on Photography*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1982), pp.x-xix.

camera he used, the length of exposure, and the best way to create a make-shift darkroom.<sup>30</sup>

By the 1920s, however, Doyle's interest in photography was almost purely an interest in capturing the supernatural on the sensitive plate of the camera. Why had Doyle's interests shifted from taking photographs of the natural world, to an investigation into the supernatural one? Doyle's early and later photographic interests were never as separate as they seem and, despite himself, distinctions between science and the supernatural in Doyle's writings are difficult to ascertain. Even his technical essays, published in the early 1880s, demonstrate an interest in the connections between photography and death, perhaps foreshadowing his later interests in photography's link to the spirit world. In his essay 'After Cormorants with a Camera', for example, in which Doyle recounts a shooting expedition with some friends, the separate connotations of the word shooting blur so that the word refers both to hunting and to photography, thus suggesting implicitly the connections between photography and death.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, in 'On the Slave Coast with a Camera', the word 'take' means dually to capture and kill men in combat, and also to 'take' a photograph.<sup>32</sup> In this essay, an African chief boasts to Doyle that in 'the last campaign [he] had taken five hundred men' to which Doyle responds that 'he could take as many as that in a single moment' ('Slave Coast', p. 19). In his anecdote, Doyle recounts how the chief was

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<sup>30</sup> Two of the photographic essays, 'A Few Technical Hints', in *The Unknown Conan Doyle*, ed. by John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green, pp. 38-39, and 'Trial of Burton's Emulsion Process', in *The Unknown Conan Doyle*, ed. by John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green, pp. 40-42, focus solely on the chemical processes involved in making a photograph. They are complicated and technical, demonstrating that Doyle had an excellent knowledge of amateur photography.

<sup>31</sup> Doyle, 'After Cormorants with a Camera', in *The Unknown Conan Doyle*, ed. by John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green, pp. 1-12. While the OED gives 1890 as the date in which the photographic definition of the word was in circulation, Doyle's language suggests he was referring both to hunting and taking a picture.

<sup>32</sup> Doyle, 'On The Slave Coast with a Camera', in *The Unknown Conan Doyle*, ed. by John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green, pp. 13-22. According to the OED, 'take' has been used in photographic language since 1859.

frightened of him afterwards, and how many of the natives would jump from their boats when they saw his camera pointed at them, believing it was a gun.<sup>33</sup>

Just as words like 'take' and 'shoot' elude a single definition in photographic language, distinctions between photography's technical workings and its supernatural power are also ambiguous in the nineteenth-century conception of photography. Lindsay Smith and Geoffrey Batchen have both written about the ways in which photography was linked to magic, the supernatural and necromancy.<sup>34</sup> Neither Smith nor Batchen, however, explore how the nineteenth-century discourse on photography is anxious about the ways in which the camera blurs the boundaries between the technological advances of science and the inexplicable and unsystematic nature of the supernatural. Doyle's writings about photography give evidence of this anxiety: he knows the technical terms in photography, the correct chemicals to use, and the reactions that must occur for a photograph to be developed, and yet he still refers to photography as the 'black art',<sup>35</sup> and in his spiritualist writings discusses how the camera is an instrument capable of capturing images of the dead.

For Doyle, the notion that photography escapes systematisation proved particularly problematic, especially since he wanted to use the camera to somehow regulate the spirit world. By visibly demonstrating their existence in the photographs, Doyle could safeguard the spirits from the scepticism of the scientific community. However, he was also attempting to capture invisible beings through a medium which was designed to capture the visible. Doyle's photographs are haunted then, not only

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<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of Doyle and imperialism, see for example, Catherine Wynne, *The Colonial Conan Doyle: British Imperialism, Irish Nationalism, and the Gothic* (London: Greenwood, 2002).

<sup>34</sup> In *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children and Nineteenth Century Photography* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), Smith argues that 'from its inception, photography held a connection with magic' (p. 2). In *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), Batchen points out that the literature on photography treated the process as a kind of necromancy, fuelling myths that the camera had the ability to strip away layers of the soul with each successive photograph (pp. 208-11).

<sup>35</sup> Doyle, 'To the Waterford Coast and Along It', in *The Unknown Conan Doyle*, ed. by John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green, pp. 51-59 (p. 53).

by the spirits who materialise on the plate, but also by the notion that these images elude capture, and that his efforts to contain the supernatural are futile. Nevertheless, Doyle insisted that photographs of spirits offered insurmountable evidence for the existence of a spirit world. His interest in spirit photography was so strong that when the Society for the Study of Supernormal Pictures (SSSP) formed in 1918 he became its Vice President (see Figure 1). He also wrote on the subject in *The Case for Spirit Photography* and *The Coming of the Fairies*, both published in 1922, and in the second volume of *The History of Spiritualism*.

In *The Case for Spirit Photography* Doyle insists that he himself has had success in developing plates which depict supernatural phenomena, a fact which he suggests makes their authenticity even more perfect (pp. 18-19). The pamphlet is filled with photographs where indistinct blurs of ectoplasm hover near the sitters for the photographs, and bodiless heads loom (see Figure 2). Doyle's second volume of the *History of Spiritualism* marks spirit photographs as important, technologically advanced method for supplying evidence that the world of spirits is a real one. *The Coming of the Fairies* is an account of the Cottingley fairy incident, in which two young girls, Elsie and Frances Wright, took photographs of themselves posed with fairies. The photographs were the subject of great controversy, and Doyle was heavily criticised for his willingness to believe the evidence of a few photographs taken by children. Doyle first wrote about the incident in *The Strand* in the December issue of 1920, using the magazine he usually reserved to uphold 'the science of deduction' in the figure of Holmes to declare his belief that the photographs were authentic, and that fairies were real.



**Figure 1.** William Hope, 'Group of Members of the S.S.S.P.', Figure 5 in Doyle, *Spirit Photography*. Doyle and Lady Doyle in the centre row, left.



**Figure 2.** William Hope, 'Rev. Charles L. Tweedale and Mrs. Tweedale with the Spirit form of the Late F. Burnett', Figure 8 in Doyle, *Spirit Photography*.



Doyle believes that the camera was the best means of giving evidence, not only because it visibly offered up the fairies, but also because the technology of the camera potentially still held unknown mysteries which could be sensitive to hitherto unseen forces. Doyle suggests that the fairies are 'separated from ourselves by some difference of vibrations. We see objects within the limits which make up our colour spectrum, with infinite vibrations, unused by us, on either side of them' (*Fairies*, pp.13-14). For Doyle, the 'sensitive plate' (*Fairies*, p. 56) of the camera was a means of recording beings like spirits and fairies because the potential of the development process was not fully understood.

Doyle's uncertainty about the limits of photographic technology suggests his ambiguity about the union of science and the supernatural. While he believes that scientific interference in spiritual phenomena is invasive and futile, he is also deeply concerned with proving the realities of spiritualism. He dismisses the methods of the SPR, but argues that a different scientific methodology, more sympathetic to spiritualism, needs to be implemented in order to come to a greater understanding of supernatural phenomena.<sup>36</sup> Doyle's antagonism towards the SPR suggests his concerns that they will infect the séance, just as in the Holmes stories the criminals are infecting London and Holmes's sensitive plate.

Doyle is deeply anxious about the infiltration of scientific investigators into spiritualism, not only because he fears their methods interrupt and hinder spiritual phenomena, but more importantly because they might somehow strip away the

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<sup>36</sup> Doyle criticizes the methods of the SPR, arguing that '[s]peaking generally, it may be said that the attitude of organized science during these thirty years was as unreasonable and unscientific as that of Galileo's cardinals, and that if there had been a Scientific Inquisition, it would have brought its terrors to bear upon the new knowledge' (*History*, I, p. 185). Doyle argues that testing should be modified to suit the conditions of the séance, just as any scientific test should be designed effectively for the conditions of the experiment: '[i]f a small piece of metal may upset a whole magnetic installation, so a strong adverse psychic current may ruin a psychic circle. It is for this reason, and not on account of any superior credulity, that practising Spiritualists continually get such results as are never attained by mere researchers' (*History*, II, p. 318).

fascinating possibilities of the unknown. He expresses these fears in *The Coming of the Fairies*:

Victorian science would have left the world hard and clean and bare, like a landscape in the moon; but this science is in truth but a little light in the darkness, and outside that limited circle of definite knowledge we see the loom and shadow of gigantic and fantastic possibilities around us, throwing themselves continually across our consciousness in such ways that it is difficult to ignore them. (p. 125)

His description of the world of science surrounded by looming unknown possibilities is reminiscent of William James's overgrown terrace of the mind in which 'uncouth forms lurk in the shadows' ('Frederic Myers' Service', p. 56). While Chapter One argues that the Gothic nature of mental science was both inspiring and threatening for writers like Henry James, the threat for Doyle is that the world of the unknown may be unable to materialise because of the scepticism and methods of the scientific community, and that science itself threatens to strip and sterilise the inspirational possibilities of the supernatural. However, Doyle also needs the support of scientific methods to demonstrate that the spiritual phenomena are authentic.

Doyle is searching for a moment in which science and the supernatural might share a language, but he is also anxious about the repercussions of such a collision. Possibly, Doyle finds this moment in the figure of Holmes, the fictional character that significantly he was most anxious about (he disliked writing about him and unsuccessfully tried to kill off in 'The Final Problem' [1893]). After all, when Doyle writes that science is but a 'little light in the darkness', it seems that he is also referring to Holmes. The theme of 'Light in the Darkness'<sup>37</sup> that Holmes can shed is

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<sup>37</sup> Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 15-86 (p. 46).

constant throughout the short stories and the long: Watson continually asks if Holmes can throw no light onto the darkness of the case, as do many of Holmes' clients. But if Holmes does shed light on the darkness, then he may be capable of revealing the looming forces outside, whether they be the criminal figures in the stories, or something more spiritual. Doyle refers to creatures like fairies and spirits as 'borderland forms' (*Fairies*, p. 126), but Holmes himself seems to be another example: he is a combination of man and machine who, like a camera, flashes and captures the elements in the dark. He is also both a master of reason and a man who colludes with the criminal and the supernatural, stretching out his filaments to influence and be influenced by them. Doyle is caught between the desire to represent spiritualism scientifically and the impossibility of achieving this goal. The spirit and fairy photographs that he endorses present a paradox in which that which cannot be apprehended is somehow apprehended in the photographic process, that which cannot be seen is seen, and that which is outside of nature is internalized into the natural world and made part of photographic technology.

Significantly, Doyle himself submits to this paradox by asserting that many of his spirit photographs are not made by the photographic process, but rather by the volition of the spirits themselves. Doyle reveals that Mr. Hope, the spirit photographer he experiments with, is able to take the photographs *without the use of the camera*, eventually producing a photograph of Conan Doyle's sister who had died thirty years before (Doyle, *Spirit Photography*, p. 20). In asserting that spirits can impress their psychic images on photographic plates and need not implement the camera as part of the process, Doyle problematizes his own argument. He believes that the photographic process can lead to truths about the supernatural world because for him that process is incapable of being fraudulent. At the same time, he suggests that regardless of the

process involving the camera that brings this evidential truth, the camera is irrelevant to the validity of the final product. Doyle's attempt to equate truth with photography is complicated by the kind of truth that he is trying to achieve. Doyle's conception of photography becomes both that which captures, and also that which eludes capture. Likewise, the Sherlock Holmes stories demonstrate this kind of dualism of visual practice with regards to photography in the Victorian period.

### **The Camera as Detective, the Ghostly Camera, and Galton's Search for 'The Criminal'**

In his first photographic essay to be published in the *British Journal of Photography*, 'After Cormorants with a Camera', Doyle uses his camera to solve a mystery. He describes how he and his companions spent the day shooting on an island just off the coast of England. Doyle and his friends hire a guide, an elderly sailor they facetiously name Sinbad, who is meant to prepare their lunch, but who instead disappears surreptitiously. Doyle and a friend search him out, and watch him unnoticed as he consumes their day's supply of alcohol, and Doyle suggests that they photograph his crime so that he cannot deny his guilt. The unlucky Sinbad does deny the accusations of theft, but is humiliated when he is presented with the photograph – the ruse is up, Conan Doyle has caught his criminal with the ultimate detective, the camera. Like Sherlock Holmes, the camera becomes a kind of detective, seeking and focusing in on the criminal, capturing him at last, and giving evidential proof that he is guilty.

Indeed, in the nineteenth century, the camera was commonly associated with the figure of the detective. Jennifer Green-Lewis examines the ways in which the camera was integral to Victorian law enforcement but also how photography could represent 'either [. . .] validation of empiricism in its surface documentation of the

world or, conversely, [. . .] proof that any visual account inevitably represents the world inadequately' (p. 2).<sup>38</sup> Green-Lewis does not, however, explore how this dichotomy connects photography to the supernatural, nor does she offer a reading of the ways in which photography's link both to empiricism and to the inadequacy of visual evidence makes problematic the role of the detective. If photography's 'visual account' is unreliable, then how does this affect the role of the police who rely so heavily on visual evidence? In discussing Sherlock Holmes as a metaphoric camera, how does the notion that the camera may offer not only an inadequate picture of events, but a mutable and even haunted one make ambiguous Holmes's 'analytic skill'<sup>39</sup> and his dealings with crime?

Visual evidence was intrinsic to Victorian policing. As Green-Lewis points out, '[t]he mug shot was conceived almost as soon as knowledge of daguerreotypy spread' (p. 200),<sup>40</sup> suggesting that compiling and memorising criminal faces was the necessary *visual* key to successful criminal capture: criminals could be filed in boxes in police stations, ready to allow for identification at the next scene of crime. By the 1880s the Bertillon system had been put into practice, which involved identification of a person by body measurements and photographs.<sup>41</sup> Although the system was eventually replaced by fingerprinting, even Francis Galton (who invented the fingerprinting system in 1888) was photographed as part of Bertillon's collections of mug shots in 1893.<sup>42</sup> Photography in the Victorian criminal justice system became not only a way of categorizing criminals but also was closely tied to the figure of the

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<sup>38</sup> Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Doyle, 'The Five Orange Pips', in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 217-29 (p.217).

<sup>40</sup> The daguerreotype was presented to the public in 1839; the 1840s saw the rise of the mug-shot.

<sup>41</sup> Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914), French criminologist, created the system for criminal identification which was adopted almost universally in the western world until it was replaced by fingerprinting at the end of the nineteenth century.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholas Wright Gilham, *A Life of Sir Francis Galton: From African Exploration to the Birth of Eugenics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 234.

detective himself, who in turn was linked to omniscient visuality. Allan Pinkerton founded his famous private detective agency in 1850, whose motto was 'We Never Sleep', accompanied by 'Pinkerton's trademark, a large open eye' (Green-Lewis, p. 199). Detectives were the all-seeing 'private-eyes' that protected the average citizens.

In the Victorian period, the eye could act as camera and detective.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, in murder investigations, it seemed possible that the victim's eye might act as both camera and detective in photographing the image of the killer. Arthur C. Evans argues that 'the notion that the image of the last thing seen at the moment of death remains imprinted on the retina of the eye' was 'popular'.<sup>44</sup> Evans suggests that retinal photography gained such popularity that Scotland Yard even photographed the retinas of one of Jack the Ripper's victims in 1888 (p. 343).<sup>45</sup> Writers at the *fin-de-siècle* were fascinated by the notion that the eye could photographically record the moment between life and death. For example Rudyard Kipling's 'At the End of the Passage' (1891) is about a man who mysteriously dies, but whose retinas may hold the key to his death, and Jules Verne's *Les Frères Kip* (1902), ends with the dead eyes of the victim revealing the face of the killers and clearing the names of the falsely accused.<sup>46</sup>

The link between the camera and the eye suggests once again that photography eludes boundaries, this time the boundaries between life and death. While in his discussion of retinal photography Evans is interested in the concept of 'how science can sometimes evolve into pseudo-science' (p. 356), he does not examine how

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<sup>43</sup> The mechanical lens of the camera operates very much like the lens of the eye, a similarity the early trailblazers of photography immediately recognised. For example, Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), the inventor of photography on paper, was the first to refer to a photographic lens in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society* in 1841 (the anatomical lens of the eye was first referenced in 1719).

<sup>44</sup> Arthur B. Evans, 'Optograms and Fiction: Photo in a Dead Man's Eye', *Science-Fiction Studies*, 20 (1993), 341-61 (p. 341).

<sup>45</sup> For more on Jack the Ripper, see, for example, Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992).

<sup>46</sup> Rudyard Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', in *Life's Handicap: Being Stories of Mine Own People* (New York: Doubleday, 1931), pp. 244-69, and Jules Verne, *Les Frères Kip* (Paris: Hertz, 1902).

photography blurs distinctions, not only between living and dead images, but also between science and 'pseudo-science'.

Francis Galton's attitude towards photography is suggestive about the slipperiness in the nineteenth-century conception of photography between the uncanny possibilities and empirical associations of the photograph. While Galton wants his composite photographs to regulate and systematize identity, whether criminal, national, or familial, and to contain it within a single image, the photographs are also haunted by the impossibility of capturing identity. Galton is usually discussed in connection with criminality and the Sherlock Holmes stories in terms of his fingerprinting system; however, the link between Galton, criminality, Doyle and *photography* is crucial to revealing Holmes's photographic powers which link him both with the notion of the all-seeing detective, and paradoxically with criminal and supernatural associations.<sup>47</sup>

Galton, cousin to Charles Darwin, was the founder of eugenics, and made advances in various fields such as meteorology, psychology, anthropology and photography.<sup>48</sup> From 1877-1885 Galton was fascinated with a new technology he had created, composite portraiture, or composite photography. Composite photographs

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<sup>47</sup> See, for example Thomas, 'The Fingerprint of the Foreigner', and Gita Panjabe Trelease, 'Time's Hand: Fingerprints, Empire, and Victorian Narratives of Crime', in *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, ed. by Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 195-206. Trelease argues that the adoption of the fingerprinting system meant that Galton and others could easily identify the criminal and manage him, but that Holmes recognises the narrative potential of the fingerprint.

<sup>48</sup> For more information about the life and researches of Francis Galton, see, for example, Martin Brookes, *Extreme Measures: The Dark Visions and Bright Ideas of Francis Galton* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004); Derek Forrest, *Francis Galton: The Life and Work of a Victorian Genius* (London: Elek, 1974); George Levine, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), and Karl Pearson, *The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914-30). Galton published profusely and in a wide range of fields. See, for example, *The Average Contribution of Each Several Ancestor to the Total Heritage of the Offspring* (London, 1897); *A Descriptive List of Anthropometric Apparatus: Consisting of Instruments for Measuring and Testing the Chief Physical Characteristics of the Human Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company, 1887); *Essays in Eugenics* (London: Eugenics Education Society, 1909); *Finger Prints* (London: Macmillan, 1892); *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1998), and *Natural Inheritance* (London, 1889).

were made by superimposing photographs of various faces in order to reveal a single, blended face.<sup>49</sup> According to Galton, ‘the process of composite portraiture is one of pictorial statistics’<sup>50</sup>, the purpose of which was to create mathematically, a *type* of person. Galton was convinced by the scientific necessity and importance of defining types within the human species, and that composite photography was the most accurate method of obtaining characteristic humans. Galton believed that composite photographs would offer limitless possibilities for the scientific community, and for society at large. They could be used, for example, to ‘give us a typical picture[s] of different races of men’ (*Composite*, p. 11).<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, they could give the most accurate likeness of a single individual, since instead of depicting that person in a single attitude, they would represent the combination of a person in every attitude: smiles and frowns would be combined into a kind of ideal photograph. For the purposes of heredity, the composite photographs could help animal breeders determine what the offspring of any animals would look like, just as husbands and wives, and other relatives could combine their features in a single photograph in order to ascertain how their children would look (*Composite*, p. 11).

Galton was particularly interested in the ways in which his composites could detect and control the potential for crime. His composites of criminals represent ‘not the criminal, but the man who is liable to fall into crime’ (*Composite*, p. 6). Galton

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<sup>49</sup> Galton, *Composite Portraits* (London: 1878), p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> Galton, *Generic Images* (London: 1879), p. 5. Galton argues ‘that the generic images that arise before the mind’s eye, and the general impressions which are faint and faulty editions of them, are the analogues of these composite pictures which we have the advantage of examining at leisure, and whose peculiarities and character we can investigate, and from which we may draw conclusions that shall throw much light on the nature of certain mental processes which are too mobile and evanescent to be directly dealt with’ (*Generic*, p. 6).

<sup>51</sup> Many Victorian scientists, including Galton’s cousin Darwin, promoted the view that non-white races were at a lower stage on the evolutionary ladder. This theory was also often used to explain the criminal mind, and insanity (Cesare Lombroso [1835-1909], was particularly influential in the field of criminal atavism). Galton is probably suggesting that composite photographs of various human ‘species’ would allow scientists to study the differences and similarities between the ‘species’ and to allow quantifiability and categorisation of the various peoples which was so desirable to the Victorian scientific world.



created 'the criminal' after consulting with Sir Edmund Du Cane, the Chairman of the Prison Commission. Du Cane had a large collection of photographs of criminals, which Galton borrowed in order to sort them into 'portraits of criminals convicted of murder, manslaughter, or crimes accompanied by violence', (*Generic*, p. 5) and then to make from them a composite. Du Cane applauded Galton's composites, believing they were a way to find and stop criminals before they turned to crime: '[i]n considering how best to deal with and repress crime, it occurred to me that we ought to try and track it out to its source, and see if we cannot check it there instead of waiting till it has developed and then striking at it' (*Composite*, p. 3). Significantly, Du Cane's use of the word 'develop' in connection with crime is suggestive not only of the potential threat of crime unfolding, but also of developing a photograph.<sup>52</sup> It seems that not only is Galton involved in detecting criminals, but also in generating them by developing them. The camera acts here as both a means of capturing a man before he develops into a fully-fledged criminal and paradoxically of symbolically *creating* criminal behaviour.

In the faces of Galton's composites of criminals, we are meant to see the identifying features of the type of person liable to crime, but find instead puzzlingly bland faces, which could be anyone's face. In light of Du Cane's sinister comments, in which pre-crime is already a crime, the fact that the faces are so non-descript implies that everyone (or no one) is the criminal type. Galton himself states that the composites of the criminal

represent no man in particular but portray an imaginary figure possessing the average features of any group of men. These ideal faces have a surprising air of reality. Nobody who glanced at one of them

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<sup>52</sup> The OED suggests that the term 'develop' was first used in connection with photography in 1845.

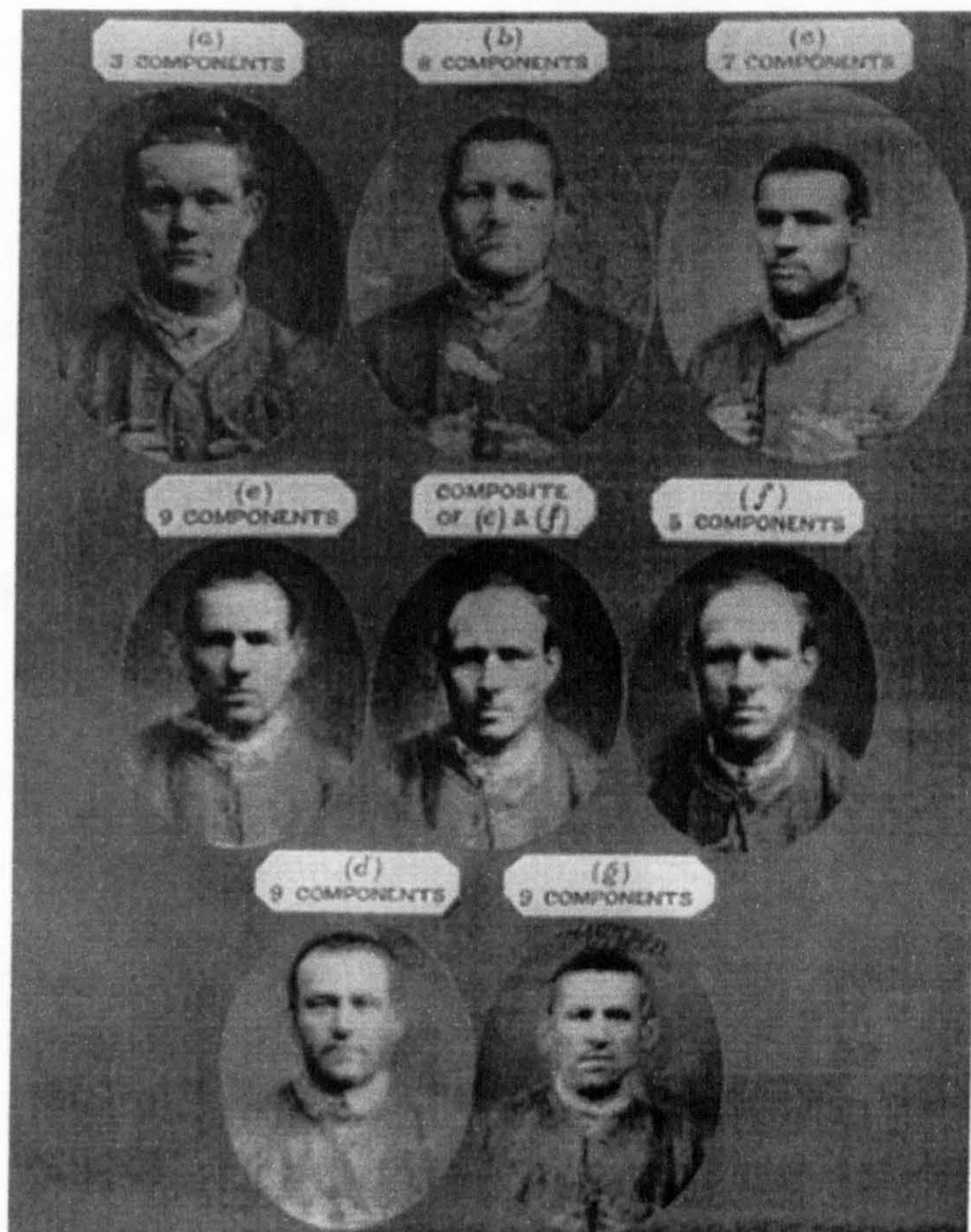
for the first time would doubt its being the likeness of a living person, yet, as I have said, it is no such thing; it is the portrait of a type, and not of an individual. (*Composite*, pp. 3-4)

Yet while these composites are meant to depict the criminal with ‘mechanical precision’ (*Composite*, p. 5), the language Galton uses to describe the criminal is imprecise, emotional, and even literary. The composite of the criminal is an ‘ideal’, an ‘imaginary’ image, and far from being the record of an exacting new science designed to track and apprehend the criminal, composite photographs actually invent new and perfect criminals who cannot be captured by the camera because they do not even really exist (see Figure 3).

Galton’s composites are suggestive about how photography in the nineteenth century is both an attempt by Victorians to quantify, to make something true because of visual evidence, and the failure to achieve this goal.<sup>53</sup> Despite attempts to harness truth, many Victorian photographic representations undermine their purpose from the start. Galton’s composites attempt to define a type of self, but seem only to suggest that selfhood is malleable and able to be blended with other selves. The end results of Galton’s composites destabilize identity more fully than they encapsulate it: the criminal is the photograph of every man, or any man, and blends of men and women result in ‘the production of a face, neither male nor female’ (*Generic*, p. 3). The criminal type is submerged in the unremarkableness of the face, while other composites are asexual; in their very attempt to demonstrate that which can be quantified, they are unquantifiable.

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan, ‘Introduction’ in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. by Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan, pp. xix-xxix (p. xx).



**Figure 3.** Galton, 'Composites Made from Portraits of Criminals Convicted of Murder, Manslaughter, or Crimes of Violence', reprinted from Daniel Novak, 'A Model Jew: "Literary Photographs" and the Jewish Body in *Daniel Deronda*', *Representations*, 85 (2004), 58-97 (p. 67).

Indeed, the notion that photography can capture identity in Galton is most severely compromised by the ghostly faces that invade his pictures: the superimposed photographs are often slightly imbalanced and reveal blurred and multiplied features, or as Galton refers to them 'ghostly accessories' (*Generic*, p. 3). In one composite, Galton combines the photographs of two brothers and one sister in order to obtain the most notable features of that family. He refers to this slightly out of focus effect in this particular composite as 'ghosts': '[g]hosts of portions of male and female attire, due to the peculiarities of the separate portraits, are seen about and around the composite' (*Generic*, p. 3). Daniel Novak suggests that contemporary observers of the composites also noticed the ghostliness of the images. Joseph Jacobs, for example commented that they were 'more ghostly than a ghost, more spiritual than a spirit'.<sup>54</sup> Although Novak is interested particularly in Galton's composites of Jews, and the ways in which these images make the notion of Jewishness, and the Jewish body ghostly, he does not examine how the spectral nature of the images is representative of the intrinsically haunting nature of photography itself in the nineteenth century, and how the discourse on photography was haunted by its desire and inability to use the camera to capture empirical truths.

Indeed, Galton's composite photographs seem to be hampered and haunted by these unwanted 'ghostly accessories' (*Generic*, p. 3), which prevent him from achieving 'a perfect test of truth' (*Composite*, p. 11). In *Generic Images* he is particularly concerned about the implications of the spectral accessories on his photographs. He suggests that '[i]f the number of combined portraits had been large, these ghostly accessories would have become too faint to be visible' (*Generic*, p. 3), as if he wants to exorcise the ghosts from the images, but his comment also implies

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Novak, p. 58. Novak describes Jacobs (1854-1916) as '[a] Jewish social scientist, folklorist, and literary critic' (p. 60).

that despite being invisible, the ghosts will nevertheless still be there haunting the pictures. Galton is deeply anxious about how this haunting affects his results and attempts to argue that the ghosts do not alter the strength of his findings. He begins by suggesting that the ghosts ‘are not sufficiently vivid to distract the attention’ (*Generic*, p. 3), but Galton himself seems distracted by the ghosts in his own discussion. He goes on to protest that regardless of the presence of the ghosts, the composites represent a ‘truthfulness of which there can be no doubt’ (*Generic*, p. 3), but Galton’s disavowals seem to point to the fact that it is he who doubts the success of the project because of the ghostly interferences. Galton is haunted by the inability to secure identity in his composite portraits. The images themselves visibly resist capture, refusing to be fully submerged in a single image by fracturing off into spectral features.

Significantly, from 1872 until the early 1880s Galton became interested in spiritualism, attended séances and even worked with the SPR, but after this period he turned his back on spiritualism and ceased his investigations into the spirit world.<sup>55</sup> There is no record if Galton experimented with spirit photography, or what he thought about it. Galton’s ghostly composites, however, do share striking similarities to the spirit photographs taken in the late Victorian period: translucent features and white misty images appear in both types of photographs. Janet Oppenheim discusses Galton’s interest in spiritualism, and although she remarks on how ‘[h]is route did not again swerve from the clarity and precision of numbers into the mists and fogs of spirit’ (p. 296), she does not offer any reasons for Galton’s attraction to, then rejection of, spiritualism. I suggest that Galton’s composites demonstrate that he was always in some measure drawn to the ghostly, and that his initial inquiries into and later

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<sup>55</sup> See Oppenheim, pp. 289-96. Charles Darwin attended a séance in 1874, but was unenthusiastic about the phenomena he had witnessed there (p. 294).

dissatisfaction with spiritualism is suggestive about Galton's fascination with and repulsion of the supernatural.

Galton wanted to guard against trickery in spiritualist practice, and during a séance held in January 1873 'he wished to get rid of conditions which were manifestly fraudulent or favourable to fraud' (Oppenheim, p. 294). His attempts to systematize this séance in order to see real ghosts, however, were apparently abortive: the spiritualist William Stainton Moses who was present at the séance wrote that it was Galton's hostile attitude which prevented any ghosts from materialising (Oppenheim, p. 294). Significantly, Galton's attempts to use empirical methods during séances to authenticate ghosts prevented any ghosts from appearing. Conversely, in his composites his attempts to contain identity within an image caused spectral figures to emerge, suggesting that it is Galton's attempts to capture the immaterial that haunt him. The ghostly always seems to hover just around him, whether refusing to materialise at séances, or stubbornly emerging in his composites. Doyle and Galton wanted to control when and how spirits would appear, but they are also representative of the ways in which scientists and psychical researchers were fascinated with and repelled by the supernatural at the *fin-de-siècle*. The spectre haunting late nineteenth-century thinkers was not simply the ghost in the séance room, but also the spectre of empirical science itself, which could neither prove the existence of the spiritual, nor exorcise the spirits from scientific endeavour.

### **Zooming in on the Criminal and Supernatural Associations of Holmes**

Most critics have argued that Sherlock Holmes's 'science of deduction' (*Sign of Four*, p. 89) and 'brilliant reasoning power' ('Red-Headed', p. 185) mark the 'triumph of reason' in every story, ultimately prohibiting him from association with either the

supernatural or with criminal elements in his character.<sup>56</sup> After all, Holmes seems to offer himself as a solution to the problem of crime, not as an accessory, and his 'scientific mind' would seem to resist the superstitions of the supernatural.<sup>57</sup> Many of Doyle's stories hint at the supernatural, in particular, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901), in which it seems that a 'hound of hell' is the curse and death of the descendants of the Baskervilles (*Hound*, p. 675).<sup>58</sup> However, the spectral hound proves to be one of flesh and blood, and the case one that can be solved with Holmes's impeccable logic. Like the lens of a camera, Holmes has focussed in to find the truth that Victorian faith in photography could imply. Yet Holmes is more than an emblem of the Victorian faith in the powers of truth in the camera, and this is because of the many and often contradictory ways photography was received in late Victorian society. Holmes both solves crime as the detective, and yet is influenced by criminality himself: he is both the defender against the supernatural and is sensitive to the sub-rational and the instinctual.

Despite Doyle's devotion to photography, the camera and photographs rarely appear in the Holmes stories, suggesting that notions of photographic visuality and photographic language have been absorbed into Doyle's writing. The idea of Holmes's keen powers of observation is often referenced, particularly in light of his ability to see through the disguises of even the most skilled criminals. Holmes himself

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<sup>56</sup> James Kissane and John M. Kissane, 'Sherlock Holmes and the Ritual of Reason', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 17 (1963), 353-62 (p. 361). The Kissanes argue that reason is a kind of ritual in the Holmes stories which is crucial to the triumph of the detective over the criminal. In Jasmine Yong Hall's 'Ordering the Sensational: Sherlock Holmes and the Female Gothic', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 28 (1991), 295-303, Hall argues that 'both the Gothic elements and the female clients in these stories play an important role in establishing the rational detective as a powerful, patriarchal hero' (p. 295). Although Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide's 'Ritual and Liminality of Sherlock Holmes in *The Sign of Four* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*', *ELT*, 48 (2005), 55-70, suggests that Holmes is associated with the liminal, she ultimately sees him as the embodiment of the power of reason. For more on scientific deduction in detective fiction and an analysis in Holmes's rational powers see for example Frank Lawrence, *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: The Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens, and Doyle* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 667-766 (p. 672).

<sup>58</sup> Doyle wrote many supernatural stories. See, for example, Doyle, *The Supernatural Tales of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, ed. and intro. by Peter Haining (London: Foulsham, 1987).

is a master of disguise, dressing as a sailor (in *The Sign of the Four*), as an opium addict (in 'The Man with the Twisted Lip') and as an old Italian gentleman (in 'The Final Problem'), and each disguise successfully fools Watson.<sup>59</sup> Holmes delights in taking on the guise of the seamy classes of London and in composing himself like a photograph. The photographic term 'negative' (according to the OED, in usage since 1841) is here significant. Like the camera which uses the negative to develop the positive image, Holmes's nature is a composite of different disguises and of negative and positive traits.

Only very rarely is Holmes's visual prowess fooled – in *A Study in Scarlet*, both Watson and Holmes are convinced by the old-woman disguise. Significantly, they are also fooled by Irene Adler in the first Holmes short story, 'A Scandal in Bohemia', which is one of the few stories to mention photography. Irene Adler or 'the woman' (p. 161), disguises as a boy and tricks Holmes. Holmes as camera/detective, is meant to reveal what the naked eye cannot, but in the case of Irene Adler he sees only the disguise. Perhaps Adler's female identity prohibits this revelation: as a woman she secures invisibility within Holmes's masculinist frame of vision.<sup>60</sup> Significantly, Adler's photograph holds more currency than money in this story. That Doyle wants the photograph instead of payment suggests that he wants to remind himself of what escapes his vision.

Thomas notes that when photography is mentioned in the Holmes stories, it is almost always connected with crime ('Darkness', pp.134-67), but he ignores the implications that this might have for Holmes himself: if Holmes is like a camera and

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<sup>59</sup> See Doyle, 'The Final Problem', in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 469-80, and 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 229-44.

<sup>60</sup> For more on the culture of masculinity in the Holmes stories, see for example Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Men: Masculinity, Conan Doyle, and Cultural History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997); Ben Knights, *Writing Masculinities: Male Narratives in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999), and Andrew Smith, 'Displacing Masculinity: Sherlock Holmes, Count Dracula, and London', in *Victorian Demons*, pp. 118-49.



photography is linked with crime, then Holmes himself is also in some way involved in criminal activities.<sup>61</sup> In 'The Red-Headed League', the thief, Vincent Spaulding, is also a photographer: '[n]ever was such a fellow for photography. Snapping away with a camera when he ought to be improving his mind, and then diving down into the cellar like a rabbit in its hole to develop his pictures' (p. 178). In the Gothic tale 'The Adventure of the Copper Beeches',<sup>62</sup> the evil Mr. Rucastle claims that '[p]hotography is one of my hobbies' (p. 327), and that he has built a dark-room in a forbidden part of the house. Indeed, photography in Holmes is often used as a blind to cover up a crime that is taking place: Spaulding is not developing photographs but rather tunneling into a nearby bank, and Mr. Rucastle has no dark-room – he is actually holding his daughter hostage there so that she will not be able to marry and deprive him of her inheritance. The photograph, often equated with the truth in the Victorian period, is here nuanced by its association with a deception. Ironically, Doyle uses the art form which cannot lie to deny culpability. The fact that *photography* is used as the ruse in both of these cases suggests that photography in the Holmes stories has questionable credibility.

In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a text that seems to be the victory of logic and reason over the supernatural, Holmes himself takes on the haunting, ghostly presence he is employed to expel. Holmes becomes 'The Man on the Tor' (p. 732): 'the ever-present danger, which is the more terrible because I [Watson] am unable to

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<sup>61</sup> See Thomas Hardy, *A Laodicean: A Story of To-Day* (London: Macmillan, 1976), first published in 1881, which explores the criminal associations of photography. For example, William Dare tries to destroy Paula and Somerset's relationship by making a trick photograph showing Somerset in a compromising (drunken) position.

<sup>62</sup> Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories are often uneasily placed in the Gothic genre. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is almost always categorised as an example of the Gothic, and recently 'The Speckled Band' was included in *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, ed. by Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 264-85. I consider 'The Copper Beeches', in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 316-32, to be another example of Doyle's Gothic, as it contains a number of Gothic elements: there is the large Gothic mansion, doubling (the governess finds a lock of hair identical to her own, and is horrified by the possibility that her other self may be living in the mansion), and a hint of insanity, for example.

define it' (p. 727). As the story progresses, Watson's journal entries become more desperate and haunted by 'an unseen watcher' (p. 730), and in his terror of the unexplainable and dark events that unfold about him he asks: '[w]hat passion of hatred can it be which leads a man to lurk in such a place at such a time? And what deep and earnest purpose can he have which calls for such a trial?' (p. 732). The answer to Watson's questions, the sinister presence on the moors, is Sherlock Holmes himself. And although Holmes insists that secrecy on the moor was necessary to solve the case he also delights in joining the other evil and more ghostly presences in the text: the escaped murder convict, the haunted moor, the ghost hound, and *Holmes himself*. Again and again, Holmes insists that his powers are nothing more than those of logic and reason: '[l]ike all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study' (p. 23). And yet he freely admits that '[s]o startling would his results appear to the uninitiated that until they learned the process by which he had arrived at them they might well consider him a necromancer' (*Study in Scarlet*, p. 23).

Holmes disrupts the logic and reason of his own texts by introducing, even only by hint or association, elements of the supernatural. Indeed, he revels in cases which bring him closer to the sub-rational, refusing 'to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic'.<sup>63</sup> He also never entirely rejects a supernatural explanation of events: '[e]liminate all other factors and the one which remains must be the truth' (*Sign of Four*, p. 92). Doyle has created a master detective who on the surface seems to be incapable of being associated with criminal action or with the occult. And yet his embodiment both of

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<sup>63</sup> Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band', in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 257-73 (p. 257). See Irene Morra, "'Singing like a musical box": Musical Detection and Novelistic Tradition', in *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction*, ed. by Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 151-70. Morra argues that Holmes's interest in music suggests that he 'must therefore possess a knowledge, mastery and enthusiasm for the intangible' (p. 155).

logic and what lies outside of that logic is what makes him such a compelling figure for the stability and disruption of Victorian photographic vision.

### **Sherlock Holmes and Mesmerism**

In 'After Cormorants with A Camera', Doyle expressed his desire to photograph death, not merely in its finality, but as it is happening; the process of death, the moment between life and death. He describes it as a 'photographic novelty' (p. 10), and asks 'why not take a cormorant at the moment of its being shot?' (p. 10). He comments on the plate, writing that it came out 'sharp as a die' (p. 11), suggesting that he is punning on death itself, which is clarifying and illuminating. The photograph (which we will never see) lends itself to a complicated interpretation, for while we can imagine a photograph of a cormorant as it is shot mid-flight, it is difficult to say at what moment we have captured the cormorant. Has the bullet hit it yet? Is it dead? Or is it only nearly dead? When is the moment of the last heartbeat? Was Doyle playing with the notion of retinal photography which explored the moment between life and death?

The notion of capturing the moment of death, was an idea that also fascinated Edgar Allan Poe. Like Doyle, Poe was interested in photography, in particular the daguerreotype.<sup>64</sup> He wrote three articles on the subject, and was himself photographed nine times. Doyle read Poe, and alludes to Poe's fictional detective Dupin in the Holmes stories on several occasions. Watson says to Holmes 'you remind me of Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin. I had no idea that such individuals exist outside of stories', to which Holmes responds that 'Dupin was a very inferior fellow' (*Study in Scarlet*, p. 24), and then proceeds to dismiss other literary detectives as incompetent or lacking in

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<sup>64</sup> *Literature and Photography: Interactions 1840-1990*, ed. by Jane M. Rabb (New York: University of New Mexico, 1995), pp. 3-5.

skill. Dupin is also mentioned in 'The Adventure of the Cardboard Box', in which both Dupin and Holmes are said to have the ability to 'follow the unspoken thoughts' (p. 888) of their companions. (Of course Holmes asserts that Dupin's efforts are mundane in comparison to his own achievements). In addition, Doyle's 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band' seems to refer directly to Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue': the baboon that is let loose in the grounds of the house is reminiscent of Poe's murderer – an orang-utan.<sup>65</sup>

In Poe's 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar', the narrator, a mesmerist, decides 'that in the series of experiments [in mesmerism] made hitherto, there has been a very remarkable and most unaccountable omission – no person has yet been mesmerised in *articulo mortis*'.<sup>66</sup> The narrator successfully mesmerises M. Valdemar at the very point of death and is able to keep him suspended in the moment for months on end. Doyle also wrote about mesmerism in his novella *The Parasite* (1894).<sup>67</sup> The narrator, Professor Gilroy, is both fascinated and horrified by the mesmerist Miss Penelosa, and while he believes that she has complete control of his will, her death suggests that he was also a powerful force in the mesmeric relationship. While I discuss the dynamic interchanges within mesmerism in the next chapter, Holmes's own mesmeric powers merit discussion here as another means of articulating Holmes's associations with the supernatural, the illicit, and the underground.

Both Poe's Dupin, and Doyle's Holmes seem to fall into a kind of mesmeric trance when they are at the height of their deductions, as if only by mesmerising

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<sup>65</sup> For more on this connection see John Sutherland, 'Mysteries of the Speckled Band', in *Is Heathcliff a Murderer?: Puzzles in Nineteenth Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 53-58.

<sup>66</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar', in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, intro. by John S. Whitley (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1992), pp. 31-38 (p. 31).

<sup>67</sup> Doyle, 'The Parasite', in *The Edinburgh Stories of Arthur Conan Doyle* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Student Publications Board, 1981) pp.41-80. For critical examinations on *The Parasite*, see for example, Anne Cranny-Francis, 'Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Parasite*: the Case of the Anguished Author', in *Nineteenth-Century Suspense: From Poe to Conan Doyle*, ed. by Clive Bloom, Brian Docherty, Jane Gibb and Keith Shand (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), pp. 93-106.

themselves, can they come to the correct conclusions. In Poe, for example, the narrator admires ‘a peculiar analytic ability in Dupin [. . .] His manner at these moments was frigid and abstract; his eyes were vacant in expression; while his voice, usually a rich tenor, rose into a treble which would have sounded petulantly but for the deliberateness and entire distinctness of the enunciation’.<sup>68</sup> Like Dupin, Holmes also seems to go into a mesmeric trance whenever he thinks deeply about a particular problem: Holmes’ ‘eyes had assumed the vacant, lack-lustre expression which shows mental abstraction’ (*Study in Scarlet*, p. 26). By assuming the mesmeric trance, however, Holmes is not experiencing ‘mental abstraction’ but rather is accessing heightened states of awareness. Although Dupin and Holmes might be simply distracted, both authors wrote about mesmerism, and the mesmeric language and postures of the bodies are there: the vacant expressions, the change in voice, the idea that although they are physically present, they are in fact mentally (spiritually?) somewhere else.

Indeed, in the quote from ‘The Adventure of the Cardboard Box’ which opens this chapter, Holmes’s ‘responsive’ ‘filaments’ (p. 888) evoke not only ectoplasm and telepathy, but also as Oppenheim suggests, ‘the summoning of invisible, imponderable fluids for explanatory purposes [which] likewise provided an important thread connecting spiritualism with mesmerism’ (p. 218). Later in the story, Holmes says that he had been ‘in rapport’ (p. 889) with Watson when he was able to guess his thoughts, an expression which in mesmeric language suggests that the two were in sympathy with one another.

Mesmerism’s relation to visuality, especially the role mesmerism plays in the reception of photography in the nineteenth century, seems to mark the very

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<sup>68</sup> Poe, ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’, in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, pp. 62-90 (p. 66).

questionable nature of vision that I have been discussing throughout this chapter. Indeed, photography and mesmerism were linked: Geoffrey Batchen writes that scientists made connections between electromagnetism and photography (pp. 154) and Alison Chapman suggests that ‘the development of the “black art” of photography in Britain corresponds with the rise of mesmerism in the 1840s’.<sup>69</sup> With regards to mesmerism, systems of visuality and photography, Crary suggests that ‘perhaps nowhere else in the late nineteenth century is the ambivalent status of attention as visible as in the social phenomenon of hypnosis’ (*Suspensions*, p. 65). According to Crary, the attentive or inattentive gaze into the camera, the abstracted gaze of the mesmerised or of distracted thought, all become part of visualising at the end of the nineteenth century (*Suspensions*, pp. 11-76).

Holmes’s photographic powers are negotiated by the very uncategorisable nature of what is being seen and what is being photographed. Mesmerism was then (as it is now) a mysterious process never fully understood and yet often practised. Its system of perception that implies inattentiveness to the external world makes it visually problematic. That Holmes has also been difficult to place in any well-defined category of visuality suggests that his own connection with mesmerism makes his role as detective in the Victorian period even more ambivalent and unquantifiable.

Holmes’s relation to photography as it was conceived in the nineteenth century is as nuanced as the concept of photography itself. Doyle’s relationship with photography was equally undefinable and unstable, and his relationship with Holmes was always questionable; Doyle is well-known for his ambivalence about his most popular creation.<sup>70</sup> Doyle was so uneasy about Holmes that he killed him off in ‘The

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<sup>69</sup> Alison Chapman, “‘A Poet Never Sees a Ghost’: Photography and Trance in Tennyson’s *Enoch Arden* and Julia Margaret Cameron’s Photography”, *Victorian Poetry*, 41 (2003), 47-71 (p. 50).

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Daniel Stashower, *Teller of Tales: The Life of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Penguin, 2001).

Adventure of the Final Problem' in 1893. However, he resurrected him in 1901 for *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and in 1903 began writing the stories for *The Strand* once again. That Doyle killed and resurrected his popular hero evokes the theory of the subject in the photograph who, as Barthes suggests, is at once going to die and is already dead.<sup>71</sup> Holmes is then always dead, and always dying, and always about to die: he haunts his own stories by the sheer fact of his being dead mid-way through them. The spiritualist in Doyle would have perhaps appreciated this turn of the screw. Or perhaps not: Doyle would have been not a little anxious about Holmes's spirit showing up in one of his photographs.

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<sup>71</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Flamingo, 1984). In Barthes the photograph is always a reminder of human mortality. In an examination of a photograph of Lewis Payne dating from 1865, Barthes argues '*he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. [. . .] I shudder, [. . .] over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe' (p. 96).

## Chapter Three: Identities and Powers in Flux:

### Mesmerism, Mesmerism/Hypnosis Manuals and Du Maurier's *Trilby*

#### Introduction

Jane Welsh Carlyle's 1844 letter, and the following passage from George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894), illustrate ways in which mesmerism was received in the mid- and late-nineteenth century:<sup>1</sup>

I gave [the mesmerist] my hand he [. . .] made [. . .] some '*passes*' over it [. . .] and [. . .] flash – there went over me from head to foot something precisely like what I once experienced from taking hold of a galvanic ball [. . .] – I had presence of mind to keep looking him in the face as if I had felt nothing and presently he flung away my hand with a provoked look, saying 'I believe you would be a very difficult subject, but nevertheless if I had *time* given me, I am sure I could mesmerize you at least I never failed with any one yet.' [. . .] [*T*]hat man was superior to *me* in nothing

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1760s, Franz Anton Mesmer discovered a universal fluid which he believed could be harnessed by magnets and used for healing purposes. Using his hands or a magnetized wand, Mesmer would make passes over his subjects in order to restore the natural flow of the universal fluid that disease or illness obstructed. Mesmerism gained popularity in Britain in the 1840s: travelling mesmerists toured the country, and many writers were inspired by the new agent. For example, the Brownings corresponded on the subject and Robert made it the subject of his poem 'Mesmerism' (1855) (see Alison Chapman, 'Mesmerism and Agency in the Courtship of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 26 [1998], 303-19). Harriet Martineau wrote *Letters on Mesmerism* (1844), which described how she had been cured by the treatment and now fully endorsed it. For more on Martineau's experiences with mesmerism, see, for example, Diana Postlethwaite, *Making it Whole: A Victorian Circle and the Shape of Their World* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984) and Postlethwaite, 'Mothering and Mesmerism in the Life of Harriet Martineau', *Signs*, 14 (1989), 583-609. Charles Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) discusses mesmerism. See Fred Kaplan's *Dickens and Mesmerism: The Hidden Springs of Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), a comprehensive study of Dickens's interest in the practice, and how it influenced his life and works. See also Margaret Flanders Darby's two part article 'Dickens and Women's Stories: 1845-1848 (Part One)' *Dickens Quarterly*, 17 (2000), 67-76; 'Part Two', *Dickens Quarterly*, 17 (2000), 127-138. Darby describes 'the close links between [Dickens's] therapeutic and authorial powers' ('Part One', p. 72), showing how Dickens's mesmerisation of women allowed him to speak for them and to write their stories when they could not.



but living strength. [. . .] I could even hinder him from *perceiving* that he has mesmerized me by *my* moral and intellectual superiority!<sup>2</sup>

Then [Svengali] made little passes and counterpasses on [Trilby's] forehead and temples and down her cheek and neck. Soon her eyes closed and her face grew placid. After a while, a quarter of an hour, perhaps, he asked her if she suffered still.

'Oh! presque plus du tout, monsieur – c'est le ciel!' [. . .]

'But never mind, matemoiselle; when your pain arrives, then shall you come once more to Svengali, and he shall take it away from you, and keep it himself for a souvenir of you when you are gone. [. . .] *And you shall see nothing, hear nothing, think of nothing but Svengali, Svengali, Svengali!*'<sup>3</sup>

These descriptions evoke the stereotype, popular in the nineteenth century, of the mesmerist as a foreigner, possessed with magical and sinister power. The mesmerist Carlyle describes had 'dark animal-eyes' and 'could not sound his *hs*' (p. 283), comments which Victorians would have readily associated as Eastern European or Jewish traits, and which mark similarities to Svengali's own 'bold, brilliant black eyes' (Du Maurier, p. 13) and heavy accent.<sup>4</sup> The passages also indicate Victorian anxieties about the moral and

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Carlyle (1801-1866), 'Letter written by Jane Welsh Carlyle to John Welsh, 13 December 1844', in *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, ed. by Clyde de L. Ryals and Kenneth J. Fielding, 24 vols (Durham: Duke University Press, 1970-1990), XVIII (1990), pp. 282-85 (p. 284).

<sup>3</sup> Du Maurier, *Trilby*, pp. 57-60. Further references are given after quotations in the text. *Trilby* was first serialized in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1894.

<sup>4</sup> See Daniel Pick, *Svengali's Web: The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), which argues that Du Maurier 'linked the theme of mesmeric entrapment with persistent anxieties about the penetrating psychological powers of the Jews. Svengali was a dazzlingly memorable meeting point of such currents of fear and fascination [. . .] about the nature of hypnosis, alien control and

sexual dangers of mesmerism, especially to vulnerable women. Furthermore, Carlyle and Du Maurier articulate the mysterious and supernatural possibilities of mesmerism: Carlyle writes that mesmerism 'is all of a family with witch craft – demoniacal possession' (Carlyle, p. 283), and Svengali seems to instill in Trilby a sinister desire to 'see nothing, hear nothing, think of nothing but Svengali, Svengali, Svengali' (p. 60).<sup>5</sup>

The extracts, also, however, represent two distinct periods in the history of mesmerism, their first and second waves of popularity.<sup>6</sup> How had the discourse on

the unconscious' (pp. 3-4). For more on Victorian anxieties about Jewishness, see for example, Anne Cowen, *Victorian Jews Through British Eyes* (London: Littman Library for Jewish Civilization, 1998); Brenda McKay, *George Eliot and Victorian Attitudes to Racial Diversity, Colonialism, Darwinism, Class, Gender, and Jewish Culture and Prophecy* (Lewiston: Mellen, 2003), and Jonathan Taylor, 'The Music Master and the "Jew" in Victorian Writing: Thomas Carlyle, Richard Wagner, George Eliot and George Du Maurier', in *The Idea of Music*, ed. by Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff, pp. 225-44.

<sup>5</sup> For more on Victorian anxiety about the sexual and moral dangers of mesmerism, links between mesmerism and the occult, and discussions of mesmerism in literature, see, for example, Maria M. Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Robin Waterfield, *Hidden Depths: The Story of Hypnosis* (London: Macmillan, 2002) and Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Searches through COPAC and the National Library of Scotland reveal that during the 1840s and 50s many works on mesmerism were published. See, for example, John Ashburner, *Facts in Clairvoyance* (London: Baillière, 1848); George H. Barth, *The Mesmerist's Manual on Phenomena and Practices* (London: Baillière, 1853); Thomas Buckland, *The Hand-Book of Mesmerism*, 3rd edn (London, 1851); Thomas Capern, *The Mighty Curative Powers of Mesmerism Proved in a Hundred and Fifty Cases* (London: Baillière, 1851); William Davey, *The Illustrated Practical Mesmerist: Curative and Scientific*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 1856); Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse: Being an Explanation of Modern Mysteries* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1851); Joseph Philippe François Deleuze, *Practical Instruction on Animal Magnetism* (London: Baillière, 1850); John Bovee Dods, *Electrical-Psychology or the Electrical Philosophy of Mental Impressions*, rev. and ed. by H.G. Darling (London: Griffin, 1851); John Elliotson, *John Elliotson on Mesmerism*, ed. by Fred Kaplan (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982); Elliotson, *Numerous Cases of Surgical Operations without Pain in the Mesmeric State* (London: Baillière, 1843); Joseph Haddock, *Somnolism and Psycheism; or the Science of the Soul and the Phenomena of Nervation* (London: Hodson, 1851); Herbert Mayo, *On the Truths Contained in Popular Superstitions: with an Account of Mesmerism* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1851); David Pae, *Handbook of Curative Mesmerism* (Edinburgh, 1854); Baron Karl Von Reichenbach, *Physico-Physiological Researches on the Dynamics of Magnetism, Electricity, Light, Crystallization and Chemism in Their Relations to Vital Force* (London, 1850); George Sandby, *Mesmerism and its Opponents* (London: Longmans, 1844), and Alphonse Teste, *A Practical Manual of Animal Magnetism* (London: Baillière, 1843). Online catalogues and libraries show, however, that very little was published on mesmerism after that until the 1880s and 1890s and into the early twentieth century, at which point publications on mesmerism and significantly, hypnotism, increased. See, for example, C. M. Étienne Eugène Azam, *Hypnotisme, Double Conscience, et Altérations de la Personnalité* (Paris, 1887); John Barter, *How to Hypnotise: Including the Whole Art of Mesmerism etc.* (London: Simpkin, 1890); Alfred Binet and Charles Féré, *Animal Magnetism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1887); James Coates, *Human Magnetism or How to Hypnotise: A Practical Handbook for the Student of Mesmerism* (London: Redway, 1897); Professor Hayslip, *How to Hypnotise for Amusement and Healing: A Correspondence Course on Hypnotism, Magnetic Healing, Suggested Therapeutics* (London, c.

mesmerism changed from its early and late reception in the Victorian period? Both Maria M. Tatar and Alison Winter argue that while mesmerism in the mid-nineteenth century was invested in the supernatural, by the end of the century it had been absorbed into a new scientific understanding of hypnotism.<sup>7</sup> The Scottish surgeon James Braid (1795-1860) first developed the idea of hypnotism and in 1843 his *Neurypnology* detailed the actions of the brain during the trance state. He defined hypnotism as 'a peculiar condition of the nervous system induced by a fixed and abstracted attention of the mental and visual eye, on one object, not of an exciting nature'.<sup>8</sup> Braid's definition of hypnotism was intended to be radically different than mesmerism. For Braid, the mesmeric trance state was an outdated superstition supposedly induced by the mesmerist's will, or by invisible fluids, while the scientific hypnotic trance state was a physiological process.

Tatar and Winter's suggestion that hypnotism exorcised the supernatural connotations from mesmerism, however, oversimplifies a profoundly ambiguous period in the history of the mind. The discourse on hypnotism at the *fin-de-siècle* was a blend of mid-century ideas about mesmerism's supernatural powers and its practical purpose in the field of psychology developing in the 1880s and 1890s. While mental scientists attempted to police this blurring between superstition and practical study, the differences between the supposedly occulted mesmerism and scientific hypnotism were actually almost negligible.

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1904); Ernest H. Hunt, *A Manual of Hypnotism* (London: Rider, 1915); Henry S. Munro, *Handbook of Suggestive Therapeutics, Applied Hypnotism, Psychic Science* (London, 1911), and Frank H. Randall, *Practical Instruction in Mesmerism* (Westminster: Roxburghe Press, 1898).

<sup>7</sup> For historical discussions on the absorption of mesmerism into hypnotism, see, for example, Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), and Derek Forrest, *Hypnotism: A History* (London: Penguin, 1999). For a history of the rise of psychology as a discipline and profession see Rick Rylance's *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> James Braid, *Neurypnology: or the Rationale of Nervous Sleep Considered in Relation to Animal Magnetism or Mesmerism*, ed. by Arthur Edward Waite, new edn (London: Redway, 1899), p. 94.

The extract from *Trilby* illustrates this overlapping between mental therapy and supernatural power within the discourse on mesmerism in the late nineteenth century. Svengali hypnotises Trilby because she complains of the 'neuralgia in her eyes, a thing she was subject to [. . .] the pain was maddening, and generally lasted twenty-four hours' (p. 55). While neuralgia is defined in the OED as 'pain, typically stabbing or burning in the area served by a nerve', the disorder was also associated in the nineteenth century with hysteria (it is significant to note that Trilby's pain is described as 'maddening'). D. Hack Tuke's *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine* (1892) defines neuralgia as 'derangement of sensibility',<sup>9</sup> and the entry on neuralgia, written by Heinrich Schüle, suggests that the symptoms can heighten during 'hysterical insanity' (II, p. 836). Furthermore, Schüle links neuralgia to gynaecological disorders, particularly hysteria, noting that the 'prolapse of the uterus' brings on 'attacks of mental derangement' (p. 839).<sup>10</sup>

Significantly, hysteria and other nervous disorders were treated in the 1890s with hypnotism, suggesting that Svengali employs hypnotism in the accepted therapeutic manner.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Carlyle's experience, which describes the use of mesmerism for titillation, *Trilby* suggests the interest at the end of the century in adapting mesmerism

<sup>9</sup> Herbert Schülle, 'Neuralgia', in *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*, ed. by D. Hack Tuke, II, pp. 835-40 (p. 835).

<sup>10</sup> The OED suggests that 'women being much more liable than men to [hysteria], it was originally thought to be due to disturbances of the uterus and its functions'. Although by the end of the nineteenth century writings on hysteria focused more on the psychological impact of the disorder, hysteria was still connected to female sexuality. In his entry on hysteria in *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*, for example, H.B. Donkin suggests that aside from abstinence, '[t]here are clearly other stresses which render women especially liable to hysteria. The periodical disturbance of menstruation, the times of pregnancy and parturition [. . .] contribut[e] to the number of sufferers' (I, pp. 618-27 [p. 620]). For more on hysteria in the nineteenth century and its relation to literature, see for example Evelyne Ender, *Sexing the Mind: Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Hysteria* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), and Peter Melville Logan, *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century British Prose* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> See 'Hypnotism in the Hysterical', in *A Dictionary for Psychological Medicine*, ed. by D. Hack Tuke, in which J.M. Charcot outlines some of the benefits of treating hysteria with hypnotism (I, pp. 606-10).

(now hypnotism) to the new science of mind. While mesmerism had a therapeutic application from its conception, by the 1890s mental scientists strove to convince both the public and themselves that hypnotism no longer had any disreputable supernatural connection. At the same time, this extract demonstrates how hypnotism was still closely linked to the inexplicable nature of the mesmeric process. For example, when Trilby tells the Laird that Svengali hypnotised her, the Laird exclaims 'I'd sooner have any pain than have it cured in that unnatural way, and by such a man as that!' (p. 60). Significantly, the Laird considers hypnotic therapy 'unnatural': for him the medical practice was still inextricably connected to supernatural control and had only ambiguous curative value.<sup>12</sup>

Not only will this chapter explore the blurring of the boundaries between mental science and the supernatural, but also the exchange between the mesmerist and the mesmerised in the context of the *fin-de-siècle*. Critical and literary discussions of mesmerism suggest that the site of power is traditionally located within the mesmerist, who has full control of his or her subject.<sup>13</sup> For example, although Winter uses Carlyle's experience with mesmerism quoted at the beginning of this chapter to show how mesmerism jeopardises clear class-distinctions, she does not consider how this dynamic process, in which the site of power is in flux, problematises her stable model of mesmerism. Carlyle's description reveals, however, that both parties are energised by the mesmeric process, and both mesmerist and Carlyle exert a will which seems to magnetically pull them together, then push them apart. While the mesmerist successfully mesmerises her, she in turn mesmerises him into thinking he has failed.

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<sup>12</sup> See Crabtree, Forrest, Tatar, and Winter for information on the scepticism and suspicion with which mesmerism was viewed.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Tatar, and Daniel Karlin, 'Browning, Elizabeth Barrett and Mesmerism', *Victorian Poetry*, 27 (1989), 65-77.

Furthermore, although Daniel Pick's *Svengali's Web* argues that Svengali's mesmerism is representative of Victorian anxieties about the dangers of foreign influence, Pick does not discuss how it is the *merging* of identities that crucially concerned Victorians in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>14</sup> The problem was not so much the threat of an outside force, such as the lower-class mesmerist's influence on upper-class Carlyle, that made late Victorians anxious about mesmerism, but rather the dangerous co-mingling of sexual and nationalities identities. The boundaries between mesmerist/mesmerised, and mesmerism/hypnotism as represented in mesmerism manuals and hypnosis handbooks are less clear than at first they seem. In the mesmeric process, both bodies share power, demonstrating that in the mesmeric process neither body has complete control nor is any one body powerless. A close reading of *Trilby* demonstrates the dynamic interchange of power between Trilby and Svengali. While Phyllis Weliver has also recognised how *Trilby* subverts expectations about the passive female role in mesmerism, she is concerned with 'ownership of Trilby's voice' and Trilby's self-fashioning in music, rather than in the complexities of and unease surrounding the mesmeric process.<sup>15</sup> *Trilby* is a mesmeric text which makes indistinct the limits of identities and powers, and which, in its popularity, mesmerized its audiences.

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<sup>14</sup> For *fin-de-siècle* concerns about the influence of foreign identity, see for example, Steve Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity in Late Victorian Culture: Civil and Military Worlds* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2003); *Contagion: Historical and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Alison Bashford and Claire Hooker, Routledge Studies in the Social History of Medicine, 15 (London: Routledge, 2001) and *Imperial Desire: Dissident Sexualities and Colonial Literature*, ed. by Philip Holden and Richard J. Ruppel (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Phyllis Weliver, *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860-1900: Representations of Music, Science and Gender in the Leisured Home* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 247.

### **Mesmerism to Hypnotism: Blurring the Boundaries of Science and the Supernatural**

‘[F]rom 1790 to 1875 somnambulism and animal magnetism were held to be occult sciences unworthy of the attention of scientific men [. . .] in 1875 [. . .] [s]omnambulism is now a recognized and unquestioned fact that no longer pertains to metaphysics’ (Richet, p. 99).

Charles Richet’s comments in *Thirty Years of Psychical Research* (1923, first published in French in 1922) suggest that by the *fin-de-siècle*, mental scientists considered mesmerism to be safely contained within the ‘recognized and unquestioned fact’ of somnambulism (another word for hypnotism). However, while Richet insists that somnambulism is now a purely factual science, he goes on to question ‘whether there are magnetic emanations perceptible only by sensitives’ (p. 99). His conclusion that ‘no satisfactory answer can yet be given’ to the question of ‘magnetic fluid’ (p.100), suggests his anxiety about the inexplicable, unscientific aspects of somnambulism. Like ectoplasm and x-rays, hypnotism was connected to ideas about invisible agency at the end of the century, suggesting that despite attempts by the scientific community to treat hypnotism as a material science, it was still linked to the immaterial aspects of mesmerism.

Indeed, since Mesmer wrote about mesmerism as a ‘universal fluid’ (Forrest, *Hypnotism*, p. 2), the literature surrounding mesmerism has retained the link to invisible, immaterial action. In *Facts in Mesmerism* (1843), for example, Chauncy Hare Townshend refers to mesmerism as an ‘imponderable agent[s]’ which ‘influences’ the

patient.<sup>16</sup> An 'influence' originally meant 'the supposed flowing or streaming from the stars or heavens of an ethereal fluid acting upon the destiny and character of men' and also an 'occult force' (OED). Townshend uses the term to describe how a mesmerist could command this mysterious emission and use it to regulate the actions of his subject. Significantly, Pierre Janet writes about hypnotism as if it is still Townshend's 'imponderable agent', invisible, and occulted: '[a]ttention is first drawn to a particular force by its exceptional manifestations. Not until then do people begin to acquire knowledge about the everyday phenomena that result from the working of this force'.<sup>17</sup> Although Janet suggests that hypnotism is capable of everyday action, his use of the term 'force' is so vague it seems that Janet himself is not sure what these everyday phenomena might be. Despite protestations that hypnotism was exorcised of mesmerism's 'pseudoscience', the discourse on hypnotism was still exploring ideas about ephemeral emanations and unknown powers.

Indeed, from 1880 onward scientists (such as F. W. H. Myers, Eugene de Rochas d'Aiglun, Albert Moll and Julian Ochorowicz) were as vague about hypnotism as Janet. They could come to no conclusion about finding an exact definition of hypnotism, nor could they come to a consensus about distinctions between hypnotism and mesmerism.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Chauncy Hare Townshend, *Facts in Mesmerism*, 2nd edn (London, 1844), p. 281. *Facts in Mesmerism* was probably one of the most widely read and influential mesmerism texts, and Townshend was a well-known public figure: he was friends with Charles Dickens and Poe satirised his work in 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar' (1845).

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Janet, *Psychological Healing: A Historical and Clinical Study*, trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul, 2 vols (London: Allen & Unwin, 1925), I, p. 151. Janet (1859-1947) studied under Charcot, and was a psychiatrist whose work was crucial to late nineteenth-century psychology.

<sup>18</sup> Eugene de Rochas d'Aiglun (1837-1914) was a French psychical investigator interested in hypnotism and psychical phenomena. Albert Moll (1862-1939) was instrumental in introducing hypnotism into psychology and published his *Hypnosis* in 1889. Julian Ochorowicz (1850-1917) was a Polish psychologist and investigator of hypnosis. See Crabtree, p. 270.



For many scientists, removing the supernatural from mesmerism was a difficult, if not impossible task.

Significantly, by the end of the century, handbooks about hypnotism were unable to make themselves distinct from those on mesmerism written earlier in the century because their vocabulary and goals were so similar. The aim of most of these works was to explain how mesmerism/hypnotism worked, to give evidence of curative value, and to encourage readers to learn, practice, and be treated with mesmerism/hypnotism. The similarity between the practices was such that James Coates in his 1897 publication of *Human Magnetism or How to Hypnotise: A Practical Handbook for the Student of Mesmerism* remarks '[p]ractically, hypnotism is mesmerism. The phenomena observed being similar, change of name cannot alter them' (p. v).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the directions for how to induce either a mesmeric or a hypnotic trance are strikingly similar. John Barter's *How to Hypnotise: Including the Whole Art of Mesmerism* (1890), for example, although seeming to argue that mesmerism and hypnotism must not be confused, goes on to explain that passes and a concentrated gaze into the eyes of the subject are necessary for both mesmerism and hypnotism. Although Barter insists mesmerism and hypnotism have some important differences, primarily that the mesmeric state can be induced on a child under three, whereas the hypnotic state cannot (p. 11), and that 'the mesmeric sleep is refreshing, but the hypnotic sleep begets weariness and lassitude' (p. 12), he is unable to maintain the sharp distinctions he believes are present between mesmerism and hypnosis in his discussion of them. In the section 'How to Hypnotise in Public' (pp. 16-17), Barter seems unable to decide which practice he is discussing and while referring to mesmerism

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<sup>19</sup> Coates's manual was popular enough to be reprinted again in 1904. See Coates, *Human Magnetism or How to Hypnotize: A Practical Handbook for Students of Mesmerism*, new rev. edn (London: Nichols, 1904).

in one sentence, he uses hypnotism as its synonym in the next. The interchange between the words happens again and again throughout the text, making the distinctions between the terms problematic to define.

Barter expresses in part the uneasiness that the medical community felt about trying to make clear distinctions between the two practices at the *fin-de-siècle*. The language in Barter's work makes the contemporary confusion within the medical community palpable, not only in his conflation of hypnotism and mesmerism, but also in the terminology he uses to describe them. The terms 'operator' and 'subject' are used by most mesmerism and hypnosis manuals published in the nineteenth century to describe the mesmerist/hypnotist and the mesmerised/hypnotised. Furthermore, in Barter's manual, discussions of the 'will' of the mesmeric operator that is able to govern the actions of the subject and the 'suggestion' made by the hypnosis operator to influence the actions of the subject suggest that 'will' and 'suggestion' are just different terms for talking about the same practice (p. 17). As Coates suggests, for many writing on the mesmeric and hypnotic practices, '[p]ractically, hypnotism is mesmerism' (p. v).

The fact that discourses on mesmerism and hypnotism often became interchangeable because of an inability on the part of researchers to clarify even for themselves what mesmerism/hypnotism really *was*, suggests the uneasiness they felt with the practices, and their inability to wholly separate these practices from the occult. One of the major concerns of late nineteenth-century works on mesmerism/hypnotism was the attempt to strip mesmerism/hypnotism of the sinister reputation they had gained in the popular imagination, and to invest them with more positive connotations: mesmerism/hypnotism were to be viewed as an effective treatment for poor health. And

yet the continuous reference to objections many people have had to both practices, and the dubious reputation the practices have had within the community at large only serves to underline that the writers and practitioners of mesmerism/hypnotism had to convince even themselves that the practices were free from the supernatural and mysterious.

Many of the manuals credit both mesmerism and hypnotism for achieving phenomena outside of the normal range of human powers. For example, Coates suggests that during a hypnotic trance state 'higher phenomena' (p. 180) can occur, such as the transference of taste and smell from the operator to the subject, as well as thought-reading and telepathy. However, he denies that clairvoyance is possible under hypnosis (Coates, pp. 180-213), a point in which he and Barter agree. Barter explains

[c]clairvoyance can only be attained by repeated *mesmeric* processes.

Introvision may be attained by the subject by repeated *hypnotic* processes.

Introvision means the faculty of seeing clearly and distinctly the various operations of nature taking place in the *interior* of another person or in the sensitive himself (p. 26).

Both Barter and Coates wish to separate activities like clairvoyance from discussions of hypnosis, but are unable to dissociate this practice from the supernatural entirely. Both admit that hypnosis can induce thought-reading and telepathy, but that only in mesmerism can clairvoyance be induced. This attempt to invest hypnosis with more scientific credibility than mesmerism is unsuccessful, however, since clairvoyance, or as the OED defines it, the 'insight into things beyond the range of ordinary perception', is ultimately an interchangeable term for thought-reading: to see into someone else's mind is, after all, to have an insight beyond the range of ordinary perception. The fact that

hypnosis was meant to be a more scientifically pure form of mesmerism was problematic, especially since not only were writers such as Barter and Coates unable to distinguish hypnotism from mesmerism, they were also unable to explain away the supernatural manifestations occurring during hypnotism.

Writings about hypnotism also seemed to conflate the boundaries between the practical and inexplicable applications of hypnotism in psychology. Jean Martin Charcot's language in the description of the use of hypnotism on a hysteric, for example, illustrates this ambiguity:

[w]hatever be the method employed for hypnotisation, even with the most predisposed persons, it may happen that sleep does not follow with all its characteristics at the first *séance*. In a number of cases there appear at first only vague phenomena, difficult to appreciate, which are to the true phases of hypnotism what the aura is to an attack of hysteria (*Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*, I, p. 607).<sup>20</sup>

Charcot's description is, as he acknowledges, vague, and seems to describe a spiritualist *séance* rather than a medical one. Indeed, the use of the term *séance* as a definition of a spiritualist gathering (first used in 1845) predates its use as a "sitting" for medical treatment' (first used in 1875).<sup>21</sup> The 'phenomena' he describes could either be ghosts in the *séance* room or the symptoms of the onset of hypnotism.<sup>22</sup> Charcot's definition is

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<sup>20</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) was a French neurologist who made significant contributions both to the study of hysteria and to the field of psychology. More for information on Charcot, see for example, Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. by Alisa Hartz (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> 'séance', OED.

<sup>22</sup> That the SPR was interested in hypnotism ensured that its link to the psychical, and not just the psychological would remain strong. One of the objectives of the SPR was '[t]he study of hypnotism, and the forms of so-called mesmeric trance, with its alleged insensibility to pain; clairvoyance and other allied phenomena' ('Objects of the Society' [1882], in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, 1880-*

literally haunted by hypnotism's connections to the supernatural. Even as hypnotism was adopted into modern psychological practice by eminent practitioners like Charcot, it carried with it its darker undertones, ensuring that the mind at the *fin-de-siècle* was to be a supremely haunted site.<sup>23</sup>

### **Mesmerism Manuals, Hypnosis Handbooks, *Trilby***

The site of power, like distinctions between science and the supernatural in mesmerism and hypnotism is a point of uneasiness in the handbooks, particularly in cases of transference. Unlike Freud's use of the term in which a patient transfers his or her unresolved emotions onto the analyst, transference in nineteenth-century mesmerism and hypnotism suggests that the operator can be affected and infected by the subject.<sup>24</sup> For example, Coates advises that mesmerists select the healthiest subjects, lest the mesmerist himself experience any of the sickness of the patient (p. 135). Furthermore, he recommends that the operator choose subjects 'most contrasted to himself in temperament' (p. 135), suggesting that if the subject and object are too alike, then the risk of them mesmerizing one another is even greater, especially if both are endowed with strong magnetic abilities.

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1900, ed. by Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], pp. 271-72 [p. 271]).

<sup>23</sup> Freud also experimented with hypnotism, most notably in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895). See, Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, ed. and trans. by James and Alix Strachey, The Pelican Freud Library, 15 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), III. However, Freud found the practice was not always reliable, and he became anxious about using hypno-therapy. See for example Crabtree and Forrest.

<sup>24</sup> For information on Freud and transference see Freud's, 'The Dynamics of Transference', in *The Standard Edition*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey, XII, pp. 97-108, and Elizabeth Wright's *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

Even as late as 1980 in *A Handbook of Medical Hypnosis*, Gordon Ambrose and George Newbold discuss the possible dangers of this kind of transference that can occur in the hypnotic state:

It does seem possible that a patient's symptoms may, during hypnotherapy, be transferred inadvertently from the patient to the one who is treating him. If the therapist is not fully in control of the situation [. . .] it seems just possible that a patient's own thoughts and feelings may, in certain circumstances, be implanted in the mind of the hypnotist. Although one cannot be dogmatic about this since there still remains a vast amount that is unknown about the workings of suggestion, this possibility is one that should not be lightly discounted. Some years ago one of us [Gordon Newbold] did meet a hypnotherapist who appeared to have succumbed to this particular hazard.<sup>25</sup>

The first edition of this work was published in 1956. That it had reached a fourth edition in the 1980s is suggestive of the hold hypnosis has even on contemporary culture, and also indicates that the anxieties we have about hypnosis today are similar to those held in the nineteenth century about both mesmerism and hypnosis. Indeed, transference suggests that the subject has the potential to harm the operator. In transference, the subject cannot be dismissed as a powerless, passive victim of mesmerism, but must be seen as a subject indeed, as much an active agent in the hypnotic/mesmeric process as the operator himself. Transference in discussions of mesmerism and hypnotism also brings up *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about the dangerous influence of not only other identities, but also

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon Ambrose and George Newbold, *A Handbook of Medical Hypnosis*, 4th edn (London: Baillière, 1980), p.57.

disease. For example, the notion of shared fluids and infection in the discourse on mesmerism is perhaps hinting at late nineteenth-century concerns about the spread of venereal disease.<sup>26</sup>

Although transference might be dangerously infectious, in the handbooks it was also invested with curative power. In *How to Hypnotise*, John Barter gives an example in which 'transfer-hypnotic treatment' (p. 27) is used at a Paris hospital in order to cure a man, 'Mr. X', suffering from St. Vitus's dance.<sup>27</sup> Transfer-hypnotic treatment occurs between three people: the operator, a patient, and a third party, the medium (or subject), who acts to connect the operator with the patient. In the case of the Paris hospital, the medium was a young French girl. She and Mr. X held hands and she alone was hypnotised by the operator. As soon as she fell into the hypnotic trance she took on all the symptoms of Mr. X's illness and adopted his personality, even claiming that she was a twenty-one year old man (Mr. X's age). When the operator awoke her from the trance she resumed her normal state, and Mr. X was once again afflicted with the symptoms of St. Vitus's dance, but to a lesser degree. After several 'transfer' sessions, Barter reports Mr. X was cured of the disease (pp. 27-8).

Although this example of 'transfer-hypnotic treatment' is meant to convince the reader of the power of the operator to cure even the most invasive neurological disorders, instead it emphasises how the subject/medium is also invested with power in the hypnotic

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<sup>26</sup> For more on attitudes towards venereal disease in the Victorian period, see, for example, Paul McHugh, *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Gail Savage, "'The Wilful Communication of Loathsome Disease': Marital Conflict and Venereal Disease in Victorian England", *Victorian Studies*, 34 (1990), 35-54; *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. by Martha Vicinus (London: Methuen, 1980), and Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

<sup>27</sup> St. Vitus's dance is a neurological disorder associated with rheumatic fever that is characterised by jerky involuntary movements affecting especially the shoulders, hips, and face. It was named St. Vitus's dance because it was believed that visiting St. Vitus's shrine would cure the illness.

process. After all, it is the subject/medium who takes on the symptoms of the illness, and the subject/medium who eventually effects the cure of Mr. X. The site of power passes from the operator to the French girl and finally to Mr. X and then back again, suggesting once more the flowing nature that Mesmer saw was a part of animal magnetism.

Indeed, the passage in which Trilby suffers from neuralgia beginning this chapter is not only an example of transference, but also suggests that the site of power in mesmerism/hypnotism fluctuates between Svengali and Trilby. Significantly, Charcot defines hypnotism as a 'neurosis' (*Dictionary*, I, p. 606). The term neurosis itself is defined by Tuke as 'a functional disorder of the nervous system – that is to say a disorder such as migraine' (*Dictionary*, p. 850). A migraine might be another symptom for Trilby's neuralgia since the pain can also be localized around the eyes and last for long periods of time. Indeed, Trilby herself seems to be suffering from hypnotism, and by virtue of her neurosis, is both a hypnotist, and one who is hypnotized. The language in nineteenth-century psychology plays with the notion both of the electricity of the mind, and electricity in the discourse on hypnotism: the nerves of the nervous system send electric impulses to one another, galvanization is used in some cases as therapy for sufferers of neuralgia (*Dictionary*, II, p. 840), and in the mid-nineteenth century electricity was used to explain some of the workings of mesmerism.<sup>28</sup> The notion of electricity is significant in a discussion of a fluctuating circuit of mesmerism, since both

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<sup>28</sup> Electrobiolgy, for example, was introduced to America in the 1840s. In his introduction to James Braid's researches on hypnotism, *Neurypnology*, Arthur Edward Waite argues that 'electro-biology' produces the same effects as hypnotism (See 'Biographical Introduction', in Braid's *Neurypnology*, pp. 1-66 [p. 49]). For more on the process, see, for example, Winter, pp. 281-84. Michael Faraday (1791-1867) was a natural philosopher who argued that light and magnetism were connected, a phenomenon that became known as electromagnetism. Winter suggests that his researches were significant in 'the experimental study of mind and nervous sensibility' (p. 278) in the mid-nineteenth century.



processes involve shared energies, and networks between bodies and minds, evoking the shared energies between Svengali and Trilby.<sup>29</sup>

In attempting to cure Trilby's neuralgia, Svengali becomes infected by Trilby, and begins to develop symptoms of the disorder. Significantly, when Svengali takes Trilby's pain as a 'soufenir' (p. 60), he implies this notion of infection. The OED defines 'souvenir' as a remembrance or memory, but also as a 'slight trace of something', intimating that there are now traces of Trilby's neurological disease in Svengali's mind. Furthermore, 'trace' is a psychological term meaning 'a change in the brain as the result of some mental experience, the physical *after-effect* as such', suggesting that the hypnosis session has impressed itself deeply onto Svengali's psyche (the OED also defines 'trace' as 'mark or impression left on the face, the mind etc.').

According to *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*, some of the symptoms of neuralgia are 'acts of violent resistance, and assaults' (II, p. 838), symptoms Svengali displays after hypnotising Trilby: he becomes violent and abusive, pinning Little Billee's arms behind him and taunting him (p. 88). Furthermore, 'neuralgia becomes the direct foundation, i.e., the cause, of delusions or fixed ideas' (II, p. 835). Shortly after hypnotising Trilby, Svengali begins to suffer from both: he sees visions of Trilby's skeleton (the narrator refers to them as 'vicious *imagination*s [emphasis mine] of Svengali's' (p. 105)) and becomes obsessed with her. Although Svengali assures Trilby

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<sup>29</sup> See Nicholas Ruddick, 'Life and Death by Electricity in 1890: The Transfiguration of William Kemmler', *Journal of American Culture*, 21 (1998), 79-87. Ruddick discusses the impact of electricity on Victorian America, but suggests that by the end of the century, the power of electricity was no longer astonishing to the popular imagination. He discusses J. Maclaren Cobban's mesmerism novel *Master of His Fate* (1890) as an example of how electricity in the late nineteenth century had 'lost the metaphoric power to convey what Cobban's novel is really about, which is the flow of sexual energy' (p. 86). Ruddick does not take into account, however, the ways in which the language of mesmerism still heavily relied on the vocabulary of and theories about electricity. See Cobban, *Master of His Fate*, ed. by Brian Stableford (Elstree: Greenhill, 1987).

that she will ‘*see nothing, hear nothing, think of nothing but Svengali, Svengali, Svengali!*’ (p. 60), it seems that both Svengali and Trilby become fascinated by one another: Trilby ‘dreamed of him oftener than she dreamed of Taffy, the Laird, or even Little Billee!’ (p. 105), and Svengali exclaims ‘how beautiful you are! It drives me mad! I adore you!’ (p. 104).

Indeed, other symptoms of neuralgia include both ‘heartache’ and a ‘guilty conscious’ (II, p. 836), which suggests both the sexual tension between Trilby and Svengali (he adores her, she dreams of him even more than of her lover Little Billee), and *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about fluid circles of power. Do Trilby and Svengali have a guilty conscious because they are intermingling the boundaries between Western and Eastern values, between Christianity and Judaism? Is Trilby’s guilt read onto her by the narrator for her nude modelling and for behaviour inappropriate for a woman in the nineteenth century? Is Trilby ‘guilty’ of transgressing gender roles, taking on Svengali’s masculine traits?

### ***Trilby’s Influence***

According to Coates, the mesmerist is powerless to do anything ‘contrary to the [subject’s] will’ (p. 209), and ultimately mesmerism only highlights the subject’s innate disposition. Although Coates discusses innate talents and the moral will of the patient, he still attributes some of the mesmeric and hypnotic phenomena to the supernatural. Coates analyses *Trilby* in detail, giving Trilby herself as an example of how hidden talents can become polished under the hypnotic trance (p. 185). Although he grants that these talents were only refined, not created by hypnosis, he also demonstrates that hypnosis has the

ability to reach unexplored parts of the mind which are capable of powers such as thought-reading and telepathy (p. 180). For Coates, hypnosis brings out innate ability but it also brings out the uncanny possibility that the human mind can possess supernatural power.

Coates gives the following account of *Trilby's* hypnotic success:

Du Maurier's *Trilby* has been denounced as an impossible creation, and *Svengali* an impossible operator; but for all that Du Maurier's novel is founded on one interesting fact in hypnotism, *i.e.* that *subjects do manifest in hypnosis certain powers of mind not suspected in normal life* [emphasis mine]. I am quite willing to grant the impossibility of a tone-deaf girl becoming a brilliant *diva*; but the fact remains that many subjects give extraordinary display of faculty in hypnosis, which neither they nor their most intimate friends imagined them to possess. The operator must ever remember that whatever powers are displayed in hypnosis these must be innate, for hypnosis [. . .] cannot create any faculty. Every human faculty, as well as those of sensation, can be stimulated or exalted in hypnosis. [. . .] I may say that *Trilby* had her prototype in Manchester about fifty years ago, and Dr. Braid was the clever, but in this instance reputable *Svengali* (p. 185).

Coates refers to an incident in Manchester in the late 1840s when the renowned singer Jenny Lind (1820-1887) was invited to the home of the 'inventor' of hypnotism, Dr. James Braid.<sup>30</sup> Braid wanted Lind to give her opinion on one of his hypnotised subjects,

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<sup>30</sup> For more on Braid refer to Crabtree, Forrest, *Hypnotism*, and Winter. This particular incident is also mentioned in Pick's *Svengali's Web*.

an illiterate factory girl who while hypnotised could sing like a virtuoso, but in her normal state was unable to carry out the same astonishing vocal feats. Together, Braid and Lind performed a series of experiments with the girl. Braid would hypnotise her and using a hypnotic suggestion, instruct her to mimic Lind. Lind would then perform a series of complicated vocal techniques which the girl would afterwards imitate perfectly. Quoting from William Carpenter's *Mesmerism and Spiritualism* (1877),<sup>31</sup> Coates recounts Braid's description of the girl's singing: '[s]he caught the sounds so promptly, [. . .], and gave both words and music simultaneously and correctly, that several persons present could not discriminate whether there were two voices or only one' (p. 186).

The talents displayed by the girl are discussed as if her ability to mimic Lind is an uncanny power, her voice magically sounding as if it was composed of many voices, and suggesting the supernatural elements still resounding within the discourse of hypnotism. The fact that Braid is compared to Svengali emphasises the possible occult and sinister powers of the hypnotist. Coates's comparison between Braid and Svengali takes all that is meant to be scientific, reputable and beneficial within the discussion of hypnosis, and reinvests it with all of the supernatural power, sexual threat, and as Daniel Pick argues, the racial threat that hypnosis could also represent. Braid, the father of hypnotism, suddenly becomes comparable to the figure that even in contemporary speech is associated with manipulation and sinister power.

The event at Braid's home, and the comparison Coates makes between Braid and Svengali, signifies once again the ambiguity of power relations in discussions of hypnotism. Certainly on the one hand, Braid's hypnotism of the girl could be viewed as a

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<sup>31</sup> William Carpenter, *Mesmerism and Spiritualism, etc. Historically and Scientifically Considered* (London, 1877).

demonstration of his ability to coax out nascent talent, to become a kind of orchestral conductor who commands what music will be played, how and when, or even more frighteningly, as the evil manipulator of her voice and person. However, the girl herself already has possession of her own voice, the talent is already hers. The relationship between Braid and the girl is not the stereotypical one we might assume in which the hypnotist takes complete control of the passive girl. Rather, the relationship is one in which Braid and the girl must work together, the site of power belonging to each of them, and the connection between them one of a shared desire for beautiful singing.

Jenny Lind herself holds an important position in the discussion of mesmerism and hypnotism in the nineteenth century, as well as to a discussion of *Trilby*. She was even compared by Du Maurier to Trilby (Pick, p. 118), and, as Pick shows, her life follows the same pattern as the heroine's: she was an illegitimate child who later became one of the most famous singers of the Victorian period (p. 118). According to Pick, Lind seemed able to hypnotise her audiences, entrancing them with her voice and even reducing them to tears. Merchandise bearing her name was sold at all of her concerts (Pick, pp. 118-126). However, Lind herself was seen by the public to have been hypnotised, not only by the company she kept (the composer Felix Mendelssohn was said to have captivated her) but also by her husband, Otto Goldshmidt, who was believed by many, to have hypnotised her into marrying him (Pick, pp. 119-122). Lind was not only believed to have hypnotic singing powers and to be under the influence of her lover, she also appeared in an opera about somnambulism, *La sonnambula* (1831) by Vincenzo Bellini (Pick, p. 120). Lind's role in the public eye was both that of mesmeriser *and* mesmerised: she had the ability to enthrall her audiences and, according to them, could be

enthralled by her husband. At Braid's demonstration she even acted as a hypnotist, giving the suggestions to the young girl of what she was to sing. Lind's dual role as mesmerised/mesmerist suggests that the mesmeric power is one of dynamic flux that passes between bodies, or in the case of Lind, allows her to act in both roles.<sup>32</sup>

Like Lind, Du Maurier's *Trilby* was enormously popular, and the mesmerised Trilby became mesmerising in her popularity. L. Edward Purcell argues that the novel 'set the pace for the emerging bestseller publishing system in America'.<sup>33</sup> Just as Lind merchandise was a bestseller, 'Trilbyana' became all the rage: Trilby jewellery, hats, shoes, ice cream, and sausages, for example, were all sold.<sup>34</sup> Although Pick investigates the phenomenon of the *Trilby* mania and how the hypnotic effect of the book on the audience echoes the hypnotic effect of Svengali on Trilby, he ignores the implications for discussions of the site of power in hypnotism. What is crucial about a discussion of hypnotism and fame is the fact that it is not the Svengalis (both literary and real) who hypnotise their audiences, but rather the Trilbys and the Jenny Linds. Trilby was meant to be the powerless victim in Svengali's wicked plans and yet when she enters into the imaginations of the British and American public she is the one whose reception entrances. Indeed, a discussion of celebrity and hypnotism in *Trilby* also brings up questions about the role of authorship. Where is the site of authorship once a novel

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<sup>32</sup> For more on Jenny Lind see Laura Benet, *Enchanting Jenny Lind* (New York: Dodd, 1940); Joan Bulman *Jenny Lind: A Biography* (London: Barrie, 1956) and Henry Scott Holland and W.S. Rockstro, *Memoir of Madame Jenny Lind-Goldschmidt: Her early art-life and dramatic career, 1820-1851*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1891).

<sup>33</sup> L. Edward Purcell, 'Trilby and Trilby Mania, The Beginning of the Bestseller System', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 11 (1977), 62-76 (p. 62).

<sup>34</sup> For more on the contemporary view on the popularity of *Trilby*, see for example, Jeanette Leonard Gilder, *Trilbyana: The Rise and Progress of a Popular Novel* (New York: The Critic, 1895). Trilby was transformed into several plays, for example *Trilby* (1895) by Paul M. Potter, and *Drilby* (1896), a parody of Du Maurier's work. Pick estimates that in the United States there were twenty-four versions of the play running by 1896 (p. 40). The book was also adapted for the screen, and films like *Trilby* (1914), *Svengali* (1931), and *Svengali* (1955) were produced.

becomes so fascinating to the public? Who is the real author once the characters begin to take on lives of their own in the popular imagination? Pick intimates that Du Maurier was anxious about the popularity of his book: 'Du Maurier was in many ways a self-effacing man; he gained only meagre pleasure from his immodest riches, and found the cascade of attention deeply intrusive' (pp. 16-17). Perhaps *Trilby* is concerned, not only with mesmeric control, but also with the dangers of mesmeric fame and authorship to the private life: the unstable nature of mesmerism implies that there can perhaps be no private life, and that instead information passes from body to body, so that both novels and privacy are public matters.

### **Blurring of Identities and Powers in *Trilby***

Gecko describes Svengali as 'a demon, a musician!' (p. 347), whose hold over Trilby transformed her into an unrivalled performer. Gecko believed that this transformation was only possible because

'There were two Trilbys. There was the Trilby you knew, who could not sing one single note in tune. She was an angel of paradise. [. . .] Well, that was Trilby, your Trilby! That was my Trilby too – and I loved her

[. . .] 'But all at once [. . .] with one wave of his hand over her – with one look of his eye – with a word – Svengali could turn her into the other Trilby, *his* Trilby – and make her do whatever he liked. . . you might have run a red-hot needle into her and she would not have felt it. . . (pp. 350-352).

Although Gecko's long speeches about Trilby suggest that she was deeply under the influence of Svengali's powers, they also serve to emphasise the problems with assigning Svengali as the instigator and manipulator of Trilby's personality and fame. Gecko's reference to 'two Trilbys' (p. 350) signifies that Svengali created and controlled another Trilby, unlike the one the men in the novel knew and loved, and that he manifested within her powers that in her normal state would have been impossible for her to demonstrate. Of course, Gecko seems to be referring not only to nineteenth-century studies on the duality of the mind, but also to the two hypnotic states: the waking (or normal) state, and the trance (or hypnoid) state that supposedly Svengali would manipulate when hypnotising Trilby. For Gecko, Trilby's secondary trance-state is the product of Svengali's will and is divorced from Trilby's own volition. However, by the late nineteenth century, many researchers believed that actions and speech displayed during the trance state were a product of the hypnotic subject's subliminal self.<sup>35</sup> In other words, what was displayed was always there, but had been sublimated within her mind.

Indeed, in Trilby's case it may be that the 'other Trilby' is the real one, and that hypnosis uncannily reveals her true identity, an identity which horrifies her English friends.<sup>36</sup> The 'other Trilby' might really love Svengali, which is terrifying for the very British Little Billee, Taffy, and the Laird because of his racial otherness. Furthermore, the 'other Trilby' shows signs of having a sexual appetite for Svengali's advances, which shocks the English characters. Like Lucy in *Dracula*, Trilby is demonized because her

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<sup>35</sup> See Crabtree; Janet's chapter in *Psychological Healing* entitled 'Subliminal Tendencies' (pp. 256- 60), and Myers, 'Multiplex Personality'.

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of doubling in Gothic fiction at the *fin-de-siècle*, see, for example, Linda Dryden, *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles: Stevenson, Wilde and Wells* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003).



sexual desires do not conform to the expectations for feminine behavior at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup>

If her dangerous sexuality comes forward through hypnosis, then so too does her singing ability. Gecko's claim that Svengali had transformed Trilby into a 'nightingale' (p. 351) becomes problematic when he himself admits that Trilby has always possessed an enchanting voice: '[s]he had not much ear. But she had such a voice as had never been heard. Svengali knew that. He had found it out long ago' (p. 348). It is not the case then, that Svengali has made of her a songstress, but rather that he has helped to perfect her existing ability. Furthermore, Gecko's belief that *Svengali* created the 'two Trilbys' (p. 350) is problematised by the fact that she was referred to as doubled long before Svengali became a strong presence in her life:

Trilby speaking French and Trilby speaking English were two different beings. Trilby's English was more or less that of her father, a highly educated man [. . .]. Trilby's French was that of the Quartier Latin – droll, slangy, piquant, quaint, picturesque [. . .]. [I]t was difficult to decide which of her two incarnations was the more attractive. (p. 75)

Her dualness is exemplified in her friendship with the three Englishmen, as she begins to divide her time between being a French model for the body and being a friend and all around helping hand to Little Billee, Taffy, and the Laird. When she is with them, she takes up the study of English culture, reading 'Dickens, Thackeray, [and] Walter Scott' (p. 75), and when she is with her French friends, or modelling, she adapts the French

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<sup>37</sup> Critics have discussed the ways in which Lucy's vampirism in *Dracula* is representative of male fear about female sexual desire. See for example, Ashley Craig Lancaster, 'Demonizing the Emerging Woman: Misrepresented Morality in *Dracula* and *God's Little Acres*', *Journal of Dracula Studies*, 6 (2004), 27-33 and Phyllis A. Roth, 'Suddenly Sexual Women in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', *Dracula*, ed. and intro. by Glennis Byron (New York: St. Martin's, 1999) pp. 30-42.

culture she has always known, she jokes, uses slang, and earns her keep in a way that shocks and embarrasses her English friends.

Trilby's self is doubled by her adoption of two cultures and languages, not by Svengali's mesmeric passes. Her choice is probably also mitigated, however, by the fact that the Englishmen find her French identity less desirable and appropriate for a woman. Her French self takes on masculine traits which she sublimates when the Englishmen are present in order to bring forward her more pleasant and feminine English self. Trilby does this, however, not because she must, but because she cannily knows how to adapt herself best to situations.<sup>38</sup> Just as Trilby is a powerful agent in the mesmeric process, she also cunningly reads the others, deciphering what they expect and desire from her.

Du Maurier's descriptions and illustrations of these characters demonstrate the ambiguity of sites of power within the text. When Trilby first appears in the studio, she is described as 'a very tall and fully-developed young female' whose 'eyes were too wide apart, the mouth too large, the chin too massive' (p. 14). Her enormous voice resounds from an enormous mouth that is compared to the largest edifices of architecture. Svengali tells her that 'the roof in your mouth is like the dome of the Pantheon; there is room in it for 'toutes les gloires de la France,' and a little to spare!' (p. 58). Furthermore, Jules Guinot refers to her as 'la grande Trilby' (p. 36), which while meant to suggest a certain greatness of character, also implies a greatness of stature. In the illustrations, Trilby towers over the other characters. Little Billee must gaze *up* at her as he asks for her hand

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<sup>38</sup> For more on cultural identity in *Trilby*, see for example, Sarah Gracombe, 'Converting Trilby: Du Maurier on Englishness, Jewishness, and Culture', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 58 (2003), 175-208. Gracombe discusses how Svengali tries to convert Trilby to Jewishness, and Little Billee tries to convert her to Englishness. While I agree that the male characters do try to influence Trilby, ultimately she also gains power in the text.

in marriage (p. 37), and in the illustrations of her performances, she towers over the band, Svengali, and her audience, seemingly double the size of everyone else (see Figure 4).<sup>39</sup>

Trilby's size complicates her supposed powerlessness when faced with Svengali. Despite the fact that Trilby physically dominates the pages of the novel, the illustrations also show that a balance of influence exists between 'la grande Trilby' and Svengali. In one illustration Trilby and Svengali are depicted bowing after a performance (see Figure 5). Here they are shown at level height with hands held, their positions nearly mirrored by two small boys behind them who look as if they too are holding hands as they gather flowers thrown onto the stage. Their equal height, as well as their clasped hands indicate partnership and amicability. Furthermore, the boys collecting flowers behind them seem to represent an image of innocence, stripping the image of Svengali and Trilby in the forefront of its possible manipulative connotations. This illustration suggests that Svengali and Trilby have collaborated, that they have worked together to achieve an excellent performance. The illustration is entitled 'And the remembrance of them – hand in hand' (p. 257) which is an excerpt from Little Billee's thoughts on the performance: 'And the remembrance of them – hand in hand, master and pupil, husband and wife – smiling and bowing in the face of all that splendid tumult they had called forth and could quell' (p. 256). Significantly, Little Billee's statement evokes the mesmeric language itself – Trilby and Svengali's joint performance compels the audience to be enthralled. Even more significant is Little Billee's choice of the word 'them'.

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<sup>39</sup> In 'Magi and the Maidens: The Romance of the Victorian Freud' in *Critical Inquiry*, 8:2 (1981), 281-300, Nina Auerbach also discusses Trilby's large feet and stature. While Auerbach is interested in the mythic, magical and regenerative powers of women in late nineteenth-century fiction, I argue that mesmerism itself needs to be re-examined in order to suggest that power relations within the mesmeric process are fluid, and that the relationship between Trilby and Svengali is one of an interchange of powers.



*Au clair de la lune*

**Figure 4.** Du Maurier, 'Au clair de la lune', in *Trilby*, p. 252.



*And the remembrance of them – hand in hand*

**Figure 5.** Du Maurier, 'And the remembrance of them – hand in hand', in *Trilby*, p. 257.

It is not Svengali alone who commands his audience, but both Svengali and Trilby working together who achieve 'that splendid tumult' (p. 256).

Indeed, they become increasingly intertwined as the novel progresses so that not only do they form a partnership of conductor/singer, but they also absorb one another's identities. In becoming 'La Svengali' it seems that Trilby is subsumed by Svengali. However, a closer reading shows that in fact they have instead become subsumed by one another, their identities easily and increasingly interchangeable as the popularity of 'La Svengali' spreads. Svengali claims in the beginning of the novel that Trilby '*shall see nothing, hear nothing, think of nothing but Svengali, Svengali, Svengali!*' (p. 60), but when Little Billee hears her sing he believes it is as if she is saying 'for I am *Trilby*, and you shall hear nothing, see nothing, think of nothing, but *Svengali, Svengali, Svengali!*' (p. 245). Here 'Svengali' is ambiguous, referring either to Trilby – La Svengali – or to Svengali himself. When the audience chants Svengali over and over again during the performance in which Trilby cannot sing, Du Maurier writes that the crowd 'took up the cry [of Svengali], derisively' (p. 289). It is not clear, however, whether their derision is pointed at the now tuneless Trilby, or at the master conductor who has failed to make the nightingale sing: the conductor and singer have become one identity in the eyes of the audience. The merging of names in this text is a merging of identities and power, which particularly concerns the conventional figures of Little Billee, Taffy, and the Laird, who are horrified by the possibility that the boundaries between identities might be permeable: the Christian Trilby can become Jewish, and her feminine characteristics can become masculine. Furthermore, Trilby's intermingling with Svengali indicates late nineteenth-century anxieties about atavism: she is reverting to a degraded, monstrous level of the

human species in which the strict distinctions upheld by the Victorians between genders, classes, and races did not exist.<sup>40</sup>

Trilby and Svengali bind themselves so closely to one another that by the end of the novel they are unable to function independently. When Trilby does not sing for Svengali at her final performance, Svengali dies. The power he exerts over her is also one which she wields over him, and once the balance of that power is broken, neither party can regain equilibrium.<sup>41</sup> In other words, once the connection between them is severed, neither Svengali nor Trilby are able to withstand the fallout of power that ensues. Svengali dies with his eyes focussed on Trilby, still desiring her song, and Trilby dies shortly afterwards, her last words ‘Svengali . . . Svengali . . . Svengali . . .’ (p. 333). Both attempt to conjure one another as they die, trying to evoke the magnetic current that binds and enthrals them.

Indeed, the illustration in which Svengali mesmerises Trilby, ‘Et maintenant dors, ma mignonne!’ (p. 302), depicts this magnetic current that flows between them (see Figure 6). The pair gaze into one another’s eyes as Svengali’s hands pass over Trilby’s body. Their positions echo Little Billee and Trilby’s in the illustration which shows him proposing to her (see Figure 7).

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<sup>40</sup> For more on late Victorian anxieties about degeneration, see, for example, Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body*; Susan J. Navarette, *The Shape of Fear: Horror and the Fin de Siècle Culture of Decadence* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), and Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons*. See also Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (London: Heinemann, 1895).

<sup>41</sup> Much of the mesmerism fiction at the end of the century is concerned with the theme of the subject and operator becoming dependent on one another. For example, in J. Maclaren Cobban’s now forgotten *Master of His Fate*, the magnetic Courtney is physically and emotionally drained by his love for Nora. Marie Corelli’s *Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul* (London, 1897), first published in 1896, is about a mesmeric love affair, which suggests that lovers must attain a balance of power in order to achieve happiness. Henry James’s *The Bostonians* (1886), (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), complicates the site of power in mesmerism by portraying Verena Tarrant as both an entrancing public speaker and a passive participant in her private life. See also Doyle’s *The Parasite*, Haggard’s *She*, Marsh’s *The Beetle*, and Wilde’s *Dorian Gray*, texts which problematise stable sites of power in mesmerism.



**Figure 6.** Du Maurier, 'Et maintenant dors, ma mignonne!', in *Trilby*, p. 302.



**Figure 7.** Du Maurier, 'Answer me, Trilby!', in *Trilby*, p.137

Depictions of mesmerism in *Trilby* are comparable to depictions of intimate moments between lovers. When speaking of his love for Trilby ('I loved her as one loves an only love, an only sister, an only child' [p. 352]) Gecko also tells how he, and everyone else was mesmerised by her: 'I have seen emperors and grand-dukes kiss her hand, monsieur – and their wives and daughters kiss her lips, and weep [ . . . ] [I have] seen the people go mad to hear her' (p. 353). Here Gecko seems to be describing one of Mesmer's orgiastic magnetising sessions of hysterical patients, but he is also showing that in *Trilby*, love and hypnotism could be the same thing.<sup>42</sup>

Little Billee, the Laird, and Taffy all confess to being in love with Trilby, in a sense mesmerised equally by her 'Trilbyness' as by her singing voice. Little Billee's love for Trilby sends him into a hypnotic state, mirroring Trilby's actions when she is mesmerised by Svengali. While Trilby becomes 'just a singing-machine' (p. 352), as Gecko puts it, Little Billee also becomes mechanized, an automaton when he realises that he cannot marry Trilby: '2 + 2 = 4, also 2 X 2 = 4: that peculiarity was no reason why 4 should be conceited; for what was 4 but a result, either way? Well, he was like 4 – just an inevitable result of circumstances over which he had no control – a mere product or sum' (pp. 168-9). Little Billee is emotionless and numb, entranced by Trilby and deadened by the possibility of losing her. The love that Little Billee and Trilby share is mesmeric, but it is also compulsive: they are hopelessly entranced by one another, bound together by their love. Just as Svengali and Trilby cannot live without one another, Little Billee cannot live without Trilby.

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<sup>42</sup> See Tatar, p. 5 for her descriptions of Mesmer's magnetic sessions, in which people would writhe and scream in a sexually explicit manner as part of their cure.



Indeed, as I have implied earlier, the possibility that mesmerism has to do with unknown emanations, is also suggestive of the seamy side of mesmerism in relation to love. The passing of fluids could also be the passing of semen. Furthermore, that Trilby mesmerises the other characters in the novel and her audience, indicates that they are all exposed to her scandalous activities. If the site of power in mesmerism can pass through many bodies, is everyone in the novel infected by Trilby's promiscuous past and by Svengali's Jewishness? Is everyone exposed likely to take on both feminine and masculine characteristics?

*Trilby's* appearance at the *fin-de-siècle* gave voice to contemporary concerns about powers and identities which could not be safely contained and controlled within social conventions of the late nineteenth century. In *Sexual Anarchy*, Elaine Showalter explores 'the myths, metaphors, and images of sexual crises and apocalypse that marked [. . .] the late nineteenth century', arguing that ideas about gender were changing rapidly and disrupting older notions about marriage and family.<sup>43</sup> For example, the odd woman would or could not marry, and the New Woman criticised the institution of marriage. Furthermore, Showalter argues that homosexuality disrupted the status quo of the Victorian home, increasing fears that 'women would bear children without marriage or not at all' (p. 3). The Wilde trials and his conviction of 1895 demonstrate how threatened Victorian society felt by sexual difference (p. 4). Significantly, Showalter points to the fact that at the *fin-de-siècle*, due in part to innovations in evolutionary science, 'the sexual borderline between the masculine and the feminine represented the dangerous vanishing

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<sup>43</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), p. 3.

point of sexual difference' (p. 8) – in other words, 'the *fin-de-siècle* [ . . . ] marked a crisis of identity for men' (p. 8).

In *Trilby*, masculine and feminine characteristics are exchanged between Trilby and Little Billee. For example, whereas Trilby 'would have made a singularly handsome boy' (p. 16), Little Billee possesses an 'almost girlish purity of mind' (p. 10). While she is tall and has a strong presence, he has 'delicate, regular features' and is 'graceful [ . . . ] with very small hands and feet' (p. 7). Trilby takes on traditionally male characteristics, and Little Billee becomes feminised. Here both gender identity and power are blurred. Since traditionally men are the dominant and women the subservient figure, in *Trilby* these roles are reversed. Little Billee is certainly the weaker of the two, more inclined to burst into tears, and horrified when he discovers that Trilby models nude. Trilby on the other hand is independent, looks after herself and her brother, and becomes a professional singer.<sup>44</sup>

Mesmerism in *Trilby* symbolically represents anxieties about the increasingly negligible differences between genders at the *fin-de-siècle*. The resurgence of mesmeric fiction in the late nineteenth century (for example Marie Corelli's *Ziska* [1896], James's *The Bostonians* [1886], and J. Maclaren Cobban's *Master of His Fate* [1890])<sup>45</sup> signifies that writers were attempting to safely contain the dangers of mesmerism within the fixity of print while simultaneously delighting in the creative possibilities mesmerism offered. The increase in publication of mesmerism and hypnosis manuals in the same period

<sup>44</sup> See also Dennis Denisoff, "'Men of My Own Sex": Genius, Sexuality, and George Du Maurier's Artists', in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. by Richard Dellamora (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp.147-69. Denisoff explores blurring of gender and sexuality in *Trilby*, but ignores the implications of this blurring in relation to mesmerism.

<sup>45</sup> For more mesmerism/hypnosis fiction written at the *fin-de-siècle*, see, Donald Hartman, 'Hypnotic and Mesmeric Themes and Motifs in Selected English-Language Novels, Short Stories, Plays and Poems, 1820-1983', *Bulletin of Bibliography*, 44 (1987), 156-66.

indicates that mental scientists themselves were attempting to control mesmerism and studies of the mind by problematically defining hypnotism as a scientific process, while concurrently evoking supernatural activity and language. Chapter Four is also concerned with the ways in which late nineteenth-century mental science was attempting to maintain rigid boundaries in the study of the mind. Mental scientists wanted to study both spiritualism and the mind empirically, but succeeded only in ghosting the mind, and as I will argue particularly the *female* mind and body. While this chapter is concerned with the ways in which trance states like hypnotism change sites of power, the next chapter suggests that women see ghosts in altered states of perception: women reclaim ghostliness as an empowering female trait.

## Chapter Four: Ghostwomen, Ghostwriting

### Introduction

‘This is the question that lies at the root of all the controversy as to ghosts. Before disputing about whether or not there are ghosts outside of us, let us face the preliminary question, whether we have not each of us a veritable ghost within our own skin?’<sup>1</sup>

This chapter explores the effect of the occulted mental science developing in the late Victorian period on women’s ghost stories and women’s self-identification (whether conscious or subconscious) with the ghostly. While Vanessa D. Dickerson contends that ghost stories ‘provide a fitting medium for eruptions of female libidinal energy, of thwarted ambitions, of cramped egos’, she also suggests that women themselves were

above all the ghost in the noontide, an anomalous spirit on display at the center of Victorian materialism and progress. Destined to be seen but unseen, required to shine forth in broad daylight as an ethereal being, but thought to be too fleshy, too corrupt and corruptible, she lived during an era of the highest material, social, and political achievement, yet found herself all too often unable fully, if at all, to participate.<sup>2</sup>

Although women’s ghost stories do indeed often articulate, as Dickerson suggests, ‘eruptions of female libidinal energy [. . .], thwarted ambitions [and] cramped egos’ (p. 8), these are both a product of frustration with women’s social role and also, what she

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<sup>1</sup> W.T. Stead, ‘The Ghost that Dwells in Each of Us’, in *Real Ghost Stories* (London, 1891), pp. 11-21 (p. 11).

<sup>2</sup> Vanessa D. Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), pp. 8, 11.

and other critics have so far ignored, an implication that women were haunted by *themselves*. Women's ghost stories of the *fin-de-siècle* share a discourse with the contemporary internalisation of the occult into the emerging discipline of psychology. This newly occulted psychology had direct and powerful implications for women and female identity, and more specifically was a phenomenon which directly allied ghostliness, women, and the mind.

I begin with a close reading of W.T. Stead's *Real Ghost Stories* (1891), exploring theories of the unconscious mind as a haunted site. Both Stead's writings, and a case study of the SPR investigation into the hauntings of Ballechin House in 1897, demonstrate that for many Victorians the haunted aspects of the mind were comparable to late Victorian ideas about gender roles, and in particular the 'ghostly' role of women in society. Late Victorian theories on mental science, particularly double consciousness and hysteria, represent how the female mind was perceived. A discussion of non-canonical women ghost story writers and their work shows how authorship, ghostliness and haunted female identity are closely intertwined. Finally, using Kristeva's theory of abjection, I argue that the 'powers of horror' that women ghost-story writers experience and evoke create a female identity at the *fin-de-siècle* that is powerful, empowering, and hopeful, as much as it is 'horrific'.

## W.T. Stead and the Woman that Haunts Us

W.T. Stead (1849-1912), publisher and journalist, was fascinated by the possibilities of the ghosts within us, by the concept that the subliminal consciousness haunted the waking one.<sup>3</sup> With an interest in promoting knowledge about 'the other world', he began publishing the spiritualist journal *Borderland* in 1893. Even after perishing on board the *Titanic*, Stead seemed to continue his spiritual mission: his spirit supposedly contacted spirit photographer William Walker by psychically imprinting a written message on a photograph.<sup>4</sup>

Stead's *Real Ghost Stories* (1891) was enormously popular, selling one hundred thousand copies in a week (Basham, p. 154).<sup>5</sup> The publication included hundreds of accounts of encounters with ghosts and was rigorously categorised into subsections, for example, 'Ghosts of the Living on Business', 'Ghosts that Keep Promises', 'Apparitions at or About Death', 'Ghosts of the Dead or Ghosts Announcing Their Own Death', 'Ghosts of the Dead with a Practical Object', 'Ghosts in the Open Air or Out of Door Ghosts' and 'Tangible Ghosts or Ghosts which Touch' (p. i). The publication even included a 'Census of Hallucinations' which readers were meant to complete to provide Stead with statistics for the number of people subject to ghost-seeing, and information about the nature of their visions. Stead guaranteed that all the stories were absolutely true

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<sup>3</sup> Stead is best known for his publication of 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' (1885), in which he addresses the problem of child prostitution in London. For more on Stead see, for example, Raymond L. Schults, *Crusader in Babylon: W.T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), and Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*.

<sup>4</sup> Doyle included this photograph in *Spirit Photography*, p. 77. The message on the photograph (apparently confirmed by handwriting experts to be in Stead's hand) reads: 'Dear Mr. Walker, I will try to keep you posted' (p. 77).

<sup>5</sup> Stead published *More Ghost Stories: A Sequel to Real Ghost Stories* in 1892. Subsequent editions of *Real Ghost Stories* were published in 1897, 1905, and 1921.

and because of this he warned many of the weak-hearted readers to put the publication down immediately and forever.

Stead's collection of what he promised were authentic ghost stories reflected an interest at the *fin-de-siècle* in guarding supernatural events against scepticism. Both spiritualists and scientists hoped to discover the factual evidence that proved spiritual existence. Medical practitioners like William James and Charles Richet also attempted to invest the supernatural with scientific truth by situating the spirit-world in the realm of the psychological. Alex Owen suggests that 'nineteenth-century spiritualism, psychical research, and psychology [were] locked in an uncomfortable embrace [. . .]. By the close of the century [. . .] psychologists, psychical researchers and spiritualists themselves were seeking the key to the mysteries in the mind alone' (*Darkened Room*, p. 237). Increasingly, their findings showed that the mind was as haunted as the spiritualist séances.

Edmund Gurney, F.W.H. Myers, and Frank Podmore's interest in consciousness, for example, led them to elaborate a theory that 'ghosts' were projections of the mind, the result of thought transference or telepathy. They published *Phantasms of the Living* in 1886, in which they

propose [. . .] to deal with all classes of cases in which there is reason to suppose that the mind of one human being has affected the mind of another, without speech uttered, or word written, or sign made;- has affected it, that is to say, by other means than through the recognised channels of sense. [. . .] we have included among telepathic phenomena a vast class of cases [. . .]. [We] refer to *apparitions*; excluding apparitions

of the *dead*, but including the apparitions of all persons who are still living, as we know life, though they may be on the very brink and border of physical dissolution. And these apparitions [. . .] include[e] not visual phenomena alone, but auditory, tactile, or even purely ideational and emotional impressions. All these we have included under the term *phantasm*. (xxxv)

The use of the word 'phantasm', now employed psychoanalytically to denote psychic tension, indicates the effect supernatural studies had on the development of an occulted mental science. Gurney, Myers, and Podmore here compare telepathy with apparitions, suggesting that ghosts were the products of this psychic tension or phantasm: ghosts could be defined as not only external but also internal manifestations of the workings of the brain.<sup>6</sup>

Stead, like Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, also cites cases where apparitions of the *living* appear.<sup>7</sup> For example, he tells the story of a man who overslept and was late for work. However, in his sleep he experienced such mental anxiety that he appeared at work as usual, only this time in spirit form (*Real Ghost Stories*, p. 32). Mary Louisa Molesworth's 'Witnessed by Two' (1888), is a fictional example of the living phantasms which captured *fin-de-siècle* imagination. At first, it seems that the ghost of the heroine's lover appears to her at the moment of his death. Subsequently, the heroine discovers that

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<sup>6</sup> In 'The Trouble with Ghost-Seeing: Vision, Ideology, and Genre in the Victorian Ghost Story', *ELH*, 70, (2003), 1107-35, Srdjan Smajic suggests that '[e]arly nineteenth-century research in physiological optics gave rise to a new type of scientific literature on the subject of ghosts [. . .] in which the spectre was repeatedly described as a perfectly normal optical effect rather than a dream-vision or bizarre product of an overactive, unhealthy imagination' (p. 1113). While Smajic explores the ways in which ghost stories complicated the notion of visual stability in the nineteenth century, I am interested in how late-Victorian mental science was increasingly haunted by the ghostly.



a man sharing her lover's name has died. The hero's 'ghost' appears as a result of his extreme anxiety when he realises that his lover will believe it is he, and not the other man who is dead.<sup>8</sup> Both the living and the dead are engaged in haunting, and this haunting is directly connected to theories on the workings of the mind at the *fin-de-siècle*.

In the chapter entitled 'The Ghost that Dwells in Each of Us' in *Real Ghost Stories*, Stead asks 'whether we have not each of us a veritable ghost within our own skin?' (p. 11). He then explicitly discusses selfhood in terms of the occult:

Thrilling as are some of the stories of the apparitions of the living and the dead, they are less sensational than the suggestion recently made by hypnotists and psychical researchers of England and France,<sup>9</sup> that each of us has a ghost inside him. They say that we are all haunted by a Spiritual Presence, of whose existence we are only fitfully and sometimes never conscious, but which nevertheless inhabits the innermost recesses of our personality. The theory of these researchers is that besides the body and the mind, meaning by the mind the conscious personality, there is also within our material frame the soul or unconscious personality, the nature of which is shrouded in unfathomable mystery. The latest word of advanced science has thus landed us back to the apostolic assertion that man is composed of body, soul, and spirit; and there are some who see in

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<sup>7</sup> Stead, according to Diana Basham, had not yet read *Phantasms of the Living* at the time of his publication of *Real Ghost Stories*, although his theories are similar to those posed by Myers, Podmore and Gurney (Basham, p. 154).

<sup>8</sup> Mary Louisa Molesworth, 'Witnessed by Two', in *Four Ghost Stories* (London, 1888), pp. 43-86.

<sup>9</sup> Stead is probably referring here to members of the SPR and to theories of 'double consciousness' proposed at the end of the century by Myers. He is probably also referring to French psychiatrists Jean-Martin Charcot and Pierre Janet, who researched the mind, double consciousness, and in particular hysteria.

the scientific doctrine of the unconscious personality a welcome confirmation from an unexpected quarter of the existence of the soul.

(p. 11)

Stead's ideas about the 'ghosts within us' reveal that he would have been familiar with the theory of subliminal or double consciousness researched by scientists such as Myers, Charcot, and Janet, which suggested that the self could be doubled and a stranger could live within.<sup>10</sup> In *Real Ghost Stories*, Stead portrays that the ghost that haunts us as gendered. More specifically, Stead's analogy suggests that our normal waking self is male, but that our secondary self is female.<sup>11</sup> Stead compares the unconscious mind, theories about hypnotism and gender relations in the following terms:

The new theory supposes that there are inside each of us not one personality, but two, and that these two correspond to the husband and wife. There is the Conscious Personality, which stands for the husband. It is vigorous, alert, active, positive, monopolising all the means of communication and production. So intense is its consciousness that it ignores the very existence of its partner, excepting as a mere appendage and convenience to itself. Then there is the Unconscious Personality, which corresponds to the wife who keeps cupboard and store-house, and

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<sup>10</sup> These theories of mind were extremely influential. Freud was interested in Myers's work on double consciousness and was a corresponding member of the SPR in the late nineteenth century. Many links can be made between the occulted mental science of the *fin-de-siècle*, and the canon of Freudian psychoanalysis that developed in the twentieth century. See also Crabtree; Roger Luckhurst "Something Tremendous, Something Elemental": On the Ghostly Origins of Psychoanalysis', in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (London: MacMillan, 1999), pp. 50-71, and Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking*.

<sup>11</sup> Basham notes that Stead 'was quick to perceive the gender-implications of such studies [psychic research and in particular hypnotism] and to use them as the basis for a new social synthesis in which the emancipation of women and the liberation of the unconscious personality were to play a significant part' (p. 154). Basham overlooks, however, the impact of mental science on the ways in which women were

the old stocking which treasures up the accumulated wealth of impressions acquired by the conscious personality, but who is never able to assert any right to anything, or to the use of sense or limb except when her lord and master is asleep or entranced. [. . .] It is extraordinary how close this analogy is when we come to work it out. The impressions stored up by the Conscious Personality and entrusted to the care of the Unconscious are often, much to our disgust, not forthcoming when wanted. It is as if we had given a memorandum to our wife and we could not discover where she had put it. But night comes, our Conscious Self sleeps, our Unconscious housewife wakes and turning over her stores produces the missing impression; and when our other self wakes it finds the mislaid memorandum [...]. [I]t is only when the Conscious Personality is thrown into a state of hypnotic trance that the Unconscious Personality is emancipated from the marital despotism of her partner. Then, for the first time she is allowed to help herself to the faculties and senses usually monopolised by the Conscious Self. (p. 20)

When Stead compares the unconscious personality with women, he also addresses women and their social and political invisibility. Stead suggests that not only is our mind a haunted site, but that the ghost who haunts it projects Victorian concepts about female identity and the female role in marriage. If we can discuss a metaphorical female haunting of the mind at the *fin-de-siècle*, then we must take into account what the

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perceived at the *fin-de-siècle*. Furthermore, she focuses on masculine narrators in women's ghost stories, ignoring the crucial aspect of how women were portraying women in these stories.

implications are for women writing about haunting at the end of the century. What do their ghost stories reveal about their identity and ideas about women?

While according to Stead's analogy hypnosis allows the unconscious mind to awaken and take control (symbolising women's emancipation from the 'despotism' of her marriage), this also suggests subversively that trance states empower women. Significantly, hypnosis does not emphasise her passive role in the home but actually heightens awareness about the 'despotism' in her married life. Indeed, altered states of perception like hypnosis, dreams, and ghost-seeing, become catalysts for creative expression and for political awakening in women's writing.

### **The Case of Miss Freer and the Haunting of Ballechin House**

The example of Miss Freer and the Ballechin House hauntings not only demonstrate the interest by spiritualists and scientists in studying the supernatural scientifically and situating the ghostly in the mind, but also connect theories about the haunted aspects of the mind and the ways in which women were perceived at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1897 the SPR decided to investigate reports that Ballechin House in Perthshire, Scotland, was haunted. Myers recommended that Miss Freer (1865-1931), a member of the SPR since 1888, should stay in the house to record the phenomena.<sup>12</sup> She arrived in early February of 1897 and left in mid-April of the same year. Miss Freer made a detailed account of her stay, which she published (under the name of A. Goodrich-

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<sup>12</sup> According to Freer (*The Alleged Haunting of B\_House* [London: Redway, 1899]), 'Mr. Myers [. . .] wrote urgently to her, saying, "If you don't get phenomena, probably no one will' (p. 82). Miss Freer also worked with the SPR during the mid-1890s in order to study the prominence of second sight in the Scottish Highlands. See 'General Meeting', *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 7 (1895-96), pp. 2-4 and 'General Meeting', pp. 182-86. Miss Freer was said to possess great powers in crystal-gazing, clairvoyance, and automatic writing, and on the strength of these credentials W.T. Stead employed her as the assistant editor of *Borderland* from 1893-97.

Freer), along with the accounts of other guests in the house in *The Alleged Haunting of B\_ House* in 1899. The book minutely lists all visual, auditory and tactile phenomena recorded at Ballechin, and even includes a floor-plan of the house so that the reader can identify where each manifestation took place.

Although *Alleged Haunting* attempts to contain the hauntings at Ballechin within the fixity of print and as a series of facts (Miss Freer suggests that '[t]he editors [Miss Freer and John Patrick Crichton-Stuart (1847-1900), third Marquess of Bute] offer no conclusions. This volume has been put together, as the house at B\_ was taken, not for the establishment of theories, but for the record of facts' [p. 235]), it is the controversy surrounding both this investigation and Miss Freer herself which was deeply concerned not only with finding facts, but with regulating which facts would be shared with the public.

While John L. Campbell and Trevor H. Hall's study on Miss Freer and the SPR attempts to recover this often forgotten chapter in the history of the SPR, I explore the ways in which the investigation of Ballechin house highlights the links between women, ghostliness, and the mind.<sup>13</sup> The SPR's activities at Ballechin provoked the public to debate in *The Times* during June of 1897: contributors were concerned about the methodology of the tests, and a guest at the house during Miss Freer's stay, Mr. J Callendar Ross, denounced the whole investigation as fraudulent.<sup>14</sup> Instead of defending Miss Freer, the SPR, and particularly Myers, turned their back on her. Myers, who had earlier been enthusiastic about the findings, and had written letters suggesting he believed

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<sup>13</sup> John L. Campbell and Trevor H. Hall, *Strange Things: The Story of Fr Allan McDonald, Ada Goodrich Freer, and the Society for Psychical Research's Enquiry into Highland Second Sight* (London: Routledge, 1968).

that there was evidence of supernatural phenomena now wrote to *The Times* on 10 June 1897, 'I visited B\_, representing that society [SPR] and decided that there was no evidence as could justify us in giving the results of the inquiry a place in our *Proceedings*' (quoted in *Alleged*, p. 195). Furthermore, he asked that his earlier letters be suppressed: 'I am afraid that I must ask that my B\_ letters be in no way used. I greatly doubt whether there was anything supernormal' (quoted in *Alleged*, p. 193). Not only did the SPR attempt to use rigorous scientific methods to prove the existence of the supernatural, but they also wished to erase experiments which showed their methods in an unfavourable light: the SPR was trying to capture ghosts and fabricate science. For example, Campbell and Hall recount how the SPR removed material from a volume of the *Proceedings* and issued a reprint containing a different case study to cover for the exposure of the 'nonsense' in the original volume (p. 127).

The SPR's actions in the Ballechin case particularly affected Miss Freer, and made her a ghostly figure in the history of the SPR. Indeed, although Campbell and Hall's book gives the most comprehensive information available on Freer, they write about her as if they want to exorcise her from both the history of the society and from their own text. They are deeply hostile towards her, ostensibly because she copied Fr Allan McDonald's notebooks on Highland second sight with the intention of taking sole responsibility for authorship when she published them. Indeed, she seemed to believe that in consulting with McDonald on the subject, she was ghostwriting the project anyway: for Freer, authorship was a collaborative enterprise, and credit could never be assigned to a single individual.

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<sup>14</sup> See Campbell and Hall, pp. 185-96. Mr. Ross argued that Ballechin had no reputation for being haunted until the SPR arrived.

Campbell and Hall vilify her throughout the book, not only because of the accusations of plagiarism, but also because of her feminine charms: according to the authors, she possessed 'personal attractions which seem to have been almost hypnotic in their effect and which she used irresistibly and ruthlessly upon those who she thought could be of use to her' (p. 97). Freer was threatening, both because she might taint the reputation of the SPR, and because she was a woman with influence in a Society formed and dominated by male membership: Campbell and Hall are particularly anxious about this threat, even hinting that she and Myers may have had an affair (pp.129-30).<sup>15</sup>

What is significant in this case is that Miss Freer is an increasingly spectral presence in the SPR after the Ballechin incident. The records of her life are themselves vague: she called herself Miss Freer, Miss X., Mrs. Ada Goodrich-Freer, Mrs. Ada M. Goodrich-Freer, and Mrs. Ada Goodrich-Freer Spoer (or occasionally Spoor), suggesting that even her name was an ephemeral and fleeting form of identity.<sup>16</sup> Campbell and Hall report that no one ever really knew her real age or family lineage (pp.98-99). She described her own family in the following terms: 'I belong to no effete race, but to a family which for physique and longevity might challenge any in the annals of Mr Francis Galton' (quoted in *Strange Things*, p. 105). While Campbell and Hall argue that she could be referring to Galton's *Human Faculty* (1883) or *Natural Inheritance* (1889), she might also be alluding to his composite portraits, with their 'ghostly accessories' (*Generic*, p. 3): her family history is as vague and elusive as the portraits.

<sup>15</sup> Although the SPR had many female members (Eleanor Sidgwick, for example, was an influential member of the SPR, and its president from 1908-1909), at the end of the nineteenth century, the council positions were almost all held by men. For example, the presidents from 1882-1907 included Henry Sidgwick, Balfour Stewart, Arthur Balfour, William James, William Crookes, F.W.H. Myers, Oliver Lodge, William Fletch Barrett, Charles Richet and Gerald Balfour.

<sup>16</sup> I refer to her as Miss Freer because she refers to herself by this name in *Alleged Haunting*.

In fact, it is a photograph which is all that remains of Miss Freer's involvement in the SPR: '[t]he present officers of the Society say that they do not now possess any documents relating to her apart from the single photograph' (*Strange Things*, p. 106). Indeed, her presence in the Society fades out entirely with the turn of the century. In the same year that she published *Alleged Haunting*, she also published *Essays in Psychical Research*, and in 1900 she edited *The Professional: and Other Psychic Stories*, a collection of ghost stories, three of which she wrote herself.<sup>17</sup> After around 1902, however, she ceased to be actively involved in the Society and turned her attention to travel writing and other literary pursuits.<sup>18</sup>

Ballechin house seems most haunted by Miss Freer herself. SPR Member Frank Podmore said 'during the investigation it was Miss Freer who first heard the noises, who first saw the apparition, and who was most frequently and most conspicuously favoured with "phenomena"' (quoted in *Strange Things*, p. 184). Indeed, the presence in the house, the ghost that haunted it for the period of the investigation was Miss Freer:

the only continuity is to be found – itself not entirely continuous – of [Miss Freer]. But simply because she is a lady, and because she had her duties as hostess to attend to, she is unfit to carry out the actual work of investigating the phenomena in question. (*Alleged*, p. 84)

Of course Miss Freer, did carry out 'the actual work of investigation' regardless of her status as a 'lady', but it is significant here that she is marked as unfit because of her gender. This also suggests that the usual investigative methods of the SPR were

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<sup>17</sup> A. Goodrich-Freer, *Essays in Psychical Research* (London: Redway, 1899), and *The Professional: and Other Psychic Stories* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1900).



masculinist, and that as a female member of the society, Miss Freer's contributions were expected to fall into the traditional domestic category of 'hostess'. When she became a different kind of hostess, however, the hostess (or medium/host) for the apparitions at Ballechin, she adopted the role of the male psychical investigator: she appropriated power to see and document the ghosts. In assuming this male role Miss Freer challenged the masculine authority of the SPR, but the SPR also undermined Freer's reputation by using her own ghosts against her. By discrediting her findings, the SPR suggested that her talent for seeing ghosts was all in her mind. Being too good at seeing ghosts meant that Miss Freer was to become ghostly herself in the annals of psychic research.

If we consider Miss Freer to be the ghost haunting Ballechin, then the haunted house becomes a significant metaphor for the haunted mind, particularly the female haunted mind. Critics on the female Gothic have already made connections between the haunted house and the female psyche, but they have not discussed how women's self-haunting impacts their writing and construction of the female in the ghost story.<sup>19</sup>

Although Miss Freer has become a spectral figure in the history of the SPR, for a brief

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Goodrich-Freer, *Things Seen in Constantinople* (London: Seeley, 1926) and *Things Seen in Palestine* (London: Seeley, 1913). She also edited and wrote biographical prefaces to two of Susan Ferrier's novels, *The Inheritance* (London: Methuen, 1902), and *Marriage* (London: Methuen, 1902).

<sup>19</sup> For discussions of the female Gothic and connections between the haunted house and the female psyche, see for example Eugenia C. Delamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Delamotte argues that the woman's domestic space in the house traps her, symbolising her emotional imprisonment. In Kate Ferguson Ellis's *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), Ellis argues that the castle represents to the Gothic heroine her fear of being both confined and abandoned. Maggie Kilgour's *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995) argues that Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) is 'a place of confinement in which the repressed female imagination is able to escape and run riot' (p. 121). Alison Milbank argues that the female Gothic tells the story of 'an escape from an encompassing interior' (pp. 10-11) in *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992). For more on the female Gothic, see, for example, E.J. Clery, *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (Devon: Northcote, 2000); *The Female Gothic*, ed. by Juliann E. Fleenor (Montreal: Eden, 1993); Donna Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2004). See also Claire Kahane, 'The Gothic Mirror' in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, ed. by Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and

period she was a powerful female presence. Both women recording psychological experiences like Freer, and the women ghost story writers I address in the next sections were turning to the ghost as a haunting and powerful symbol for women's disenfranchisement. Women writers, fictional and non-fictional, were aware that they were apparitional figures in constructions by the male medical community, but subversively used ghostliness as inspiration for their careers.<sup>20</sup>

### The Female Ghost Story and Hysteria

At the same time that ghosts at the *fin-de-siècle* had been adopted by the scientific, medical and spiritual communities as objects of study, the ghost story was also refined by the woman writer as a distinctively female form. Jessica Amanda Salmonsen argues that as much as seventy percent of ghost stories published in British and American magazines in the nineteenth century were written by women,<sup>21</sup> and Julia Briggs calls the end of the nineteenth century 'the high-water mark of the form'.<sup>22</sup> At the *fin-de-siècle*, dozens of women ghost-story writers appeared in magazines and collections of short stories, including women who have received some recent critical attention (M.E. Braddon, Amelia Edwards, Edith Nesbit, and Margaret Oliphant,) and others who have been almost forgotten critically (Mrs. Alfred Louisa Baldwin, Helena Blavatsky, Emilia Frances Dilke, Lettice Galbraith, Anna Bonus Kingsford, Mary Louisa Molesworth and Charlotte

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Madelon Sprengnether (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 335-51. Kahane suggests that the woman's body is both a habitat and a prison.

<sup>20</sup> See also Terry Castle, *Female Thermometer*, who discusses women in the eighteenth century and the ways in which the mind haunts itself.

<sup>21</sup> Jessica Amanda Salmonsen, 'Preface', in *What did Miss Darrington See?: An Anthology of Feminist Supernatural Fiction*, ed. Jessica Amanda Salmonsen (New York: Feminist Press, 1989), pp. ix-xiv (p. x).

<sup>22</sup> Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber, 1977), p. 14.

Riddell). Even women writers not usually connected with the ghost story genre experimented with the form, including Harriet Beecher Stowe.<sup>23</sup>

Many critics have considered why so many Victorian women turned to the genre, most arguing that the ghost story, because itself a form designed to tell incendiary tales, allowed for the articulation of what otherwise would have been unacceptable. In fact, most scholars writing on women's ghost stories in the nineteenth century have come to similar conclusions to those of Lowell T. Frye, Clare Stewart, Diana Basham and Vanessa D. Dickerson – that the ghost story was a popular form for the woman writer not only practically, because ghost stories promised more financial security than other genres, but also because the form is a transgressive space which allows women to write in politically coded terms about their ghostly role in society.<sup>24</sup> Examinations of women's ghost stories have not yet fully explored the reasons for and significance of their popularity at the *fin-de-siècle*. The end of the century was a time of rapid change for women: it was the era of the hysterical female, the New Woman, and the suffragette.

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Harriet Beecher Stowe's 'The Ghost in the Cap'n Brown House' (1871), in *Classic Fantasy By Women*, ed. by A. Susan Williams (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 201-11. Although usually remembered in popular culture for the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, a controversial work demonstrating the horrors of slavery, Stowe was also an ardent spiritualist.

<sup>24</sup> In 'The Ghost Story and the Subjection of Women: The Example of Amelia Edwards, M.E. Braddon, and E. Nesbit', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 26 (1998), 167-209, Frye suggests that writers like Amelia Edwards, M.E. Braddon and Edith Nesbit 'used the ghost story to examine the experience of women in a society dominated by men, in a world defined and structured by ways of thinking strongly associated with men' (p. 171). In "'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, Clare Stewart's interest lies more in the nature of how women's ghost stories were received in the Victorian period, suggesting that their reception 'was intimately bound up with perceptions of womanhood and delineations of femininity' (p. 108). Stewart argues that 'not only did the genre allow for the expression of subversively feminist ideas, but it also made possible the exploration of dangerous territory, which would have been closed off completely in any other context' (pp. 111-12). Like Frye and Stewart, Diana Basham believes that the issues raised in the ghost stories are raised implicitly, hinting at feminist ideas and female anxieties, but never explicitly making a feminist statement. For Basham, what is interesting about women's ghost stories is the absences within the texts, the exclusion of the female within the tales which speaks more plainly than the presences or inclusions. It is what is not said or is not visible in the ghost story that speaks the invisible message of unrest and anxiety about the plight of women (pp. 151-76).

Why then, in a period when women tried to redefine the roles they were to play in contemporary society and the coming century was the ghost story the popular choice for the female pen? Although I believe financial common sense was an important factor in determining the popularity of the form, women's ghost stories offer more than an outlet for suppressed and repressed female ideas and feelings. The ghost story empowers women because the ghost becomes an emblem for women's disenfranchisement. The links between mental science and the supernatural, along with the quickly changing environment on how women were viewed legally, socially, and morally at the moment in which the writing and publication of women's ghost stories increased, is a phenomenon which must be granted closer inspection if we are to better understand these ghostly texts, and the climate in which they were conceived.

Theories about the female body and psyche underwent a number of transformations during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century. Women themselves during this period were attempting to effect social and legal change. For example, in 1882 the Married Women's Property Act was passed, which granted both men and women legal ownership of and rights to property, and gave women the right to litigate in their own name. In 1886 the Guardianship of Infants Act gave women stronger legal rights to their children if they were divorced.<sup>25</sup> Women were becoming strong advocates for their legal identity and public selves, in particular the New Woman, who demanded all women gain the right to education, employment and greater social freedom. Significantly,

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<sup>25</sup> Caroline Norton (1808-1877) successfully campaigned for the Infant Custody Act (1839), which allowed mothers to have custody of their children as long as they gained the approval of the Lord Chancellor. The Guardianship of Infants Act gave women even stronger rights to custody, since the children's welfare was

spiritualism was strongly linked to the women's rights movement at the end of the century: many women activists were also spiritualists.<sup>26</sup> A connection to the spirit world could be enabling for women and in identifying with ghosts they also believed that they were channelling energy in order to make changes for women at the end of the century.

During the same period in which great strides were made in the women's rights movement, however, there was a perceived increase in female illness. Elaine Showalter suggests that this was partly a construction by a male-dominated society, which considered the female to be dangerous, and by the very nature of her gender, the other that was already ill.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, she argues that the rise of both female activism and female illness like hysteria at the *fin-de-siècle* was indicative of male discomfort with liberated women: 'doctors [. . .] explicitly linked the epidemic of nervous disorders [. . .] to *fin-de-siècle* women's ambition' (*Female Malady*, p. 121). Male doctors and conventional Victorian society were increasingly alarmed by the possibility that the woman would no longer be the 'angel of the house': '[f]eminism, the women's movement and what was called, "the Woman Question" challenged the traditional institutions of marriage, work, and the family' (Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 7). The figure of the woman at the end of the century had become culturally and socially unpredictable and threatening, and both her body and her mind were represented by male

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to be taken into consideration (many felt that a mother's presence was the most beneficial to child development).

<sup>26</sup> For more on the ways in which spiritualism was involved in the women's rights and political movements, see, for example, Anne Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon, 1989); Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (New York: Knopf, 1998) and Molly McGarry, 'Spectral Sexualities: Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism, Moral Panics, and the Makings of the U.S. Obscenity Law', *Journal of Women's History*, 12 (2000), 8-29. Also see Owen, *Darkened Room*, who suggests that spiritualist séances allowed women greater sexual and social freedom.

<sup>27</sup> Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1910* (London: Virago, 1987).

society as unexplored territory. Indeed, spiritualism increased women's threat in society since it allowed women, especially mediums, to be the powerful agents in spiritualist circles. Furthermore, spiritualism was connected with hysteria: 'women who underwent spiritualist experiences were readily labelled "hysterical"'.<sup>28</sup>

Hysteria, perhaps more than any other nervous disorder in the nineteenth century, was explicitly connected with the unknowability and uncontrollability of the female body. Sondra M. Archimedes suggests that 'potentially all of women's diseases [. . .] could be confidently assigned to the uterus'.<sup>29</sup> Janet Beizer, however, points out that by the *fin-de-siècle*, hysteria was beginning to be seen by the medical community as a 'neurological' disorder.<sup>30</sup> Freud's *Studies On Hysteria* (1895), although preoccupied with the bodily symptoms of the illness, suggested that hysteria was a sickness of the mind. He argued that hysteria was a result of 'psychical trauma' (which he later qualified as being almost necessarily sexual) from the patient's past (*Hysteria*, p. 56). For Freud,

the splitting of the consciousness which is so striking in the well-known classical cases [of hysteria] under the form of 'double conscience' is present to a rudimentary degree in every hysteria, and that a tendency to such a dissociation, and with it the emergence of abnormal states of consciousness (which we shall bring together under the name of 'hypnoid') is the *basic phenomenon of this neurosis*. (*Hysteria*, pp. 62-63)

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<sup>28</sup> Roy Porter and Helen Nicholson, 'Georgina Weldon and Louisa Lowe', in *Women, Madness, and Spiritualism*, ed. by Roy Porter, Helen Nicholson, and Bridget Bennett, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 2003), I, pp. 3-27 (p. 5). Porter, Nicholson and Bennett also use the example of spiritualists Georgina Weldon and Louisa Lowe whose views were so unconventional that they were forcibly removed to insane asylums by their husbands. Both women attempted to change laws which gave husbands the right to incarcerate their wives, and were successful in some of their suits.

<sup>29</sup> Sondra M. Archimedes, *Gendered Pathologies: The Female Body and Biomedical Discourse in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 2.

My aim here is not to discuss the problems, complications and ongoing debates about hysteria, but to point out two particularly interesting phenomena within the discourse on hysteria: firstly, that the male medical community in the nineteenth century wrote about hysteria in such a way that, as Archimedes suggests, it made female sexuality 'deviant' and the female body 'unnatural' (p. 2), and secondly, that at the *fin-de-siècle*, hysteria was beginning to be internalised as an illness of both mind and body. At the end of the century mental scientists attempted to control and classify the 'deviant' and 'unnatural' aspects of women's minds and bodies in unprecedented ways. These attempts, however, only made female identity even more apparitional and immaterial in the eyes of medical science, since neither her mind nor her body could be neatly mapped and contained. While medical and biological science saw this as debilitating, women writers used the ghost as a symbol for their own anxieties about the role of women in the home and legally, and the ghost story as a space for political expression.

### **Ghostwomen, Ghostwriting**

Women writers like Charlotte Riddell, Mary Louisa Molesworth, Anna Bonus Kingsford, Emilia Frances Dilke and Helena Blavatsky are crucial to a discussion of women's apparitional identity in the late nineteenth century because they have themselves become ghostly in the canon. Many of these women were struggling to find a voice in late Victorian society, whether it be to advocate theosophy, like Blavatsky, or the women's trades unions, like Emilia Frances Dilke. Furthermore, they engage in significant ways with contemporary theories on mental science and hysteria, using ghosts and altered

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<sup>30</sup> Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 7.

states like dreaming to show the ways in which women can reclaim the ghostly as a subversive symbol for female identity.

In the case of Charlotte Riddell's (1832-1906) work, sometimes no ghosts appear in the story and the *woman herself* represents the supernatural presence in the text.<sup>31</sup> Riddell's 'The Open Door' (1882), for example, is the story of the supposedly haunted Ladlow Hall. A young man goes to the hall to investigate a mysterious door which will not remain closed, due, village gossip says, to a ghost. The young man soon learns that the door leads to a room where a man was murdered and whose will was never found. The 'ghost' is revealed to be the wife of the murdered man who returns again and again to the property searching for the will in order to destroy it, since she knows she will inherit nothing if it is found.<sup>32</sup> In taking on a ghostly form the woman becomes a powerful presence in the text, not only because she protects her finances, but also because the fear she evokes gives her authority. In 'The Open Door', Riddell channels the potential supernatural fiction has for empowering women.

The women in ghost stories by Mary Louisa Molesworth demonstrate, alongside a sense of fear of ghosts, an affinity with them, a compassion and sympathy for the ghostly.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps this connection is the manifestation of the subtle recognition that the

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<sup>31</sup> For more on Riddell writing about women writing, see for example, Margaret Kelleher, 'Charlotte Riddell's *A Struggle for Fame*: the Field of Women's Literary Production', *Colby Literary Quarterly*, 36 (2000), 116-32, and Linda H. Petersen 'Charlotte Riddell's *A Struggle for Fame*: Myths of Authorship, Facts of the Market', *Women's Writing*, 11 (2004), 99-115. While Petersen argues Riddell 'reinscribes myths of female authorship [. . .] myth of genius and vocation, of solitude and loneliness, of domesticity and inspiration' (p. 100), she does not discuss how these myths of authorship impact on Riddell's ghost stories.

<sup>32</sup> Charlotte Riddell, 'The Open Door', in *Weird Stories*, new edn (London, 1885), pp. 48-103.

<sup>33</sup> Few critical writings on Molesworth's ghost stories exist, although interest in her writing for children is reviving. See, for example, Alison Chapman, 'Phantasies of Matriarchy in Victorian Children's Literature', in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. by Nicola Diane Thompson, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth Century Literature and Culture, 21 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 60-79, and Jane Darcy, "'Worlds not realized": The Work of Louisa Molesworth', in *Popular Victorian*



ghosts they see are reflections of themselves and their own frustrated desires and ambitions. The most moving example of this alliance between the ghost and the woman can be found in Molesworth's 'Lady Farquhar's Old Lady: A True Ghost Story' (1873). Lady Farquhar and her family are staying in an old country house, Ballyreina, so that Lady Farquhar can recover her health. There, she sees the ghost of an old woman three times. She subsequently discovers that the old woman was the ghost of the eldest Miss Fitzgerald who used to inhabit Ballyreina but whose family lost all of their fortune and were forced to move to the Continent. Miss Fitzgerald died abroad, exactly a year before Lady Farquhar inhabited the house.<sup>34</sup>

What is curious about the story is what the story seems *not* to say about Lady Farquhar. Why is it that she feels such empathy for 'my old lady' (p. 272), and also so protective over her? When Lady Farquhar is asked by the narrator to give an account of her ghost she speaks of it with a certain sorrowful hesitation, as if fearful of somehow betraying Miss Fitzgerald: '[a]ll that I feel is a sort of shrinking from the subject, strong enough to prevent my ever alluding to it lightly or carelessly. Of all things I should dislike to have a joke made of it' (p. 273). She also tells of her guilt and grief at not somehow being able to help the ghost:

I cannot now describe [the ghost's] features beyond saying that the whole face was refined and pleasing, and that in the expression there was certainly nothing to alarm or repel. It was rather wistful and beseeching, the look in the eyes anxious, the lips slightly parted, as if she were on the

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*Women Writers*, ed. by Kay Boardman and Shirley Jones (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 111-34.

<sup>34</sup> Molesworth, 'Lady Farquhar's Old Lady: A True Ghost Story', in *The Penguin Book of Classic Fantasy*, ed. by Susan A. Williams, pp. 272-85.

point of speaking. I have since thought that if *I* had spoken, if I *could* have spoken – for I did make one effort to do so, but no audible words would come at my bidding – the spell that bound the poor soul, this mysterious wanderer from some shadowy borderland between life and death, might have been broken, and the message that I now believe burdened her delivered. (pp. 280-1)

The wistful, beseeching language seems to describe the feelings of both the ghost *and* Lady Farquhar. Furthermore, the anxiety about silences in this passage is suggestive about the women's silent voice in politics in the late Victorian period. Finally, the notion of breaking through the 'borderland' may suggest Lady Farquhar's awakening to the fact that women are not only silent, but invisible in the nineteenth-century socio-cultural framework. Perhaps the 'borderland' represents the division between women's acceptance of their subservient role, and the ushering in of the strong voices and material changes that the New Woman made towards the end of the century.

Significantly, Lady Farquhar's sightings seem to coincide with a particularly unhappy or anxious time in her life, although what is making her unhappy is always kept hidden from the reader. She is at Ballyreina because 'I had not been as well as usual for some time (this was greatly owing, I believe, to my having lately endured unusual anxiety of mind)' (p. 274). She never elucidates this comment, and only refers to her nervous constitution again in order to assure the narrator that she is 'not morbid, or very apt to be run away with by [her] imagination' (p. 273). But it is during this time of anxiety that she sees the ghost, and it seems this is also the case when she is suffering from any kind of mental agitation. For example, she sees the ghost for the second and third times just after

receiving a letter which is 'a very welcome and dearly-prized letter, and the reading of it made me feel very happy. I don't think I had felt so happy all the months we had been in Ireland as I was feeling that evening' (p. 279). Who sent the letter, what its contents are, and why they have made her so happy are never clear, but directly thereafter she sees the ghost. That she sees the ghost in an altered state of emotional intensity suggests that what she sees is more than a woman who like herself is seeking to be disburdened, but also that she is looking at herself. The ghost seems to be a projection of all Lady Farquhar's unspoken anxieties and hopes in this story (and here it is important to remember that she is also unable to speak to the ghost), manifesting itself in a reflection of inner turmoil. Lady Farquhar does seem to see the ghost, but she seems in a sense also to *be* that ghost whose history, like her own in this tale, might reveal 'many a pitiful old story that is never told' (p. 284). Farquhar is haunted by herself here, by her own silence about her thoughts and past, as well as by the ghost of Miss Fitzgerald.

If, as in the case of 'Lady Farquhar's Old Lady', women in ghost stories written by women are haunted by themselves, it is interesting to look at how women ghost writers used writing self-reflexively in their work. What did women's ghost stories, and the theme of writing in these stories have to say about female identity at the end of the nineteenth century? Despite the professional successes of the woman writer and the rise of a mass female reading public,<sup>35</sup> nineteenth-century society was troubled by a conviction that reading and writing were dangerous for women. Janet Beizer has

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<sup>35</sup> For more on the literary marketplace and the reception of women writers, see, for example, *The Victorian Novelist: Social Problems and Sexual Change*, ed. by Kate Flint (London: Croom Helm, 1987), and *Women and Literature in Britain, 1800-1900*, ed. by Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For attitudes to fiction writing see Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

suggested that factions of the male medical community were openly hostile towards reading women and warned against the dangers of novels:

Virtually every nineteenth-century medical text on hysteria offers a prophylactic to the (implicitly male) reader seeking to protect his wife, daughter, or woman patient from the ravages of the female condition. The barrier that physicians recommended almost unanimously is illiteracy (p. 55).

The medical community also warned against the dangers of writing. During her mental breakdowns, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was prescribed the 'rest cure' in which she was forced to remain in bed without any mental stimulation, especially writing.<sup>36</sup> The Gothic short story 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892) by American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) ironically shows that the boredom, depression and insanity that the 'rest cure' was meant to prevent, actually worsened these symptoms.<sup>37</sup> In 'The Yellow Wallpaper' the depressed narrator is forbidden to write, and it is this loss of a creative outlet which plunges her deeper into despair and madness. Writing, which women saw as both productive and curative, was often viewed as extremely dangerous by male doctors, who demanded that women stifle creativity in favour of health.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996), pp. 175-200. Lee gives 1895-1896 as the period of Woolf's first major breakdown, but suggests that during most of her life Woolf suffered 'episodes' of depression and illness (p. 175).

<sup>37</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 'The Yellow Wallpaper', in *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers at the Fin-de-Siècle*, ed. by Elaine Showalter, pp. 98-117. For a discussion of the Gothic effects of creative deprivation in Gilman, see, for example, E. Suzanne Owens, 'The Ghostly Double Behind the Wallpaper in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"', in *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women*, ed. by Lynette Carpenter and Wendy K. Kolmar (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), pp. 64-79.

<sup>38</sup> See also Archimedes. S. Weir Mitchell (1829-1914) pioneered the 'rest cure', which was influential even on Freud. See Mitchell, *Wear and Tear, or Hints for the Overworked*, 8th edn (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1897). First published in 1871, *Wear and Tear* suggested that activities like writing damaged women's physical and mental health. John Harvey Kellogg's (1852-1943) *Ladies Guide in Health and Disease*,

Although reading and writing were represented as hazardous activities that brought up anxieties about controlling both the female mind and body (especially in the case of hysteria), increased female production of the ghost story at the *fin-de-siècle* suggests that women were aware of the similarities between anxieties about the reading/writing female and the ghosts haunting the ghost story. The writing woman was haunted, not just by ghosts, but by her own desire to create in a society resistant to female expression.

The cases of Anna Bonus Kingsford and Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) are particularly significant here, since both women turned to ghost stories at the end of their lives, explicitly desiring these works to be representative of their lifetime achievements.<sup>39</sup> Indeed they seemed to be following the trend of ghost stories at the *fin-de-siècle* in which ghosts appear at the moment of death. For example, 'The Story of the Rippling Train' (1888), by Mary Louisa Molesworth, is about a woman whose ghost comes to bid farewell to her lover at the very moment of her death.<sup>40</sup> Lettice Galbraith's 'The Ghost in the Chair' (1893) is about the appearance of a ghost at an important board meeting at the same time he is reported to be dead.<sup>41</sup> Alfred Louisa Baldwin's (1845-1925) weeping woman in 'Many Waters Cannot Quench Love' (1895) appears not only at the moment of her death, but, as the reader discovers, at the same moment that her lover at sea also perishes.<sup>42</sup>

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*Girlhood, Maidenhood, Wifehood, Motherhood* (London, 1890), first published in 1882, also expresses concerns about women performing 'strenuous' mental activity like reading and writing.

<sup>39</sup> For more on Kingsford and Blavatsky and their interest in the occult, see Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> Molesworth, 'The Story of the Rippling Train', in *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 227-55.

<sup>41</sup> Lettice Galbraith, 'The Ghost in the Chair', in *New Ghost Stories*, (London, 1893), pp. 51-66.

<sup>42</sup> Alfred Louisa Baldwin, 'Many Waters Cannot Quench Love', in *The Shadow on the Blind* (Ashcroft: Ash-Tree, 2001), pp. 59-67.

For Kingsford and Blavatsky, however, the ghost story became the form in which it was not the fictional ghosts who appeared at time of death, but their own authorial personae. The supernatural became a source of comfort for these writers, which implies not simply that the ghost story allowed women to express their anxieties about the plight of woman more freely than other genres, but that the ghost story also offered them a source of sympathetic self-identification. This self-identification was, however, modified by both an *embrasure* and a rejection of the affinity between ghosts and women.

Kingsford received a medical education at the Paris Faculty of Medicine, and was both a spiritualist and an influential member of the Theosophical Society (Oppenheim, p. 186). She put her spiritualism above all other aspects of her life, eventually rejecting both Anglicanism and her marriage (Owen, *Darkened Room*, p. 176). Most of *Dreams and Dream Stories* (1888) was written in 1886, although it was gradually added to until the author's death.<sup>43</sup> According to the editor Edward Maitland, 'the publication is made in accordance with the author's last wishes' (p. 6). The work is a record of Kingsford's dreams, poems she claims to have written in her dreams, and stories that were inspired by or somehow relate to dreams. Kingsford explains dreaming in terms echoing those that Myers and Stead use to discuss the workings of the conscious and unconscious mind. Kingsford writes in her preface that 'the soul has a twofold life, a lower and a higher. In sleep the soul is liberated from the constraint of the body, and enters, as an emancipated being, its divine life of intelligence [. . .]. The night-time of the body is the day-time of the soul' (pp. 13-14). The dream-life that Kingsford describes suggests that in certain

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<sup>43</sup> Anna Bonus Kingsford, *Dreams and Dream Stories*, ed. by Edward Maitland (London: Redway, 1904), p. 9. Edward Maitland collaborated with Kingsford on many of her writings. For more on Kingsford, see, for example, Edward Maitland, *Anna Kingsford, Her Life, Letters, Diary, and Work*, 2nd edn (London, 1896).

somnambulant states, the separate selves within us are liberated, allowing the subservient self to have free rein. Although comparable to Stead's notion of the separations between the dominant, masculine, waking self and the suppressed, feminine, dormant self, Kingsford's dreams imply a radical re-visioning of a divided and gendered identity. Kingsford's dreams, often about powerful and mythic women leading in battle, suggest that when women access the dream or unconscious state they both confront their suppressed ambitions and desires, and use these alternative states of perception as inspiration for writing about them. Ghost and dream stories offer space for women to subversively adopt, and as I will suggest later, abject, the ghost as a symbol for female empowerment.

Kingsford's ghost story 'Steepside' symbolically expresses women's frustrated ambitions and explores anxieties about the act of writing. On the way to spend the holiday with friends, a young man is forced by bad weather to stay in a haunted mansion where he sees blood rushing under his bedroom door and the ghosts of two women, one fleeing from the other across the snow. A Catholic priest later tells him that the house was once inhabited by a couple, their daughter Julia, and Julia's maid Virginie. Julia was supposed to marry a wealthy heir, but she secretly planned to elope with her poorer lover Philip Brian. Meanwhile, Virginie also loved Philip and wanted to destroy his relationship with Julia. She forged Julia's handwriting and in a letter said that the affair was over, and informed Julia's parents about the intended elopement. Believing Julia no longer cared for him, Philip committed suicide. Philip's death sent Julia into a psychopathic rage, causing her to shoot her father in the head, strangle her mother, and finally, followed by the frantic and now repentant Virginie, to fling herself off a cliff. The

Catholic priest learned this horrifying story from Virginie herself, who made her death-bed confession to him, and the young man was convinced that what he had witnessed in the mansion was a repetition of the dark events leading to Julia's death.<sup>44</sup>

Besides expressing intense female rage and thwarted desire (in the cases of both Virginie and Julia), 'Steepside' has an underlying theme of the sinister aspects of writing. When the young man first enters the haunted mansion, he reads books covered in blood. After Julia's death, Virginie goes mad and spends the rest of her life making exact copies of any written words she sees (repeating, it seems, the endless hours of practice it took her to master Julia's handwriting). The appearance of bloody books and the compulsive copying of any written text suggest that writing is somehow dangerous, and in the case of Virginie, that writing can become a punishment for past wrongs. Virginie is after all, haunted by her own hands, penmanship, and ability to write and copy things exactly, just as much as she is by Julia's ghost. 'Steepside' expresses women writers' anxieties about the act of writing. Imagery like bloody books suggests that writing is draining for women writers, but also morbidly fascinating. Writing about ghosts is a means of symbolically articulating women's ghostly role in society and politics, but also suggests that women must turn to the ghostly and the supernatural to gain a voice. Paradoxically, women must ghost themselves to give their opinions material shape in the form of the stories.

Helena Blavatsky, like Kingsford, also turned to the ghost story at the end of her life. A spiritualist and extremely influential theosophist, with dozens of publications under her name, Blavatsky published her collection *Nightmare Tales* in 1892.<sup>45</sup> The foreword to the work, written by Annie Besant, president of the Theosophical Society

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<sup>44</sup> Kingsford, 'Steepside: A Ghost Story' in *Dreams*, ed. by Edward Maitland, pp. 116-46.



and political activist,<sup>46</sup> expresses Besant's ideas about Blavatsky's decision to create *Nightmare Tales*:

The world knows H.P. Blavatsky chiefly by her encyclopaedic knowledge, her occult powers, her unique courage. This little book, composed of stories thrown off by her in lighter moments, shows her as a vivid, graphic writer, gifted with a brilliant imagination. [. . .] The *Nightmare Tales* were written during the last few months of the author's pain-stricken life: when tired with the drudgery of THE THEOSOPHICAL GLOSSARY she, who could not be idle turned to this lighter work and found therein amusement and relaxation. Her friends, all the world over, will welcome this example of gifts used but too rarely amid the strain of weightier work.<sup>47</sup>

Besant's perspective on Blavatsky's motivations in creating these stories was perhaps affected by the public's general unease when it came to classifying and judging women's ghost stories. The stories themselves are certainly not 'light': 'The Cave of the Echoes' and 'The Ensouled Violin' are particularly gruesome stories about jealousy, murder, vengeful ghosts and the devil himself.<sup>48</sup> Although Besant dismisses the ghost story as simply an amusement genre without serious literary merit, Blavatsky herself spent a lifetime pledging herself to theorising about and contacting the spirit world. It seems

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<sup>45</sup> For more on Blavatsky, see for example, H.P. Blavatsky, *Helena Blavatsky*, ed. and intro. by Nicholas Goodrick-Clark (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> Alex Owen writes that Annie Besant 'took the stage in the name of secularism, anti-vaccination, [and] opposition to the Contagious Diseases Act' (pp. 211-2).

<sup>47</sup> Annie Besant, 'Foreword' in *Nightmare Tales*, by H.P. Blavatsky (London, 1892), p. 3 (p. 3). All subsequent ghost stories by Blavatsky will be taken from this edition.

<sup>48</sup> Blavatsky, 'The Cave of the Echoes', pp. 68-80, and 'The Ensouled Violin', pp. 98-133, both in *Nightmare Tales*.

clear that not only would she devote her 'last few months (p. i)' to the supernatural, but that this would be an important, self-revelatory task.

As with Kingsford, writing and its implications for female identity and ghosts is a theme in Blavatsky, in particular in her tale 'A Bewitched Life'. In this story, a young man makes his fortune in Japan in order to support his sister and her family in England. He has always been sceptical about religious faith, but when more than a year passes and he has heard nothing from his sister he fears the worst and turns to the Japanese holy men, the Yamabooshi. He looks through a magical mirror and sees that his sister has gone mad after learning of her husband's death, has been placed in an insane asylum, and her children have been sent to an orphanage. Stricken with grief, the man refuses to ritually purify himself as the Yamabooshi suggest, and thus is doomed to foresee the deaths of everyone he meets, and to relive the moments of his family's tragedy forever.<sup>49</sup>

The full title of the story is 'A Bewitched Life (As Narrated By a Quill Pen)', which points to the discursive framework in which the plot is working. The story opens in the bedchamber of the possibly fatally ill narrator. In a vision, she sees a man writing a tale – the hero of the story – and discovers that she can understand the language of the quill. The quill scratches on the page, which the narrator can translate simply by listening, into the English language. Of course, this suggests that it is Blavatsky herself who is the narrator, on her own deathbed, haunted by the writings of a quill pen. Authorship here is blurred (Is it Blavatsky that is writing? Or Blavatsky the spiritualist medium that is writing? Is this automatic writing or the writings of the protagonist? Is the quill responsible?), but the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction are also blurred to create a cyclicity between Blavatsky's life and the text. Since the protagonist can see

the fate of everyone he meets, does this mean that he is foreseeing and describing Blavatsky's death?

### **Women's Ghost Stories and Abjection**

At the moment that they were to enter the other world, both Kingsford and Blavatsky turned to writing about ghosts, and writing about what was ghostly in writing. The affinity developing between ghostliness and women and the authors' self-identification with ghosts is equally marked by the rejection and loathing of the ghostly and the similarities between ghosts and women. For while ghost stories are a source of comfort for these writers, ghosts and the supernatural are still fearful presences in the stories. In a Kristevan sense these ghost stories are being abjected by their writers, and the horror of ghosts and ghostliness is expressed as abjection, particularly in the writings of Emilia Frances Dilke, Charlotte Riddell, and Mary Louisa Molesworth.

The term abjection has been a critically useful term in discussions of the Gothic. In 'Abjection, Nationalism and the Gothic', Robert Miles suggests 'an understanding of the abject as a literary modality' in order to 'theorize horror as abjection', which allows him to 'pursue connections between horror, nationalism and the Gothic'.<sup>50</sup> Miles correctly points to the problem of abjection theory in terms of discussions of nationalism: 'nationalism is utterly historical' while 'Kristeva's theory [. . .] ahistorically deals with universal structures of the human psyche' (p. 51). Miles is able to situate abjection historically however, by discussing the 'Other' as being 'coloured by nationalism' and 'how nationalism becomes part of the semiological economy of the unconscious' (p. 51).

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<sup>49</sup> Blavatsky, 'A Bewitched Life', in *Nightmare Tales*, pp. 7-67.

While Miles situates abjection in the traditional Gothic period, I situate it at the *fin-de-siècle* following the examples of critics like Kelly Hurley and Eric Savoy, who discuss the theory specifically in a late nineteenth-century framework.<sup>51</sup> The loss of self-identity, one of the greatest of Gothic horrors in the late Victorian period is also the power of horror in Kristevan abjection.<sup>52</sup> The term abjection is thus an important theoretical tool in exploring women's ghost stories at the *fin-de-siècle* and the identity of the late Victorian writing woman.

Kristeva describes abjection as being implicitly tied to discursiveness: it is 'within the being of language,'<sup>53</sup> and because of its connection to language has a specific significance to discussions about writing. She describes abjection in terms that could imply both the ghostly and the ghost: 'It is [. . .] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, composite' (p. 4). Neither living nor really dead, neither material nor immaterial, ghosts are ambiguous beings that are abject. But women at the end of the nineteenth century, themselves ghostly in their marginal positions in society, are also abject. Vanessa D. Dickerson has already suggested the similarities between the ghost and the woman, their mutual marginal position in society,

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<sup>50</sup> Robert Miles, 'Abjection, Nationalism and the Gothic', in *The Gothic*, ed. by Fred Botting, Essays and Studies, (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2001), pp. 47-70 (p. 48).

<sup>51</sup> For example, Hurley uses *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to argue that both Stevenson's novel and Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* 'discuss the repulsive yet intriguing possibility of loss of self-identity' (p. 42). See also, Eric Savoy, 'Spectres of Abjection: the Queer Subject of James's "The Jolly Corner"', in *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography*, ed. by Glennis Byron and David Punter (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 161-74. Savoy discusses the abject in terms of the loss of selfhood in which the double in James's 'The Jolly Corner' (1908) 'comes to signify, horrifically, the life without an identity' (p. 167).

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), and David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fiction from 1765 to the Present Day: The Modern Gothic*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1996), II.

<sup>53</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 45.

and their shared inability to be defined in a fixed or immutable way (p. 11). However, Kristeva's theory allows us to understand the powers of horror for the ghostliness within the female self. In discussing abjection within the subject, or self Kristeva argues:

[i]f it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject.

There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded. (p. 5)

Women were experiencing abjection when they wrote ghost stories at the end of the century. Women ghost-writers could not look to the public sphere (which was male-dominated) to find sympathy or understanding: they could not identify with a world that was ultimately hostile to female ambition, especially to the ambitions of the female writer. Yet when they turned inwards and began writing ghost stories as a means of satisfying the desire for recognition and identification they found not the satiation of this desire, but rather only the desire itself. Abjection came for these women when, in turning to the ghost story they found identification with the ghost who represented the abject.<sup>54</sup>

Writing ghost stories was an exercise in the abjection of the self, both the recognition and the abjection of a haunted self. Likewise, the female figures who appear

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<sup>54</sup> See also Marion Shaw, "To tell the truth of sex": Confession and Abjection in Late Victorian Writing', in *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History, and the Politics of Gender*, ed. by Linda M. Shires (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 87-100. Shaw is also interested in the ways in which writing is both abject and

in the stories play out the drama of abjection that occurs in the writing self. Abjection is, according to Kristeva, specifically related to the feminine, in particular to the mother. Kristeva suggests that when we are nauseated by the skin of milk and spit it out, we are spitting out the mother, abjecting her in the moment that we abject ourselves since we *are* the mother, or at least a part of the mother that we have rejected (p. 3). For Kristeva, the mother is always abjected when confronted with, or in place of language (which is part of a paternal, or masculine-oriented discourse) - '[t]here is language instead of the good breast. Discourse is being substituted for maternal care' (p. 45).

The abjection of the mother or rather of female identity itself causes a major conflict that occurs in ghost stories by Dilke, Riddell and Molesworth. Paradoxically, the desire for recognition and ambition that causes these women to turn to the ghost story is also the realisation that the ghosts *are* representations of this thwarted desire: the fictional women in the stories written abjectly by female writers come to represent the abjection of the mother, or rather of the female self. Ghosts alone are no longer wholly responsible for causing abjection in these stories. In addition to ghosts, women in women's ghost stories also cause abjection in part because of their close identification with the ghostly. Furthermore, if abjection is caused by turning inwards only to be faced with more abjection, then the writing woman is thus faced with her own abject, ghostly and *dangerous* self. Kristeva has discussed the dangers that exist within the female body, in particular menstrual blood, which 'stands for the danger issuing from within the identity' (p. 71). Women characters themselves, and not just ghosts are dangerous in these texts – dangerous to themselves.

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empowering, but overlooks the ways in which abjection is an especially important means for studying women's writing.

Emilia Frances Dilke's (1840-1904) 'The Shrine of Death' (1886), helps to illustrate the dangers of abjected female identity.<sup>55</sup> In the story, a fifteen year old girl is in desperate search for the secrets of life. A witch tells her that only in marrying Death will she discover what she truly desires. The girl slowly pines away for the hidden knowledge that Death alone possesses, and at last the village priest advises that she should be allowed to marry him, and 'pass a night within [Death's] shrine, on the morrow it may be that her wits will have returned to her'.<sup>56</sup> The marriage ceremony is conducted, and the girl beholds, at last, her fearful husband, who is bent over the pages of an open book. He compels her to look and read it, but she cannot decipher the writing. Frustrated, afraid, and increasingly angry, she cries: 'What shall the secrets of life profit me, if I must make my bed with Death?' (p. 23). She attempts to flee the crypt but is stopped by the 'dreadful dwellers' (p. 23) of the Shrine of Death. When in the morning the villagers come to fetch her 'she was dead; but her eyes were wide with horror' (p. 24).

'The Shrine of Death' is a significant text because it depicts awakening female sexuality and thwarted female ambition. That the girl's intense desire to know the secrets withheld from humanity begins during puberty is not coincidental. Her desire for knowledge just beyond her reach seems to mirror the stirrings of pubescent curiosity about burgeoning sexuality. The human body during this developmental period becomes unknown, and unknowable, terrifying in its metamorphosis from child-body to woman-body in which the knowledge of the self is desirable but seemingly impossible, and in

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<sup>55</sup> For more on Dilke, see for example, Betty Askwith, *Lady Dilke: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969); Israel Kali, *Names and Stories: Emilia Dilke and Victorian Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Elizabeth Mansfield, 'Emilia Dilke, Self-Fashioning and the Nineteenth Century', in *Marketing the Author: Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves and Self-Fashioning, 1880-1930*, ed. by Marysa Demoor (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2004), pp. 19-39.

<sup>56</sup> Emilia Frances Dilke, 'The Shrine of Death', in *The Shrine of Death and Other Stories* (London, 1886), pp. 11-24 (p. 16).

which the boundaries between sexual innocence and sexual awareness are blurred. The text is littered with symbolic flowerings and deflowerings, innocence and realisations. Red roses, in particular, represent both innocence and its loss: the rose suggests the blood of the virgin and menstrual blood, the very shape and colour of the flower connoting the vagina. Roses remind the girl of her awakening desires, but also of her mother and her youth: 'she brought [the rose] close to her face, and its perfume was very strong, and she saw, as in a vision, the rose garden of her mother's house and the face of one who had wooed her there in the sun' (p. 19). When the girl walks down the stairs into the Shrine of Death, 'she heard, as it were, the light pattering of feet behind her, but turning, when she came to the foot, to look, she found that this sound was only the echoing fall from step to step of the flowers [roses] which her long robes had drawn after her' (p. 19). Here, the fallen roses sound like the footsteps of children, symbolic of the girl's lost childhood, or perhaps of the possibilities for motherhood that marriage might bring. The girl's decision to marry Death marks her ultimate deflowering, suggestive of a post-lapsarian loss of innocence but also of *le petit mort* of orgasm, the symbolic 'small death' of sexual climax that is here made literal in the consummation of marriage with Death.

What makes this story most captivating is the symbolic destruction of the girl's desire not for sexual pleasure, but for intellectual gain. The girl's desire is, ultimately, for knowledge, but when at last she is face to face with Death she finds that she cannot read the open book: regardless of her hopes and sacrifices, her wish for intellectual fulfilment is thwarted and her punishment for making such a wish is death. Many of the stories in Dilke's collection echo the themes of sexual awakening and frustrated ambition. In 'The Silver Cage', a woman grows tired of waiting for Love to come for her soul and so gives



her soul to the Devil, an act which eventually causes her death.<sup>57</sup> In 'The Physician's Wife', a young woman marries an older physician in the hope of gaining greater scientific knowledge. She soon falls in love with the physician's young laboratory assistant who is too cowardly to elope with her and abandons her. Wrathfully, she murders her husband and then dies alone in their castle. Her ghost haunts the castle and by some strange curse all women who subsequently live there are destined to meet a similar fate.<sup>58</sup> 'The Black Veil' tells the story of an abused wife, who, tired of her husband's beatings, at last gains the courage to free herself from him and murders him. However, her black mourning veil is under the control of her husband's vengeful spirit and daily grows heavier until she can scarcely move. Under the advice of a wise-woman she goes to his grave to apologise, but is murdered by her husband's ghost.<sup>59</sup> All three stories mark the attempt and failure by their female protagonists to find self-fulfilment, whether through love, intellectual gain, or courage.

In *The Shrine of Death and Other Stories*, and in Dilke's subsequent collection *The Shrine of Love and Other Stories* published in 1891,<sup>60</sup> the protagonists are plagued by their hopes and ambitions. The result is their downfall, and although ghosts make regular appearances in these stories, the real ghosts are the protagonists, haunted by their own dreams, desires, and actions. More specifically, when hopes and ambitions in these stories are thwarted it is almost always because they are the kind of goals that are denied women. Higher knowledge and intellectual achievement in the nineteenth century are conventionally seen as being part of the male sphere. The woman's sphere, typically a

<sup>57</sup> Dilke, 'The Silver Cage', in *Shrine of Death*, pp. 27-36.

<sup>58</sup> Dilke, 'The Physician's Wife', in *Shrine of Death*, pp. 40-56.

<sup>59</sup> Dilke, 'The Black Veil', in *Shrine of Death*, pp. 79-84.

domestic one, is closed to the kinds of learning the women in Dilke's stories desire. Women for Dilke are thus not simply haunted by their own ambitions but by the very fact of their being *women*. The female sex in Dilke's stories is perhaps more ghostly than any of the other phantoms she conjures up.

Dilke's collections of stories are part of an emerging pattern in *fin-de-siècle* ghost stories written by women in which it is not the ghosts themselves which are ghostly. Instead the female self and body is ghostly, has the power to haunt, and is expressed as abjection. The girl in 'The Shrine of Death', who is in the process of becoming a woman and whose only desire is for knowledge is doubly abject. The want of knowledge is met in the Shrine of Death with simply want: she is unable to read the book which presumably contains the knowledge she seeks. The small village in which she grew up failed to satisfy her curiosity and lacked the imagination, sympathy and means to bring her knowledge, but in turning to the 'impossible' she is faced only with her own unfulfilled desire, embodied metaphorically by death. Not only is she herself abjected by her longing for the impossible, but also by her own female identity. In seeking knowledge she is also symbolically seeking the answers to her own developing 'woman's' identity. However, puberty itself as a threshold state may initiate the abject because, as Kristeva defines the term, abjection 'does not respect borders, positions, rules. [It is] [t]he in-between, the ambiguous, composite' (p. 4). The girl's blurred position between girl and woman make her abject, and also turns the story into an allegory for female abjection: the girl's adolescence, her very self is abjected, but in the story this translates into her literal death at the moment that she should transform into a woman. However, the 'motion' through which she abjects herself is thus 'within the same motion though which 'I' claim

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<sup>60</sup> Dilke, *The Shrine of Love and Other Stories* (London, 1891).

to establish *myself*' (Kristeva, p. 3). The death in this story seems to signify that the abjection of female adolescence is also the birth of the female adult self. The metaphor is a cautionary one, however, since the female adult self emerges from death and suggests also that the denial or impossibility of knowledge is implicit in this emergence.

Both Charlotte Riddell's 'Old Mrs. Jones' (1882) and Mary Louisa Molesworth's 'Unexplained' (1888) use female adolescent abjection as the borderland in which ghosts can be seen, and the dangers to female identity explored. The females in these stories seem either particularly wary of ('Unexplained') or prone to nervous disorders ('Old Mrs. Jones'), especially hysteria, making the link between the Victorian notion that sensitive women and female adolescents were more likely to see ghosts.<sup>61</sup> In 'Old Mrs. Jones', the eponymous ghost is said to haunt a lodging house which was once her home. Allegedly murdered by her husband Dr. Jones, rumour says that she will not rest until her body has been found. Anne Jane, a girl who has come to work at the lodging house is most affected by the ghost of Mrs. Jones. In fact, when she arrives, the ghost ignores all of the other lodgers and focuses solely on Anne. Eventually, in a somnambolic state, Anne finds the house where Dr. Jones is living under a pseudonym, and police later find Old Mrs. Jones' body. The girl's own adolescence and nerves put her at risk in this story her female identity has, in a sense, condemned her to the seeing of the ghost and caused the abjection which forces the affinity between the ghost and the woman. However, in succumbing to

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<sup>61</sup> See for example, Basham, p. 158, and Susan Schaper, 'Victorian Ghostbusting: Gendered Authority in the Middle-Class Home', *The Victorian Newsletter*, 100 (2001), 6-13. Schaper argues, '[w]omen's susceptibility to occult manifestations, real or imagined, was often attributed by both sceptics and believer's to women's innately and distinctly feminine nature' (p. 7). Furthermore, she suggests that '[f]emale ghost-seeing [. . .] is profoundly equivocal in Victorian culture. It can serve as a testimonial to woman's highly developed sensitivity and offer her the opportunity to extend both her talent for care-giving and propensity for religion into the realm of spiritual suffering. However, ghost-seeing can also indicate psychological instability' (p. 8). While Schaper notes the association made between ghost-seeing and

the hypnotic trance state, Anne Jane is also able to grant Mrs. Jones justice. The liminal states women can reach give them authority, perhaps symbolising their desire to attain legal and political power. The not-quite-dead and the not-quite-woman form an uneasy alliance in this story, suggesting the ghostliness that haunts female identity and the female body in this genre.<sup>62</sup>

Mary Louisa Molesworth's 'Unexplained' is an extraordinary, eerie piece which explores in frightening detail the dangers of the female self, especially the female adolescent self at the moment of abjection. The story is narrated by a woman and mother who is travelling with her two children across Germany, but who leave their travelling companions and stay in a small village, Silberbach. There, they are terrified by the seemingly evil inhabitants of the village as well as the village itself, but also by the fact that Nora, the woman's daughter, has witnessed a ghost.

The mother's description of Nora portrays perfectly the in-betweenness of the adolescent female:

She scarcely looked her age at that time, but she was very conscious of having entered 'on her teens', and the struggle between this new importance and her hitherto almost boyish tastes was amusing to watch. She was strong and healthy in the extreme, intelligent though not precocious, observant but rather matter-of-fact, with no undue development of the imagination, nothing that by any kind of misapprehension or exaggeration could have been called 'morbid' about her. It was a legend in the family that the word 'nerves' existed not for

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hysteria in the Victorian period, she ignores the ongoing discourse in the period between ghostliness, women, and the mind.

Nora: she did not know the meaning of *fear*, physical or moral. I could sometimes wish she had never learnt otherwise. But we must take the bad with the good, the shadow inseparable from the light. The first perception of things not dreamt of in her simple childish philosophy came to Nora as I would not have chosen it; but so, I must believe, it had to be.<sup>63</sup>

The mother is attempting here to clear her daughter of any charges that nerves or hysteria would have caused her to see the ghost, but later asserts that although they were not present before the sighting, a distinct change did come over Nora:

Nora by degrees recovered her roses and her good spirits. Still, her strange experience left its mark on her. She was never again quite the merry, thoughtless, utterly fearless child she had been. I tried, however, to take the good with the ill, remembering that thoroughgoing childhood cannot last forever, that the shock possibly helped to soften and modify a nature that might have been too daring for perfect womanliness – still more, wanting perhaps in tenderness and sympathy for the weaknesses and tremors of feebler temperaments. (pp. 188-89)

The implications of this passage are fearful, and demand that the reader question what is really happening in this story. Why was the ghost such a shock? Was the ghost a kind of punishment or warning for Nora, so that she might conform more easily to the womanly standards her mother feared she might otherwise not have possessed? The answers to these questions seem to suggest that Nora abjects herself because she is precariously balancing between adolescence and adulthood, and this process is symbolically played

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<sup>62</sup> Riddell, 'Old Mrs Jones', in *Weird Stories*, pp. 230-314.

<sup>63</sup> Molesworth, 'Unexplained', in *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 87-226 (pp. 97-98).

out between Nora and the ghost: Nora *is* the ghost she confronts in this time of intense emotional and physical change. Furthermore, the ghost is shocking because it is a warning to Nora that she must mould herself into a more acceptable womanly framework in order to better adapt to society.

Without these explanations, the ghost seems incapable of instilling any kind of fear at all. The ghost, a well-dressed young gentleman, appeared in the rooms at Silberbach, apparently because he was looking for a teacup that Nora's mother had purchased. The reader later discovers that the gentleman, who was killed by a bolt of lightning, had been buying a particular tea set for his mother that was the same pattern as Nora's mother's. The fact that the ghost was coming back from the grave to repossess a teacup makes it hard to take this ghost seriously, but the story is genuinely unsettling. The ghost is frightening because of his implications for Nora's future sense of self.

In fact, the whole story seems to captivate and chill because the reader is aware that everything that transpires within the story has a life-changing effect on Nora. The story's most eerie aspect is its reconstruction of the sinister landscape of Silberbach which is personified as a frightening, claustrophobic monster. Silberbach also seems to be peopled by menacing characters: leering, lecherous men who call attention to Nora's burgeoning womanhood, and the wicked landlord who causes the mother to narrate: '[t]here seemed something sinister in his [the landlord's] words. A horrible, ridiculous feeling came over me that we were caught in a net, as it were, and doomed to stay at Silberbach for the rest of our lives' (p. 148). The threatening landscape, and lascivious men are perhaps suggestive of Nora's changing emotional and physical state respectively. Like the land, Nora's thoughts and emotions are turbulent, frightening and dangerous. Her

body now, which is no longer so 'boyish' as her mother described it, is dangerous to her because it now attracts the attention of dangerous men.

'Unexplained' is thus a ghost story that is about the ghostly nature of Nora's growing up and the dangers female identity can pose to women's sense of self. Indeed, Nora becomes the ghost of herself since she is no longer the 'merry thoughtless, utterly fearless child' (p. 188) that she used to be. Despite the fact that she seems to conform to masculine expectations for feminine behaviour, her experience is also an awakening. Indeed, in some ways her encounter with the ghost strengthens her character, for example, she now feels 'tenderness and sympathy for the weaknesses and tremors of feebler temperaments' (p. 189). The 'feebler temperaments' could refer not only to the ghosts which she is sensitive to, but also to women in the late nineteenth century who seem to have only an insubstantial political presence. Nora's new found sympathy with ghosts and ghostly women suggests that she is alert to women's social and political invisibility, an awareness which may motivate and politicise her.

If abjection in these stories is a kind of rejection or death of the adolescent self, however, it is also, as Kristeva has suggested, an establishment or birth of the adult self (p. 3). Kristeva suggests that "'I" am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. During that course in which 'I' become, I give birth to myself' (p. 3). Women writers writing about death, and about ghosts and ghostly women were also rewriting themselves, recreating themselves in the process of writing about death. The rise of the ghost story written by women at the *fin-de-siècle* marked not only the death of

the woman and her reappearance as a ghost in her fiction and in social constructions about women, it also marked the ghost story as a site of the birth of the female author.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Many critics have discussed the death of the author, but none have discussed the ways in which women writing ghost stories at the end of the nineteenth century were recreating themselves through writing about death. For discussions of the death of the author, see for example Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Authorship from Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader*, ed. by Séan Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), pp. 125-30, and Séan Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).



## Chapter Five:

### Case Study: Vernon Lee, Aesthetics and the Supernatural

#### Introduction

'[T]he hostility between the supernatural and the artistic is well-nigh as great as the hostility between the supernatural and the logical'.<sup>1</sup>

The thesis now turns to a case study of Vernon Lee, a significant figure in an examination of the *fin-de-siècle* fascination with and repulsion of the supernatural. Like mental scientists, spiritualists, and psychical researchers of the 1880s and 1890s, Lee impossibly wanted control of the inchoate elements of the world around her. For Lee, literary genres, aestheticism, and the supernatural should all be contained within tight and impermeable boundaries. Lee seems to embody the paradox perpetuated in her writing's attempt to make material the immaterial: she herself cannot be easily accommodated within any one literary genre or period. While she is deeply focused in the past, particularly the eighteenth century, her writing is also modernist, and her literary styles, themes and forms blur distinctions between the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Lee's 'Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art', first published in *Cornhill Magazine* (1880) was meant as an emphatic statement of Lee's aesthetic theories. The essay attempts to demonstrate the impossibility of portraying the supernatural in art, but paradoxically Lee herself constantly turned to representing the supernatural and defined it as that 'which is beyond and outside the limits of the possible, the rational, the explicable – that supernatural which is due not to the logical faculties,

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<sup>1</sup> Vernon Lee, 'Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art', in *Belcaro: Being an Essay on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London, 1881), pp. 70-105 (p. 74).

arguing from wrong premises, but to the imagination wrought upon certain physical surroundings' ('Notes', p. 76). The 'real supernatural', she argues is 'born of the imagination and its surroundings, the vital, the fluctuating, the potent' ('Notes', p. 80). The supernatural for Lee is the impossible, irrational and inexplicable which the imagination evokes, a supernatural that is paradoxically a product outside of nature but also within nature, for it is fashioned by the human mind.

Lee's uneasy definition of the supernatural exemplifies the Victorian struggle to arrive at a conclusion both about supernatural events themselves, and what exactly the term meant, since it could define a natural, unnatural, or newly naturalised phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> Lee struggled to encapsulate the supernatural as outside of nature while at the same time locating it within the imagination, suggesting, with mental scientists, that the mind could be unknown to itself. She also tried to show that the supernatural could not be depicted in art while returning to the subject in her writing again and again.

Indeed, she was so anxious to divest art of any meaning outside of itself (especially the supernatural) that she tried to theorise a psychology of aesthetics, attempting to make the study of art a scientific project in her work 'Beauty and Ugliness' (1897) and *Music and its Lovers: An Empirical Study of Emotion and Imaginative Responses in Music* (1932). This chapter explores the links between aestheticism and ghostliness that Lee repudiated and yet evoked, and demonstrates that Lee's efforts to dissociate aesthetics and the supernatural only pushed them more closely together.

Lee's identification of the tensions as well as the connections between aestheticism and the supernatural situate her within a tradition in Victorian aestheticism which linked art and the Gothic. Walter Pater's seminal *The Renaissance* (1873), for

example, suggests that the power of Da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa' lies in her embodiment of the supernatural, portraying her as a kind of Gothic succubus: 'She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave.'<sup>3</sup> Catherine Maxwell suggests that Pater's *Mona Lisa* is here depicted as a *femme fatale*, a figure who would appear again at 'the literature of the *fin-de-siècle*', which was concerned with 'the connections between the portrait, the double, and death'.<sup>4</sup> Lee's work could easily fit into this kind of Gothic aestheticism; certainly, there is something of the *femme fatale*, or of Pater's *Mona Lisa*, in the painting of Medea da Carpi in Lee's ghost story 'Amour Dure' (1887), whose mouth 'looks as if it could bite or suck like a leech.'<sup>5</sup> However, Lee's writing complicates this kind of easy categorisation and transgresses boundaries both between literary genres and social identities. Women in Lee are feminine *and* vampiric as in the case of 'Amour Dure', and they are also haunting. Female identity is unstable and evades capture: in 'Dionea' (1890), for example, Dionea escapes depiction in art, an evasion which places her alongside Lee's own anxieties about the (im)possibilities of portraying the supernatural in

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<sup>2</sup> See Bown, Burdett, and Thurschwell.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (Chicago: Pandora, 1978), p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Maxwell, 'From Dionysus to 'Dionea': Vernon Lee's Portraits', *Word and Image*, 13 (1997), 253-69 (p. 253). Maxwell lists both Lee's 'Oke of Okehurst' and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as examples. Elisabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), also articulates the connections between death, art and the woman. Both critics bring up disturbing questions about a society which consistently describes evil or dangerous women and which links women and death in art. Bronfen outlines the ongoing problem of why our culture finds the image of dead women beautiful. Maxwell addresses the question by suggesting that sometimes the *femme fatale* 'can celebrate, albeit in a disguised mode, a female strength, passion and energy, which are in counterpoint to the woman as domestic angel' ('Dionysus', p. 256). For more on the figure of the *femme fatale* in the Victorian period, see for example, Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Bram Dijkstra, *Evil Sisters: the Threat of Female Sexuality and the Cult of Manhood* (New York: Knopf, 1996); Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), and Rebecca Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late Victorian Femme Fatale: the Kiss of Death* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Lee, 'Amour Dure' in *Hauntings: The Supernatural Stories*, (Ashcroft: Ash-Tree Press, 2002), pp. 7-30 (p. 13).

art.<sup>6</sup> Lee's use of Gothic elements (such as ghosts, haunted paintings, statues that come to life) instead of serving to exorcise the supernatural from her aesthetic writing, rather accentuate its ghostly elements.

After all, in Lee, art kills. In 'Amour Dure' the painting of Medea da Carpi leads to Spiridon Trevka's death. In 'Oke of Okehurst' (1886) Alice Oke believes she is the embodied ghost of her ancestor based on their uncanny resemblance in a painting. Alice's husband, Mr. Oke, becomes convinced Alice is having an affair with a ghost and believing he sees the phantom, accidentally kills his wife.<sup>7</sup> Art is always the source of the ghostly in Lee's supernatural stories, and her paintings and statues are haunted despite herself. Although Lee's stories usually offer a psychological explanation (for example, that Alice's husband's jealousy caused him to hallucinate the phantom lover), this only reinforces the contradictions in her writings: Lee's stories have ghosts, but they might just be products of the mind.

Talia Schaffer and Donald Lawler have pointed to ways in which aesthetic writers used the Gothic in order to work through their anxieties about aestheticism, their personal lives, contemporary social problems, and their own writing.<sup>8</sup> For Lee, however, Gothic themes and elements failed to offer a means of rectifying the differences she felt were

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<sup>6</sup> Lee, 'Dionea', in *Hauntings: The Supernatural Stories*, pp. 31-49.

<sup>7</sup> Lee, 'Oke of Okehurst', in *Hauntings: The Supernatural Stories*, pp. 51-86. First published in 1886 as 'A Phantom Lover'.

<sup>8</sup> In *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), for example, Talia Schaffer argues Ouida (1839-1908) 'was instrumental in developing and popularising the genre of the aesthetic novel in the 1880s' (p. 32). For Ouida, the Gothic offered 'a way of conceptualising women's feelings about their roles in the men's power dynamic' (p. 127), an important concern for women writing in the late nineteenth century. Similarly, Donald Lawler demonstrates how Oscar Wilde also used the Gothic in his aesthetic writings: '[t]o a significant extent, the foundations of *Dorian Gray*, *Salome*, and 'The Sphinx' as decadent masterpieces seem dependent on Wilde's decision to use the gothic as the most effective means for resolving artistically the competing claims of the aesthetic, sexual, tragic, and supernatural aspects of works representing portions of his own inner life' (Donald Lawler, 'The Gothic Wilde', in *Rediscovering Oscar Wilde*, ed. by C. George Sandulescu [Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1994], pp. 249-268 [pp. 262-63]).

inherent in the supernatural and art. In a truly Gothic way, Lee's work became haunted by what haunted Lee: the fact that art could not be quantified and was both familiar and unfamiliar, uncanny in its resemblance to and difference from the supernatural.

Her stories 'Dionea', 'The Doll' (1900), and 'The Legend of Madame Krasinka' (1890), show how art and the supernatural actually intersect. Dionea is an orphan girl, washed up on the shore of an Italian village, who seems to have a strange and powerful influence over everyone around her. She is depicted as a kind of lost idol or goddess whose beauty persuades the artist Waldemar to use her as his model. Although Waldemar tries to sculpt her, Dionea eludes capture, and shows how art cannot contain her beauty. Perhaps Lee here is subtly alluding to Edgar Allen Poe's 'The Strange Case of M. Valdemar' (the alternative spelling to Waldemar). Like Waldemar, Valdemar attempts to capture the uncapturable, in this case death itself, but the warning in both stories is clear: art, death, and the supernatural are elusive, transcending the human body and Lee's short story.

Although Dionea fits into Lee's model of aestheticism by demonstrating that art cannot depict the supernatural, problematically Dionea is not only a possible deity, she is art itself. The narrator comments on the fact that Waldemar treats Dionea as an object whose only purpose is to be copied:<sup>9</sup> 'I could never believe that an artist could regard a woman so utterly as a mere inanimate thing, a form to copy, like a tree or flower. Truly he carries out his theory that sculpture knows only the body, and the body scarcely considered as human' (p. 45). 'Dionea' is also an inversion of the Pygmalion myth. While Aphrodite eventually transforms the statue of Galatea into a real woman and lover,

in Lee's work, Dionea is herself becoming increasingly more like a statue.<sup>10</sup> The narrator writes: 'How strange is the power of art! Has Waldemar's statue shown me the real Dionea, or has Dionea really grown more strangely beautiful than she was before?' (p. 46). The real Dionea, at least for the male gazes of the narrator and Waldemar, is a work of art, a thing to be admired and copied. 'Dionea' is suggestive about the links between art and the supernatural, their slippery nature and how both elude capture in this story.

Both 'The Legend of Madame Krasinka' and 'The Doll' express anxieties about the role of art and the supernatural in writing. In 'Madame Krasinka', the eponymous heroine sees a sketch of an old woman known locally as the Sora Lena who committed suicide. Madame Krasinka becomes fascinated by the woman's sketch and sad history, and at a costume ball comes disguised as the old woman. After the ball, she believes that she has become the ghost of the Sora Lena, and she unconsciously follows the woman's old patterns. The story culminates in her attempting to hang herself, just as the Sora Lena had done, but she is saved by the apparition of the woman herself. Madame Krasinka's attempts to represent the supernatural in art are so successful that she becomes possessed by a ghost. Her costume so convincingly takes on the traits of the Sora Lena, that Madame Krasinka actually becomes her.<sup>11</sup>

In 'The Doll' the narrator is fascinated by a life-sized doll, an exact replica of a Count's dead-wife. She feels such sympathy for the doll (which seems to her deeply

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<sup>9</sup> For discussions of the woman as art object, and the male gaze see Bronfen and Kathy Alexis Psomiades's *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Lee evokes many Greek myths in her writing, probably to give greater symbolic resonance to her characters. For example, Dionea may refer to Dionysus, the god of wine, but it may also refer to Dione, whose name means 'divine queen'. Significantly, Medea, the femme fatale in 'Amour Dure' means 'cunning'. For more on these characters and myths, see, for example, Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 2 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955).

<sup>11</sup> Lee, 'The Legend of Madame Krasinka', in *Hauntings: The Supernatural Stories*, pp. 287-304.

unhappy) that she arranges to buy it, and then burns it, 'put[ting] an end to her sorrows.'<sup>12</sup> Once again, art in this story so completely captures the supernatural – in this case the unhappiness of a dead woman – that the art must be destroyed. Art in Lee *is* supernatural, and in the world of her stories, art always has the most power and potential. Lee's discomfort with the supernatural in her writing is marked by the conclusion of the story: the doll must be burned, and removed from the story, in order to put its, and Lee's own, anxieties to rest.

Lee is haunted by her attempts, and failures, to find an aestheticism defined by materialism:<sup>13</sup> she wanted an art that was materialistic, not spiritual, even when it was drawing from spiritual or supernatural themes.<sup>14</sup> Angela Leighton argues that 'Victorian aestheticism is essentially a materialistic creed' and '[t]hat 'sentiment of the body,' no longer spirited into otherworldliness but fleshed with sense, pervades both English and

<sup>12</sup> Lee, 'The Doll', in *Hauntings: The Supernatural Stories*, pp. 277-83 (p. 283).

<sup>13</sup> For the Victorians, materialism signified the dangers that new scientific theories (such as evolution theory) posed to the Christian (and any) spiritual faith. See Oppenheim, pp. 1-3, who suggests that spiritualism was in part a reaction against Victorian materialism.

<sup>14</sup> In 'Resurrections of the Body: Women Writers and the Idea of the Renaissance', in *Unfolding the South: Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers and Artists in Italy*, ed. by Alison Chapman and Jane Stabler (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 222-38, Angela Leighton argues that aestheticism is essentially invested in materialism. In her discussion of Pater's *Mona Lisa*, Leighton suggests that Pater is creating 'the principles of an aesthetic Gothicism which will accompany ideas of the Renaissance for the rest of the century. Art offers a (fake) resurrection of the flesh in the cause, not of reviving the past, but of suggesting the modernity and scepticism of the present. It resurrects the body, not for eternal but for material life. It is not a person, La Gioconda, but matter itself which ghosts the picture of Mona Lisa. Who she is or was, her eccentrically drawn-out history of incarnations, resolves into eyelids and hands' (p. 225). For Leighton, the relationship of aestheticism and the supernatural is problematic, suggesting that aestheticism was concerned with form and the 'intrinsic' nature of beauty, instead of what art might represent. Psomiades's *Beauty's Body* centres on a similar theme, demonstrating that aestheticism had become increasingly materialistic by making the icon of aestheticism, the female body, into a form of commodification: 'femininity works as a signifying system to mediate the relationship between autonomous art and commodity culture in the second half of the nineteenth century' (pp. 2-3). She too points out, however, the connection to the Gothic, suggesting that the female body can be frightening, and even dangerous because in adopting the dress and appearance of the aesthete, she is also demonstrating an 'ability to take on different kinds of femininity at will, that gender itself is not an absolute category' (p. 156), a possibility which puts femininity itself at risk.

French aestheticism. The physics rather than metaphysics of being attract the aesthete'.<sup>15</sup> In her discussion of ghost stories by Lee she writes that '[i]magined as a kind of stenograph, a machine to catch voices, the ghost story provides the only means, mechanical and unbelievable, with which to manage the supernatural' ('Ghosts', p. 4). Leighton further argues that in Lee's 'A Wicked Voice' (1887), Zaffirino's voice, '[t]his confusion of flesh and mechanism, the performer denatured into pure instrument, gives the song an inescapable and pervasive body' ('Ghosts', p. 5). While Leighton argues that in Lee art is haunted by its own materialism, emphasis on form, and commodity, I suggest that Lee's aestheticism, in particular her writings on music, offers an alternative vision in which art is uncanny, not because it is materialistic, but because it can never achieve the materialism that Lee desires for it. Throughout her literary career, Lee was to engage in a radical and sustained embrace and rejection of the supernatural. In an examination of Lee's aesthetic and supernatural texts, as well as the links between Lee's writing, spiritualism, and the SPR, this chapter suggests that despite herself, Lee's was to be a supernatural aestheticism.

### **Lee's Ghostly Aestheticism: Haunting James, Genre, Identity and Literary Periods**

Lee was at the forefront of aesthetical writing at the end of the century, and she knew and interacted with many of the most important literary figures of her day.<sup>16</sup> She met Oscar Wilde in 1881 and had a mutually influential relationship with Henry James, whom she

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<sup>15</sup> Angela Leighton, 'Ghosts, Aestheticism and Vernon Lee', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28 (2000), 1-14 (p. 2).

<sup>16</sup> She published prolifically on aesthetics, both in journal essays and books like *Belcaro* (1881), *Juvenilia* (1887), *Laurus Nobilis* (1909), *Beauty and Ugliness* (1912), *The Beautiful* (1913), and *Art and Man* (1924)



satirised in her short story 'Lady Tal' (1911) and to whom she dedicated her aesthetic novel, *Miss Brown* (1884). Maxwell argues that, in the case of Lee's ghost stories,

James had appropriated or come to possess the stories in much more than a simple borrowing of motifs. In his own later supernatural stories he was to enlarge upon a particular feature of Lee's work [. . .]: the margin of ambiguity she creates in her studies so that they can be read simultaneously as both psychological studies of obsessive states of mind and supernatural occurrences. [. . .] in doing this, James was to complicate the distinction he makes [. . .] between the real and the fantastic; a complication of which Lee herself was always very much aware.<sup>17</sup>

That both Lee and James wrote in such a way as to complicate the real and the supernatural suggests how genre cannot be rigidly policed: genre itself is haunted by its inability to enforce strong boundaries. Furthermore, Lee and James's relationship is suggestive about the ghostliness inherent in writing and influence. Maxwell describes their relationship as 'an extremely complicated affair of mutual acknowledgement, mutual influence, and mutual grievance' (p. 268). She argues that in *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), James is attacking the figure of Medea in Lee's 'Amour Dure', 'which seems to signal the way in which Lee and her writing has 'possessed' James' imagination and bears witness to the efficacious haunting of her male rival's consciousness' (p. 269). Although Maxwell points to the ways in which Lee influenced James, she does not examine how these writers blur the boundaries of authorship. Not only were Lee and James blurring the lines between fact and fiction, they were also blurring authorial lines,

influencing one another's writing, and haunting each other's stories, making indistinct the separation between aestheticism and the supernatural.

Like her aesthetic contemporaries Pater and Wilde, Lee 'shared [the] conviction of the desirability of a perfect fusion of content and form'.<sup>18</sup> She believed that art could be judged only in terms of the piece of artwork itself: '[t]he goodness of the form must not be a fittingness to something outside and separate from the form, it must be intrinsic to the form itself.'<sup>19</sup> For Lee, we are not meant to seek in art our own emotions and desires, but rather, we must appreciate what is already there. Lee's idea that art has intrinsic value extends to her discussion of art's purpose, which she argues is an ethical one: 'though art has no moral meaning, it has a moral value; art is happiness, and to bestow happiness is to create good.'<sup>20</sup> For Lee, art had benefits for the spiritual health of a person: 'by its essential nature, by the primordial power it embodies, all Beauty, and particularly Beauty in art, tends to fortify and refine the spiritual life of the individual.'<sup>21</sup>

In 'Notes on the Supernatural in Art' Lee emphasises many of the aesthetic points she makes elsewhere, namely the importance of form, and an understanding of art's intrinsic value in an appreciation of art. According to Lee, 'mature artists [ . . . ] see only as much as within art's limits,' ('Notes', p. 87) they are restricted by their form, and it is for this reason that they can never capture the supernatural in their art: 'For the supernatural is essentially vague and art is necessarily essentially distinct: give shape to the vague and it ceases to exist' ('Notes', p. 74). Her emphasis on form also suggests that

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<sup>17</sup> Maxwell, 'From Dionysus', p. 267. According to Maxwell, 'Lee produced her supernatural tales long before James wrote his, a fact he acknowledged in 1890 when he thanked her for sending him a copy of *Hauntings*' (p. 267).

<sup>18</sup> Hilary Fraser, *Beauty and Belief: Aesthetics and Religion in Victorian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 205.

<sup>19</sup> Lee, 'The Child in the Vatican', in *Belcaro*, pp. 17-48 (p. 40).

<sup>20</sup> Lee, 'Ruskinism: The Would-Be Study of Conscience', in *Belcaro*, pp. 198-229 (p. 229).

she wants her writing to be contained in rigidly separated genres, making clear distinctions between the ghost story, for example, and historical writing. Paradoxically, she suggests that trying to give shape to the supernatural (which she does in writing ghost stories) destroys it and makes the art simply what it was to begin with: '[t]he artists were asked to paint, or model, or narrate the supernatural [. . .] but see, the supernatural became the natural, the gods turned into man, the madonnas into mere mothers, the angels into armed striplings, the phantoms into mere creatures of flesh and blood' ('Notes', p. 75). For Lee, 'art had been a worse enemy [to the supernatural] than scepticism' ('Notes', p. 85) and in art '[t]he gods ceased to be gods not merely because they became like men, but because they became like anything too definite' ('Notes', p. 81).

Certainly in her short story 'The Gods and Ritter Tanhuser' (1913), Lee's writing seems to effectively kill off the godliness of the gods. The story depicts the Greek gods in their retirement, and satirises them as having embarrassing human flaws. They are arrogant, proud and foolish, and rarely live up to their reputation: even the goddess of love is undesirable.<sup>22</sup> This story seems to encapsulate all Lee hoped to prove about how art and the supernatural were 'at variance' ('Notes', p. 80). The gods are not like gods because they have been confined and defined within the story, which strips them of their mysterious, immaterial power. Indeed, at the end of 'Notes on the Supernatural in Art', Lee argues that any attempt to depict the supernatural in art would always be a failure:

Call we in our artist, or let us be our own artist; embody, let us see or hear

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<sup>21</sup> Lee, *Laurus Nobilis: Chapters on Art and Life* (London: Lane, 1916), p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Lee, 'The Gods and Ritter Tanhuser', in *Hauntings: The Supernatural Stories*, pp. 195-200.

this ghost, let it become visible or audible to others besides ourselves; paint us that vagueness, mould into shape that darkness, modulate into chords that silence – tell us the character and history of those vague beings. . . set to work boldly or cunningly. What do we obtain? A picture, a piece of music, a story, but the ghost is gone. In its stead we get oftenest the mere image of a human being; call it a ghost if you will, it is none. And the more complete the artistic work, the less remains of the ghost. (p. 94)

Significantly, to her list of arts which cannot capture the supernatural, Lee adds writing. Although Lee claims the supernatural can be evoked only if we keep it to ourselves ‘and remain satisfied if the weird and glorious figure haunt only our imagination’ (p. 104), she herself is never able to follow her own advice. She turns again and again to the ghost story, writing over and over the set of supernatural events she denies art can represent. Although it could be suggested that Lee was simply attempting to aestheticise the ghostly, using the ghost story as a form for telling beautiful and scary tales, the supernatural was actually ghosting her art, making her own aesthetics a haunted, uncanny one.

Indeed, Henry James, in a letter to his brother William calls Lee ‘uncanny’, which here seems to suggest both Lee’s familiarity and unfamiliarity or anxiety with her own work.<sup>23</sup> Ghosts in Lee are everywhere, even in her non-fiction, despite her assertion that they should stay within the confines of the imagination. ‘Ravenna and her Ghosts’ (1894) serves as an example. An essay on Ravenna in Italy, this non-fiction piece is curiously included in the collection of Lee’s supernatural tales *Pope Jacynth and More*

*Supernatural Tales* published by Peter Owen in 1956. The publisher's note explains that the essay 'is not a story, although in this vignette is retold a medieval legend of the supernatural. It has been included in this volume because it is not far from the stories which make up this book.'<sup>24</sup> Lee's fiction and non-fiction seem to blur together, making indistinct the differences between factual and fictional accounts, and demonstrating the slipperiness between genres. That ghosts populate both Lee's fiction and non-fiction suggests that she is ghosting genre: all genres are haunted by other genres, and no genre is pure.<sup>25</sup> For example, Lee's 'Ravenna' is an example of travel writing, history, ghost story, folklore and memoir. Genre's generic differences are uncanny in their ultimate similarity, asking questions about the nature of genre itself, and also straining the boundaries that Lee sets up for herself, between art and the supernatural, and fiction and non-fiction.

In 'Ravenna', Lee's writing demonstrates a constant evoking and exorcising of the ghosts she finds in the Italian town of that name, and her first impression of the town is immediately overshadowed by ghosts:

All round the church lay brown grass, livid pools, green rice-fields covered with clear water reflecting the red sunset streaks; and overhead, driven by storm from the sea, the white gulls, ghosts you might think, of

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Maxwell, 'From Dionysus', p. 269.

<sup>24</sup> Lee, 'Ravenna and her Ghosts', in *Pope Jacynth and More Supernatural Tales* (London: Owen, 1956) pp. 124-46 (p. 125).

<sup>25</sup> For more on genre theory, see Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 221-52.

the white-sailed galleys of Theodoric, still haunting the harbour of Classis.<sup>26</sup>

She then attempts to lay to rest these ghosts by emphasising the people that live there: 'Since then, as I hinted, Ravenna has become the home of dear friends, to which I periodically return, in autumn, or winter or blazing summer, without taking thought of any of the ghosts' (p. 127). Lee continues to populate the town, attempting to dissociate it from the ghostly by suggesting that the past which might have haunted it is so remote as to be negligible: '[t]hat is the thing about Ravenna. It is, more than any of the Tuscan towns, more than most of the Lombard ones, modern, and full of rough, dull, modern life; and the past which haunts it comes from so far off, from a world with which we have no contact' (p. 129). But Lee inevitably resurrects the ghosts again: 'Little by little, one returns to one's first impression and recognises that this thriving little provincial town with its socialism and its *bonification* is after all a nest of ghosts, and little better than the churchyard of centuries' (p. 131). At the end of her essay, she cannot resist once again haunting her text, attaching a Gothic legend originating from Ravenna, in which every week a ghostly hunt runs through the forest in pursuit of a young woman.

Ghosts literally appear in Lee's writings, but they play more than a thematic role. As Peter Buse and Andrew Stott's *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* reminds us,

the most sustained engagements this century with the figure of the ghost do not revolve around thinkers attending séances, but rather in the texts of what has come to be called theory. [. . . ] [M]odern theorists, the inheritors

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<sup>26</sup> Lee, 'Ravenna', p. 126. Theodoric is the 'King of the Goths' (p. 137), the Ostrogothic barbarian whose ghost still lingers over the Ravenna he once commanded, and who is himself haunted by the men he killed

(and deformers) of the Enlightenment, find the trope of spectrality a useful theoretical tool.<sup>27</sup>

According to Buse and Stott, who cite Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* as an example of ghosts in theory, ghosts and ghostliness are not only spectral beings but also act as abstracts for ways of conceptualising theory, history and identity itself. Lee's writings are haunted by her other writings, which results in a kind of ghostly meta-text about haunting itself. She is also haunted by her sense of and desire for the past, by her own self, and by her inability to exorcise from herself her anxieties about the supernatural. For while Lee desires to abject the supernatural from her work, it still influences her, coming back to haunt her in her writing. She desires to kill off the supernatural with her art as she promises in 'Notes on the Supernatural', but she cannot do it. Art, which is meant to be a matter of form, is as unfixable as the supernatural itself.

Indeed, Lee's identity also seems inchoate, as if she is unable to police her opinions about either the supernatural or her own sense of self. Critical discussions of Lee's ghost stories have focused on how Lee was conflicted about her identity by referring to the repressed or subversive sexuality which Lee's ghosts help bring to the surface. Lee's relationships with women made her identity unstable in the eyes of a society which would have demanded heterosexual relationships.<sup>28</sup> Ambivalent sexuality

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during his reign.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, 'Introduction', in *Ghosts*, ed. by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, pp. 1-20 (pp. 5-6).

<sup>28</sup> Many critics argue that Lee's anxieties about same-sex desire emerge in her ghost stories. In "A Wicked Voice": On Vernon Lee, Wagner, and the Effects of Music', *Victorian Studies*, 35 (1992), 385-408, Carlo Caballero argues that in 'A Wicked Voice', the singer Zaffirino represents castration, the 'erod[ing] differences [. . .] between the dead and the living, the past and the present, the male and the female' (p. 389). For Caballero, 'sexual mutability [. . .] proliferated' (p. 404) in Lee's supernatural stories. Catherine Maxwell also discusses 'A Wicked Voice', arguing that Zaffirino is decidedly effeminate, which not only indicates possible male-male desire between Zaffirino and Magnus, but also brings up questions of androgyny ('Dionysus', p. 262). Perhaps Peter G. Christensen states this idea most explicitly in "A

haunted the mainstream society, and to a certain degree probably haunted Lee herself.<sup>29</sup> Particularly Lee's supernatural stories demonstrate examples of homoerotic desire and repressed sexuality, but my interest takes this to a wider scope, examining Lee's conflicted identification with and anxieties about the supernatural, how this was reflected in her theories on aestheticism, and their relation to the fundamental contradictions in her work. I am interested in the ways in which, despite herself, her aesthetic and supernatural writings are inextricably intertwined.

Lee's most recent biographer, Vineta Colby, whose work 'is an attempt to read [Lee's] entire work in its fullest context – biographical, literary, and intellectual,' outlines the difficulty of attempting to place into any literary category an author as diverse and as contradictory as Vernon Lee: 'In the end, Vernon Lee fits no single category. She was too late to be a Victorian, too early to be a Modernist. She was a nonmilitant feminist, a sexually repressed lesbian, an aesthete, a cautious socialist, a secular humanist. In short,

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Wicked Voice": Vernon Lee's Artist Parable', *Lamar Journal of the Humanities*, 15 (1989), 3-15, claiming that not only does Zaffirino represent castration, but that hearing him sing has the power to turn the listener into a woman (p. 8). In *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History and the Victorian Female Intellectual* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), Christa Zorn explores female desire in Lee, implying that Lee's 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' 'favours a woman-centred and perhaps even a lesbian perspective, as suggested by [Prince Alberic's] image, which has been established as an icon of same-sex love in *fin-de-siècle* literature' (p. 156). Critics like Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Dennis Denisoff have suggested that Lee's aesthetic writings also demonstrate her anxieties about same-sex desire. In "'Still Burning from this Strangling Embrace": Vernon Lee on Desire and Aesthetics', in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. by Richard Dellamora, pp. 21-41, Psomiades finds that in Lee's novel *Miss Brown*, there is evidence of lesbian desire between Miss Brown and Sacha Elaguine, a desire which Miss Brown finds both thrilling and horrifying. In 'The Forest Beyond the Frame: Picturing Women's Desires in Vernon Lee and Virginia Woolf', in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. by Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), pp. 251-69, Denisoff suggests, however, that Lee's aesthetic writings allow her to explore her own hidden desires: Lee [. . .] combined the visual genre with a feminist aestheticism [. . .]. Doing so allowed [her] to take essentialising artistic conventions that hindered individual exploration and self-expression and reconfigure them into literary tools of contestation for women who wished to articulate their unsanctioned emotional needs and desires (p. 251).

<sup>29</sup> Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) suggests that lesbians are socially ghostly, and that they have been neglected for so long that they seem to haunt the boundaries of mainstream society. While hers is a study of contemporary culture, and her focus on an examination of the lesbian in film, she points to the idea that ambivalent sexuality can be linked to ghostliness.



she was protean.<sup>30</sup> Lee herself seemed to be aware of her own unfixable nature, claiming 'And if I contradict myself, why, I contradict myself.'<sup>31</sup>

Lee was obsessively fascinated with the ghosts of an idealised historic past.<sup>32</sup> Her *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880) explores the culture and especially the music of Italy, which were for her subjects of intense interest and even obsession.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, her focus on Italy suggests that she may also have been drawn to Catholicism with its emphasis on spirituality and ritual. Perhaps for Lee the religious and numinous was something only an older and inaccessible culture could adequately address, a mysticism which escapes contemporary culture because it had become too modern and rational. But although Lee's writings suggest her longing for the past, her work also places her in the centre of the literary and cultural trends of the late Victorian period. The aesthetic movement flourished at the end of the century, coinciding with the enormous rise in the popularity and production of supernatural fiction. Lee's writings blur distinctions between historical periods, literary genres, and identities, a merging of texts and themes which made her deeply anxious about the loss of control in her own writing.

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<sup>30</sup> Vineta Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2003), p. xii.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Colby, p. xi.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Catherine Maxwell's 'Vernon Lee and the Ghosts of Italy', in *Unfolding the South*, ed. by Alison Chapman and Jane Stabler, pp. 201-21, which 'explores the imaginative importance of the past' for Lee whose 'writing on history, memory and association is pervaded by a form of imaginative perception and interpretation which she identifies with ghosts and ghostliness' (p. 201). In addition, Carlo Caballero suggests that Lee 'was haunted by the past. In her writing the past assumes the character of a ghost, an ineffable presence evoked by a place, a song, a picture from long ago' (p. 387). See also Peter Gunn, *Vernon Lee: Violet Paget, 1856-1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964). Gunn suggests that 'it was with the heightened sensibility of one in love that she approached the whole period' (p. 65).

<sup>33</sup> Lee, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (London, 1880). See also Hilary Fraser, 'Regarding the Eighteenth Century: Vernon Lee and Emilia Dilke Construct a Period', in *The Victorians and the Eighteenth Century: Reassessing the Tradition*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 223-49. Both Lee and Dilke, who I discussed in the previous chapter, were creatively drawn to aestheticism and the ghost story. While Dilke uses ghosts as a powerful symbol for the female struggle for political and legal recognition, Lee is radically ambiguous about ghosts and haunted by her inability to resist writing about them.

The next section will examine the ways in which Lee attempts to regain control: at the turn of the century and until she died, Lee focused her energies on studying, categorising, defining and limiting aestheticism.

### Case Study: 'Beauty and Ugliness'

As part of her mission to police aestheticism Lee attempted to incorporate empirical methodology into her aesthetic theories, and having read much of the writings on psychology of her day, decided that a theory of psychological aesthetics would best allow her to quantify, categorise, and make conclusions about the physical and mental response to art. In William James' *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), 'she found psychological corroboration for the connection of mind and body' (Colby, p. 154), a connection she had hoped to make in her psychological aesthetics. Besides James, she also read Oswald Külpe's *Outlines of Psychology* (1895), and quoted him in the opening pages of the volume containing most of her works on psychological aesthetics, *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (1911).<sup>34</sup> Külpe wrote that '[w]e may conjecture that the aesthetic feeling originates in a relation of the perceived impression to the reproduction it excites.'<sup>35</sup> My focus will be on the essay 'Beauty and Ugliness' (1897) co-written by Lee and her emotional and literary partner Kit Anstruther-Thomson (1857-1921), a study that aims to find recordable physiological responses to the art they observed.<sup>36</sup> They report that

<sup>34</sup> Oswald Külpe, *Outlines of Psychology: Based Upon the Results of Experimental Investigation*, trans. by Edward Bradford Titchener (London: Sonnenschein, 1895).

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Lee and C. Anstruther-Thomson, *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies on Psychological Aesthetics* (London: Lane, 1911), p. vi.

<sup>36</sup> Lee, 'Beauty and Ugliness' in *Beauty and Ugliness*, pp. 156-239. William James, according to Vineta Colby, 'allowed for the physiological responses' (p. 154) in his researches that Kit and Lee had hoped to find.

our facts and theories, if at all correct, would establish that the aesthetic phenomenon as a whole is the function which regulates the perception of Form, and that the perception of Form, in visual cases certainly, and with references to hearing presumably, implies an active participation of the most important organs of animal life, a constant alternation in vital processes requiring stringent regulation for the benefit of the total organism. (pp. 156-7)

During their research they posed the question 'What is the process of perceiving Form, and what portions of our organism participate therein?' (p. 161). Using empirical research, they attempted to create 'stringent regulation[s]' for objectively studying subjective reactions to art.

The process of gathering data for the study involved examining a work of art, and keeping a detailed record of any changes in body temperature, heart rate, movements of the body and respiration etc., that might occur during this examination. For example, in the case of a chair that was used for the purpose of the study, Kit writes:

in accompanying the movements connected with height [of the chair], the breathing seems limited by the limitations of the height; the breath does not rise as high as it can, but follows the rise of the eye to the top of the chair and then changes direction. There seems to be a pull sideways of the thorax, and the breath seems to stretch out in width as the balance swings across and the eyes alter their movement across the chair; then follows the expiration. (p. 165)

In the notes taken by Kit, and written into theories by Lee, it seems that the body moved in accordance with the art it examined. Kit and Lee were attempting to blur traditional boundaries between aesthetics and empirical science. Earlier on in the century, the borders between disciplines were more malleable, and gentlemen scholars could write scientific articles alongside educated scientists. For example, the *Athenaeum* regularly featured articles about the arts and the sciences, and there was considerable blurring and borrowing of ideas between the two. By the end of the century, however, the ratification of different subjects as distinct and professional meant that the arts and sciences were no longer amalgamated.<sup>37</sup> Kit and Lee's attempt to treat the two discourses as analogous was devastating to the project: their methods and evidence proved unconvincing and ultimately no scientific project could objectively assign why some art was pleasurable and some was not. Although reflective of contemporary interests in psychology (for example Karl Groos and Théodule Ribot admired their efforts) to make finite the infinite, Lee and Kit's study met with an ambiguous reception. Not only did it not get as much critical attention as Lee hoped, but much of the attention it did receive was negative. Professor Lipps heavily criticised their methods and results and to make matters worse, Bernard Berenson (1865-1959), an art critic and writer, claimed that the women had plagiarised his own ideas.<sup>38</sup>

The project was disastrous, not only because it damaged irreparably ties between Lee and Kit (who felt devastated by Berenson's accusations and exhausted by Lee's

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<sup>37</sup> For a history of emerging disciplines at the end of the century, see, for example, *Disciplinary at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Amanda Andersen and Joseph Valente (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), and George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (Oxford: Macmillan, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> See Colby and Gunn, who detail the aftermath of the publication of 'Beauty and Ugliness'. Karl Groos (1861-1946) and Théodule Ribot (1839-1916) were both influential psychologists at the *fin-de-siècle*. Theodor Lipps (1851-1914) researched in psychological aesthetics.

demanding work schedule), but also because it exposed the impossibility of attempting to transform art into science. This impossibility was something Lee would never accept and she tried to systematise art again in *Music and its Lovers: An Empirical Study of Emotion and Imaginative Responses in Music* in 1932, a project which took her twenty-five years to complete. To research her topic, Lee made questionnaires which asked how people responded to music.<sup>39</sup> According to Gunn, Lee was trying to 'explain tastes' (p. 229), but as with 'Beauty and Ugliness', *Music and its Lovers* could not achieve its ambition of making art appreciation an empirical science.

Lee's regrets about her writings surface in the collected edition of *Beauty and Ugliness* where, in the prefatory note to the essay of that name, as well as the conclusion, she apologises and revises her earlier theories about psychological aesthetics. In the preface she writes that her own attitudes towards aesthetics has changed but that Kit's remains the same: 'I wish to point out [. . .] that my own present theory of Aesthetic Empathy is the offspring, or rather only the modified version, of the theory set forth in the following essay ['Beauty and Ugliness'], a theory due mainly not only to my collaborator's self-observations, but [. . .] to her own generalisations upon it' (p. 154). She apologises in the conclusion for her methodology, claiming 'I had no standard of what constitutes psychological experimentation' (p. 352). And finally, in the conclusion, she abandons her earlier theory altogether:

In short, the plural pronoun employed by me in *Beauty and Ugliness* meant not *we two collaborators*, but *we, all mankind*, or at all events all mankind capable of formal aesthetic preference. [. . .] I really thought that

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<sup>39</sup> See Lee, *Music and Its Lovers: An Empirical Study of Emotion and Imaginative Responses to Music* (London, 1932).

everybody was 'we.' It was only when, reading Lipps [. . .] that I gave up the belief that the phenomena described by my collaborator must necessarily be taking place in some subconscious region of my own self.

(pp. 352-3)

Her rejection of not only her ideas, but also betrayal of Kit, suggests the unhappiness and the sense of failure with which Lee seemed to regard much of her aesthetic writings. Her comments in *Juvenilia* (1887) act as a foreshadowing to the later problems she would face in her aesthetic writing. In *Juvenilia*, Lee dismisses aesthetical questions as youthful, happy ones which have no real profound meaning. She writes: '[w]e were happier first. Decidedly, that is what I have been insisting all along. But while we were happy other folk were wretched and this convenient division of property and class cannot be kept up for good.'<sup>40</sup> This statement seems to be a gentle reminder to herself that she too, must move on, and that the empirical aesthetics she is seeking cannot be found.

Critics like Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Diana Maltz have analysed 'Beauty and Ugliness' in terms of the homoerotic tension between Kit and Lee, and what that says about Lee's aestheticism.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, Colby dismisses this chapter in Lee's life entirely,

<sup>40</sup> Lee, *Juvenilia: Being a Second Series of Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London, 1887), p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> When, for example, Kit and Lee observe a statue, Psomiades writes that '[a]esthetic experience is thus based in lesbian desire, both Vernon's desire for the embodied Kit, and both women's desire for the statue's revelation' ('Still Burning', p. 31). Aesthetic experience in Lee is a physical one, argues Psomiades, in which bodies can gaze on other bodies intellectually, artistically, and sexually. In '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 Psomiades, pp. 211-29, Diana Maltz also argues for a kind of sexually voyeuristic reading of the 'Beauty and Ugliness' experiments: '[t]he museum gallery was in fact a social arena where Anstruther-Thomson used her body to titillate an audience of female, upper-class devotees. [. . .] In Anstruther-Thomson's hands, this program [. . .] became instead a lively, liberatory forum for an aristocratic lesbian elite' (p. 213). See also Phyllis F. Manocchi, 'Vernon Lee and Kit Anstruther-Thomson: A Study of Love and Collaboration between Romantic Friends', *Women's Studies*, 12 (1986), 129-48. Other critics have also made connections between aestheticism, homoeroticism, and homosexuality. See, for example, Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

stating that 'she squandered valuable creative energy in measuring physiological reactions to specific works of art' (p. 335). Lee's desire and inability to quantify art, however, marks a *fundamental* crisis in Lee's aesthetics, placing her alongside the psychological thought of her day, and what she would have been horrified to recognise, the psychical research of her day as well.

### Lee and the Ghosts of the SPR

Like other late Victorian thinkers, Vernon Lee wanted to make quantifiable the unquantifiable. She was looking for evidence to explain art, just as the SPR were looking for evidence to explain supernatural phenomena. There is no record of how she felt about spiritualism, but Lee was openly dismissive of the ghosts of the SPR, and in the preface to *Hauntings* (1890) she writes:

Hence, my four little tales are of no genuine ghosts in the scientific sense; they tell of no hauntings such as could be contributed by the Society for Psychical Research, of no spectres that can be caught in definite places and made to dictate judicial evidence. My ghosts are what you call spurious ghosts (according to me the only genuine ones), of whom I can affirm only one thing, that they haunted certain brains, and have haunted, among others, my own and my friends.<sup>42</sup>

Lee was interested, not in the materialistic nature of ghosts, but rather in the ghosts that sprang from the imagination.

However, her language betrays her real interest: while the OED defines 'spurious' as 'illegitimate' and 'counterfeit', the term also means 'of material things'. Lee wants her

ghosts to be false, fictional and imaginary, but she also wants them to be *tangible*. She defines ghost in the following terms:

By *ghost* we do not mean the vulgar apparition which is seen or heard in told or written tales; we mean the ghost which slowly rises up in our mind, the haunter not of corridors and staircases, but of our fancies. [A ghost is] a vague feeling we can scarcely describe, a something pleasing and terrible which invades our whole consciousness, and which, confusedly embodied, we half dread to see behind us, we know not in what shape, if we look round. ('Notes', pp. 93-94).

Again her language suggests she is conflicted about what she means by ghosts. While she argues that real ghosts 'rise[s] up in our mind', she also suggests that they are 'confusedly embodied'. Indeed, this phrase aptly expresses Lee's perplexity not only about the nature of her ghosts, but also about the nature of the supernatural in her writing: she confusedly wants ghosts to be embodied while insisting that they escape materialisation.

Furthermore, Lee sharply dissociates herself from the SPR by suggesting that their only interest was in the physical evidence that could be obtained about ghosts instead of in the ethereal, imaginative ghosts that she assures us preoccupy her in her own ghost stories. The SPR was indeed invested in putting mediums to rigid scientific tests in order to discover whether they were fraudulent or not: mediums were placed in cabinets with their hands bound, and sometimes sitters held on to lengths of string attached to the medium's hands which would allow them to detect any movement. Searches of the séance room were conducted to rule out the use of fraudulent devices. Spiritualists also conducted these tests to prove to sceptics that the manifestations were real. The search for

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<sup>42</sup> Lee, *Hauntings*, 2nd edn (London: Lane, 1906), p. xi.



material evidence proved problematic and paradoxical for spiritualists, however, since spiritualism arose in part as a reaction against the materialism of Victorian science.<sup>43</sup> Spiritualism was meant to gift a new kind of spirituality to a society that had largely lost all faith, and that felt depressed by the materialism of modern society.

Despite their supposed distaste for materialism, however, spiritualists and psychical investigators alike were connecting the spirit back to the physical body of the medium. Spiritualists demonstrated this in their delight in full-form materialisations at séances, where ghosts, when touched or pinched, always felt very fleshy.<sup>44</sup> The investigators were also interested in the fleshliness of séances, since often in the darkened séance room touch was the only perceptible phenomenon. As SPR member Frank Podmore comments, 'It is then, upon this unexercised and uneducated sense of touch that the investigator at a dark séance has to rely almost exclusively, not merely to inform himself of what feats are being performed, but also to guard against the medium's complicity in the performance.'<sup>45</sup>

The SPR was not only interested in finding evidence to support a genuine spiritual experience, but also in bodily responses to haunting events. Just as Lee and Kit had attempted to monitor the ways in which the body responded to a work of art, the SPR was interested in the reactions of the body in a ghostly encounter. SPR member Charles Richet, for example, describes how the body reacts when it is in the presence of a ghost: '[t]he arrival of phantoms is nearly always heralded by a vague sensation of horror, the

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<sup>43</sup> Oppenheim, pp. 60-1. See also Steven Connor, 'The Machine in the Ghost: Spiritualism, Technology, and the "Direct Voice"' in *Ghosts*, ed. by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, pp. 203-55. Connor suggests that despite being a reaction against Victorian materialism, spiritualism was still a 'grotesque mimicry of materialist language and modes of thought' (p. 203).

<sup>44</sup> See Oppenheim and Owen.

<sup>45</sup> Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism*, ed. by R.A. Gilbert, *The Rise of Victorian Spiritualism*, 8 vols (London: Routledge, 2000), VII, pp. 197-98.

feeling of a presence coinciding with a cold breath' (p. 567). Richet also offers a bodily explanation for spiritual phenomena such as table-turning. He argues that while sometimes the movements are inexplicable,

in most of these cases, though not in all, these movements are to be explained by the unconscious movements of the subject. His muscles can be seen to contract, and as the least pressure will cause a table in unstable equilibrium to move, no other cause can reasonably assigned either for table-movements or automatic writing. (p. 401)

Careful measurements of the body show that it is simply muscular action that controls the table or pen, and for Richet, the body holds the key for unravelling the mysteries of spiritualism.

Spiritualist William Crookes's experiments suggested that the body could prove whether a medium was genuine or fraudulent. President of the SPR in the 1890s, Crookes is best known for his experiments with mediums, and in particular for his researches on the mediumship of Florence Cook and her spirit guide 'Katie King'.<sup>46</sup> He published his séance notes from the 1870s in the SPR Proceedings for 1889. In one séance with Florence Cook, he attached to her body

an electrical apparatus, called a galvanometer, by means of which the young woman became part of a mild electric circuitry. When Florence was attached to this contraption, Crookes assumed she could not impersonate a materialized spirit without producing telltale fluctuations in the galvanometer readings. (Oppenheim, pp. 345-46)

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<sup>46</sup> For more on Florence Cook and William Crookes see for example Owen and Oppenheim and Trevor H. Hall, *The Spiritualists: The Story of Florence Cook and William Crookes* (New York: Helix Press, 1963).

While his experiments were often criticised for their inconsistency and poorly thought-through methodology, and while, as in the case of Florence Cook, 'Katie King' materialised without his machine registering any change, Crookes nevertheless demonstrates the interest psychical researchers took in monitoring the body when it was confronted with spiritual phenomena.

While Lee and Kit were attempting to blur the boundaries between art and science in 'Beauty and Ugliness', psychical researchers were attempting to make the spirit and the material overlap. But here a problem arose: a close identification between the spiritual and the body was a materialistic creed. Janet Oppenheim argues that nineteenth-century philosophy was uneasy about the relationship that should exist between the mind and the body:

The problem was [. . .] significant to spiritualists and psychical researchers, for the independent existence of mind was, of course, an essential part of their argument against materialism. Whether dubbed mind, soul, spirit, or ego [. . .] such an entity distinct from brain tissue was requisite to rescue man from a state of virtual automatism, a mere bundle of physical and chemical properties. [. . .] Thus spiritualists and psychical researchers alike found themselves drawn to the infant study of the human mind from a scientific perspective. (Oppenheim, p. 207)

Like the psychical researchers and the spiritualists, Lee was caught between the body and the mind, between her monitoring of bodily responses to art, and the elusive nature of art itself. She was also caught between the logic she believed existed in art, and the illogic and impossibility of the supernatural that she claimed art could not capture and yet from

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which she constantly drew inspiration in her own writing. Unlike the psychical researchers and spiritualists, however, Lee was striving for the materialism they were seeking to escape. But although she would have liked to exorcise her demons, Lee was only successful in being haunted by the ghosts who would not leave her writing alone.

Despite the fact that she contends her ghosts are not those of the SPR, the fact that she is haunted by ghostliness in her writing suggests that her interest, just like the SPR's, is also in the ghosts of the mind. Indeed, as Oppenheim suggests, by the end of the century, the SPR, other psychical researchers and spiritualists were all increasingly interested in what was ghostly within the field of mental science. The ghosts of the SPR were sometimes the ghosts that 'haunted certain brains' (*Hauntings*, p. xi), suggesting that to an extent Lee's ghost stories were working within the same framework as the mental scientists of her day. That her ghost stories have been connected by recent critics to Henry James's psychological thrillers, strengthens the idea that her ghosts of the mind were not simply those of an imaginative past, but also that they were influenced by contemporary psychology.

Lee explores this notion in 'The Hidden Door' (1886). In this humorous Gothic tale, the satirically named Decimus Little (a man 'accustomed to think of himself as connected with extraordinary matters, and in some way destined for an extraordinary end'<sup>47</sup>) believes he has discovered the Secret Chamber of Hotspur Hall. Little accidentally opens the chamber and, believing he has released a terrible curse, flees the house in despair only to learn later from a housekeeper that the 'chamber' is actually where the servants dry the linen.

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<sup>47</sup> Lee, 'The Hidden Door', in *Hauntings: The Supernatural Stories*, pp. 321-38, (p. 321).

Here the only explanation is psychological: Little's overwrought imagination has been his undoing. Significantly, Little is a man fascinated by psychology: he 'read[s] about delusions in Carpenter's *Mental Physiology*' (p. 327), and is 'considerably interested in [. . .] the Society for Psychical Research' (p. 322). 'Carpenter' refers to William Benjamin Carpenter, one of spiritualism's harshest opponents. He believed that spiritualist phenomena could all be dismissed as either delusion on the part of the witnesses, the result of unconscious action or by some other natural explanation. His *Principles of Mental Physiology* was strongly critical of any belief in the supernatural and was a straightforward psychological text (Oppenheim, pp. 241-244).<sup>48</sup>

'The Hidden Door' is the only one of Lee's supernatural stories for which Lee offers no supernatural explanation. Curiously though, it is the man of empirical science, who studies contemporary psychology and who is 'open to arguments and evidence on all points' (p. 322), who believes he has come face to face with the supernatural. Despite Carpenter's warnings that supernatural events are the result of delusion, Little fully deludes himself, for here there really are no ghosts. Perhaps in denying the supernatural from the man interested in the SPR Lee is reiterating her distaste for the sorts of ghosts that the society was seeking, but it is also suggestive that she and Little share a similar fear of and desire for the ghostly: both try to abolish it, but find it haunting even in the most unlikely places.

Lee characterises Little as someone who might be inclined to see a ghost: a strong imagination, a belief in his own extraordinary fate, and an uneven temperament (he is given to 'impulses of lawlessness' [p. 322]). However, she also denies him the one element that she lends to all of her other stories: art. While in most of her supernatural

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<sup>48</sup> William Carpenter, *Principles of Mental Physiology* (London: Routledge, 1993). First published in 1874.

stories, ghosts emerge from paintings ('Amour Dure', 'Oke of Okehurst') or music ('Winthrop's Adventure', 'A Wicked Voice'), no ghosts emerge here at all, and this lack of the supernatural is due to the lack of art. Lee's aesthetics are built, not on the appreciation of the intrinsic nature of art's form, but instead on her desire to reject the supernatural while simultaneously writing about it. 'The Hidden Door' is both a ghost story and a humorous short story, a story which reaches through genres and explodes Lee's idea that art has the power to contain only what is intrinsic to itself. Lee spent a lifetime attempting to capture and put limits on beauty, never realising that the supernatural could redefine beauty, by freeing it from the impossible, and often arbitrary restrictions Lee imposed on herself in works like 'Beauty and Ugliness'.

### Lee's Phantom Wicked Voices

Lee loved music more than any other art form, and wrote about it from her 1880 publication of *Studies of Eighteenth Century in Italy* onwards. Quoting Pater, she summarises her view of music in 'Impersonality and Evolution in Music' (1882):

'All arts,' Mr. Pater has suggestively said, though perhaps without following to the full his own suggestion – 'All arts tend to the condition of music;' which saying sums up perfectly my own persuasion that the artistic element of all arts, which in each is perplexed and thwarted by non-artistic elements, exists in most unmixed condition in music, because music is in reality much less connected with life and its wants and influences than any other art.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Lee, 'Impersonality and Evolution in Music', *Contemporary Review*, 42 (1882), 840-58 (p. 857).

Lee's aesthetics demanded that music, like any other art form, should have no meaning outside itself, and that its value was due to its intrinsic essence: 'music is [. . .] the most formal and ideal of all arts, unique in the fact that the form it creates resembles and signifies nothing beyond itself' ('Impersonality', p. 856).

Despite this assertion, music in Lee is always associated with that which lies outside of its form: the supernatural and the uncanny. In 'Impersonality and Evolution in Music' she reviews psychical researcher Edmund Gurney's *The Power of Sound* (1880), which is concerned with the psychical aspects of sound and music.<sup>50</sup> Gurney's book suggests that music, and in particular the voice, has an intense and powerful influence over its listeners that is comparable to telepathic or mesmeric forces:

But given fairly adequate conditions, the immediate power of one being over the feelings of another seems at its maximum in a case where no external tools or appliances are involved, where nature and art appear one, where phenomena of absolute beauty can be presented as though part of the normal communication of man to man, and where in addition the use of the familiar words heightens the naturalness of address, and completes the directness and spontaneity of the effect. Many will attend when addressed in this way whose lives would otherwise lie wholly apart from the influence of beautiful and pure emotion. In the midst of this normal sad remoteness the effect of song on the masses is like a glimpse of infinite spiritual possibilities; and owing to the fewness of the moments where even the suggestion of a universal kinship in lofty sentiment

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<sup>50</sup> Edmund Gurney, *The Power of Sound* (London: Smith, Elder, 1880).

appears possible, such occasions seem to have a very singular and impressive significance in human life. (Gurney, p. 475)

Gurney argues that music transcends conventional perceptions, suggesting that listening to music is a supernatural experience. Lee may have felt uneasy with this aspect of Gurney's theory, since later in *Music and Its Lovers* she was trying to limit perception to music, not give it 'infinite spiritual possibilit[y]'.<sup>51</sup>

Lee did agree in many ways with Gurney's belief in the power of the voice, however, and she asserted that music depended on the performer.<sup>51</sup> The fact that she herself evokes the uncanny in music shows that she was both fascinated and anxious about the ways in which the supernatural could destroy rational control over art:

I believe [. . .] there exist musical forms common to all the composers of a given epoch, forms which they slightly alter and rearrange without removing the sense that such forms have been heard before, even as when we see a hitherto unknown member of a family whose face gives us the sense of having been seen before. ('Impersonality', p. 851)

Composers can unwittingly compose music they have never listened to before, but which they have always intrinsically heard, an occurrence which plagues Winthrop in 'Winthrop's Adventure: A Culture Ghost' (1881). Winthrop cannot decide whether the music that haunts him is the work of his own hand, or that of the ghost of a composer he witnessed in Italy and exclaims, 'Of course, I either composed it myself or heard it, but

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<sup>51</sup> Lee, 'Cherubino: A Psychological Art Fancy', in *Belcaro*, pp. 129-55 (p. 151).



which of the two was it?'<sup>52</sup> Winthrop's experience with music is an uncanny one in which the music is both deeply intimate with him, and also a horrible unknown.<sup>53</sup>

In 'A Wicked Voice', a version of 'Winthrop's Adventure' which Lee rewrote in *Hauntings*, Magnus is also eternally haunted by a music which may or may not be his own: '[m]y head is filled with music which is certainly by me, since I have never heard it before, but which still is not my own, which I despise and abhor: little trippings, flourishes and languishing phrases, and long-drawn, echoing cadences.'<sup>54</sup> For Magnus, both eventualities are disastrous: if the music is composed by a ghost, then he may be haunted forever, but if he has composed a piece that he despises, then it suggests there is also something uncanny about his very self. Part of Magnus is so unfamiliar to him that it writes horrible, haunting music.

In fact, Lee's own experience with singers and music is uncanny, for in *Studies on Eighteenth Century Music* she writes about pieces that she has never heard and perhaps never will hear, but that she still feels familiar with: 'it was a feeling of mingled love and wonder at the miracle of the human voice, which seemed the more miraculous that I had never heard great singers save in fancy.'<sup>55</sup> She is fascinated by the uncanny possibility of writing about music that is both absent and present, material and immaterial.

In her essay on music aesthetics, 'Chapelmaster Kreisler: A Study of Musical Romanticists', Lee also touches on themes of the uncanny in music. Lee's discussion

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<sup>52</sup> Lee, 'Winthrop's Adventure', in *Hauntings: The Supernatural Stories*, pp. 251-76 (p. 255).

<sup>53</sup> For information on music and fiction in the Victorian period, see for example, Alisa Clapp-Intyre, *Angelic Airs, Subversive Songs: Music as Social Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (London: Eurospan, 2002); *Idea of Music*, ed. by Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff; Michael P. Steinberg, *Listening to Reason: Culture, Subjectivity, and Nineteenth-Century Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), and Phyllis Weliver, *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction*.

<sup>54</sup> Lee, 'A Wicked Voice', in *Hauntings: The Supernatural Stories*, pp. 87-105 (p. 104).

<sup>55</sup> Lee, 'Introduction: For Maurice Five Unlikely Stories', in *Hauntings: Supernatural Stories*, pp. 177-91 (p. 187).

revolves around Johannes Kreisler, a character in E.T.A. Hoffmann's novels.<sup>56</sup> It is significant that Lee chooses Hoffmann's work as a means of articulating her ideas about music, particularly because Freud later uses Hoffmann in his definition of the uncanny ('Uncanny', pp. 219-56). Although Lee's essay predates Freud's theory of the uncanny, she seems to be aware of what Freud would term the uncanny in her understanding of music, and like him seems to perceive the uncanny elements in Hoffmann's stories. Despite herself, Lee was evoking the strange, and dark sides of music. Both 'Winthrop's Adventure' and 'A Wicked Voice' present a haunting voice which has the power to kill (in 'A Wicked Voice' Zaffirino murdered a woman with the power of his singing), and which defies capture as it both eludes and pursues Winthrop and Magnus.

In 'A Wicked Voice' the composer Magnus is haunted, not by the materialisation of a ghostly voice, but rather by its failure to materialise. In fact, very little in this story seems to fully materialise. The singer Zaffirino has a voice which could belong to man or a woman (p. 97) and he is physically described as being both feminine and masculine:

That effeminate fat face of his is almost beautiful [. . . ] I have seen faces like this, if not in real life, at least in my boyish romantic dreams, when I read Swinburne and Baudelaire, the faces of wicked, vindictive women. Oh Yes! he is decidedly beautiful, this Zaffirino, and his voice must have had the same sort of beauty and the same expression of wickedness. . . (p. 91)

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<sup>56</sup> Lee, 'Chapmaster Kreisler: A Study of Musical Romanticists', in *Belcaro*, pp. 106-28. Johannes Kreisler is a character in some of Hoffmann's novels, for example, *Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr nebst fragmentarischer Biographie des Kapellmeisters Johannes Kreisler in zufälligen Makulaturblättern* (1822). Kreisler is a tormented musical genius.

Zaffirino's sexual ambiguity suggests that he is not quite materialising as any gender at all.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, his very image is elusive, for when Magnus sings the portrait of Zaffirino 'keeps appearing and disappearing as the print wavers about in the draught' (p. 92). Despite the fact that the portrait seems visually ghostly, it represents the only real material vestige of Zaffirino. The fact that Magnus destroys the portrait, however, ripping it, and throwing it into the canals of Venice, suggests that like Lee, Magnus is haunted by his inability to produce materialism in his art.

After all, every time Magnus tries to compose, and to create new art, he is haunted by a melody which is just out of reach, rendering him incapable of writing anything at all:

as soon as I tried to lay hold of my theme, there arose in my mind the distant echo of that voice, of that long note swelled slowly by insensible degrees, that long note whose tone was so strong and so subtle.

There are in the life of an artist moments when, still unable to seize his own inspiration, or even clearly to discern it, he becomes aware of the approach of that long-invoked idea. A mingled joy and terror warn him that before another day, another hour have passed, the inspiration shall have crossed the threshold of his soul and flooded it with rapture. (p. 94)

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<sup>57</sup> Critics like Caballero and Christensen have discussed the homoerotic implications of Zaffirino's sexual ambiguity. See Patricia Pulham, 'The Castrato and the Cry in Vernon Lee's Wicked Voices', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 30 (2002), 421-37. Pulham also disusses the ambiguity of gender in Lee's 'A Wicked Voice', although she focuses on the ways in which the castrato is symbolic of the maternal voice haunting Lee's fiction (p. 423). See also Joe Law, 'The "perniciously homosexual art": Music and Homoerotic Desire in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*', in *The Idea of Music*, ed. by Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff, pp. 173-96. Using the example of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Law suggest that music and homosexuality are linked in nineteenth-century fiction. For more on connections between music and sexuality in the 1880s and 1890s, see also Ian Biddle, 'Of Mice and Dogs: Music, Gender and Sexuality at the Long Fin de Siècle', in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 215-26.

Ironically, Magnus's long awaited inspiration is not even his own composition, but instead Zaffirino's, whose voice he can never quite catch anyway. He hears 'a ripple of music' (p. 94), but then almost before he has registered it 'the sounds had ceased' (p. 95). Magnus increasingly becomes obsessed with this voice which is always just out of reach, and which he can never quite hear: 'My work was interrupted ever and anon by the attempt to catch its [the voice] imaginary echo' (p. 96). Significantly, Magnus himself uses the word 'imaginary', as if he knows he is searching for something that will never fully materialise.

Indeed, even in the fleeting moments when he does hear the voice, his body seems to dematerialise and becomes as ghostly as the voice that haunts him. As he hears the singing he says, 'A faintness overcame me, and I felt myself dissolve' (p. 95). When he hears the voice again he notes that he is becoming as immaterial and ethereal as the voice itself: 'it seemed to me that I too was turning fluid and vaporous, in order to mingle with these sounds as the moonbeams mingle with the dew' (p. 103). Magnus becomes more and more spectral, and by the conclusion, he is only a ghost of the composer he was before, unable to think of any music save the 'ghost-voice which was haunting me' (p. 96). He confesses that 'I am wasted by a strange and deadly disease. I can never lay hold of my inspiration', (p. 104) and begs for Zaffirino to sing once more (p. 105).

But Zaffirino, it seems, will not materialise anytime soon, since he was never fully materialised anyway. Magnus sees him twice, but the first time is in a dream (p. 93), and the second time is from a distant gallery which resembles 'a dark box in a half-lighted theatre' (p. 102). From this room, suggestive of the darkened rooms of the spiritualist séances, Magnus sees a ghost indeed, but the ghost is so spectral that by the

time he throws open the door upon the spirit, Zaffirino has disappeared into the ether and the room 'was as bright as a mid-day, but the brightness was cold, blue, vaporous, supernatural' (p. 104). At the end of the story we are left only with the supernatural, and Magnus is left with only the haunting traces of a voice he will never be able to exorcise.

In 'Impersonality and Evolution in Music' Lee explores the anxieties she later expresses in 'A Wicked Voice' about how music can evade categorization as being both a material and immaterial art form. Although she credits music with perfection because of its adherence to form, she contradicts herself by explaining how music *cannot* be contained by form: 'music is an art of emotional material, of material intimately connected with the realities of things, and of abstract, ideal form – of form unlike anything outside itself of which we have any experience' ('Impersonality', p. 843). Art is both realistic and abstract, material and able to escape materialism, both a matter of form but also a form which in its description is like nothing we have experienced before – in effect, the musical form she seems to be talking about (despite herself), is supernatural. In 'A Wicked Voice', music is also supernatural, and in this case the voice is compared to the devil himself: 'For what is the voice but the Beast calling, awakening that other Beast sleeping in the depths of mankind, the Beast which all great art has ever sought to chain up, as the archangel chains up, in old pictures, the demon with his woman's face?' (p. 88). Magnus seems to be describing Lee's own desire and inability to 'chain up' the supernatural in art, just as he himself is never able to harness the voice to compose the perfect piece.

That music and the voice in Lee is directly connected to the supernatural, and in particular to the immaterial, suggests that the voice in Lee was uncannily disembodied.

Zaffirino is never seen to sing, and his voice comes only from empty gondolas, or from the night air, but never from a physical body. Spiritualism was also very much concerned with what was ghostly in the voice. Although these ghosts were not the literary ones of Lee's writing, their example is instructive in examining the conflicts between the spiritual and the material that conflicted Lee. The voice, or 'direct voice' as it was called in the séances of the spiritualists, was a disembodied one, much like Zaffirino's, a spectral ghost speaking from nowhere. Alex Owen describes the spiritual experiences of the Theobald family, who heard 'the voices of spirit children not uttered through the medium's mouth but manifesting themselves independently throughout the room' (p. 89). William Crookes describes manifestations of various sounds during the séance which to him can only be the result of intelligent disembodied spirits within the room: 'the sounds to which I have just alluded will be repeated a definite number of times, they will come loud or faint, and in different places at request; and by a pre-arranged code of signals, questions are answered and messages are given with more or less accuracy.'<sup>58</sup>

Lee's ghosts are never really fleshed out, never really fully embodied, but really only a glimpse, or a voice, a painting, or a sculpture. Lee's aestheticism wrestles with its own materialistic claims only to come to the uneasy conclusion that art is as haunted with her failed empiricism as her ghost stories. Both the supernatural and art in Lee are slippery, for she simultaneously attempts and fails to give them a body. Lee's supernaturalism is forever just out of reach of materialism, and her wicked voices never fully materialise, making them perpetually uncanny.

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<sup>58</sup> William Crookes, 'Notes of an Enquiry into the Phenomena Called Spiritual', in *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (London, 1874), pp. 81-102 (p. 87).

Still, Lee would have wanted her ghost stories to be Leighton's 'machine to catch voices' ('Ghosts', p. 4). After all, she claims 'what would we [herself and childhood friend John Singer Sargent] not have given if some supernatural mechanism had allowed us to catch the faintest vibrations of [Farinelli's] voice' ('For Maurice', p. 185).<sup>59</sup> But for Lee there was always something more desirable about the unattainable, a desire that extends to her flawed attempts to quantify art, and 'a longing for the unattainable, with the passion only unattainable objects can inspire' ('For Maurice', p. 187). Indeed, she was always more fascinated with what was just out of reach, asking in 'Notes on the Supernatural', '[w]hy do those stories affect us most in which the ghost is heard but not seen? [. . .] Why, as soon as a figure is seen, is the charm half-lost?' (p. 94).

In her discussion of ghosts and visuality in Thomas Hardy's poetry, Catherine Maxwell suggests that 'all portraiture has a link with death, [and] the silhouette has even a stronger relation in that it figures absence more graphically, so that, where the subject of representation is in fact dead, the silhouette becomes a shade of a shade.'<sup>60</sup> Shades, also a synonym for ghosts, 'offer the sensitive observer the opportunity of projecting more freely his or her own memories, impressions, fantasies and associations into the charged blank space of the silhouette; that is to say, it sums up what is important to the observer' ('Vision', p. 515). Maxwell's analysis of absences which are more intimate, more telling, than presences, is true of Lee's ideas about writing and the supernatural and her desire for what is not there, as well as for her tendency to project the ghostly into

<sup>59</sup> Lee based both 'Winthrop's Adventure' and 'A Wicked Voice' on the castrato singer Farinelli (1705-1782). Lee and the would-be famous American painter John Singer Sargent (1865-1925) were captivated by his eerie portrait when they saw it in 1872.

<sup>60</sup> Catherine Maxwell, 'Vision and Visuality', in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Richard Cronin and Alison Chapman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 510-25 (p. 515). That Hardy's poetry (he published his first collection of poems in 1898) and Lee's writing overlap suggest the ways in which writers at the end of the century were interested in the links between art and the supernatural.

everything she wrote. Of music, Lee wrote '[t]here is nothing stranger in the world than music; it exists only as sound, is born of silence and dies away into silence, issuing from nothing and relapsing into nothing; it is our creation, yet it is foreign to ourselves' ('Chapelmaster', *Belcaro*, p. 106). Lee's writing worked in much the same way, in which the supernatural was always the uncanny double of her aestheticism.



## Chapter Six: Balancing on Supernatural Wires: The Figure of the New Woman

### Writer in Grand's *The Beth Book* and George Paston's *A Writer of Books*

#### Introduction

'I was talking to a fellow only to-day, who is in a publisher's office, and he was telling me the sort of thing that the public wants. He says they don't care about all that – what d'ye call it? – analysis, and if you want to make money you should write a historical romance with lots of fighting in it, or something in the supernatural line with Biblical characters like Miss – I forget what she calls herself.'

'My dear Tom,' cried Cosima, aghast. 'I couldn't do such things to save my life, and I wouldn't if I could.'<sup>1</sup>

In this scene from George Paston's (Emily Morse Symonds) *A Writer of Books* (1898), Tom suggests that writer Cosima attempt more popular lucrative fiction; she is horrified, not only by the idea of compromising her work to suit the mass market, but also significantly, of writing *supernatural* fiction. Although we are alert to Cosima's discomfort with 'selling out' and her wish that 'she should never need to write for money, but only for name and fame,' (p. 210) it is less clear why the thought that writing about the supernatural in particular threatens her.<sup>2</sup> When the literary market of the 1890s was flooded with novels about the supernatural, such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Beetle*, and *Dracula*, why did New Woman writers of the same period appear to turn

<sup>1</sup> George Paston, *A Writer of Books* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1999), p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, in this scene Cosima is forcefully reminded of Tom's marriage proposal and 'how he had told her that when they were married she never need to write for money, but only for name and fame' (p. 210). This scene thus not only demonstrates Cosima's anxieties about which genre to write, and her concerns about the literary marketplace, but also her concerns about her failing marriage and the different ideals to which she and Tom aspire.

away from this popular trend and invest themselves in realistic fiction depicting women's anxieties about marriage and their struggles for financial independence? Were the differences between Gothic supernaturalism and fiction about the plight of woman at the end of the century as distinct as they seem?

Like other women writers characterised in *fin-de-siècle* New Woman fiction, Cosima desires to write realistic novels in order to portray 'all sides of life and all sorts of conditions of men' (p. 45).<sup>3</sup> New Woman writers themselves, for example Sarah Grand, also firmly believed in the importance of writing accurate depictions of real life: '[t]o be true to life should be the first aim of an author, and if one deals with social questions one must study them in the people who hold them.'<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the genre's political agenda and its use of realism has been the key focus of most critical writing on New Woman fiction.<sup>5</sup> The notion of being 'true to life' is problematic, however, since it is not clear whether Grand means true to the conventional expectations for women (such as being a good wife and mother), or true to the New Woman cause of seeking alternatives to marriage, domesticity, and financial dependence. Grand may also imply that women should be 'true

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* (London: Virago, 1980), in which, Beth vows that she will write about 'the normal – the everyday' (p. 373), believing that in this way she can learn more about human nature and help her readers to find greater happiness (p. 374). Mary in Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of A Modern Woman* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2004) also believes in the importance of writing about real life: 'I can't help seeing things as they are, and the truth is so supremely attractive' (p. 147).

<sup>4</sup> Sarah A. Tooley, 'The Woman's Question: An Interview with Madame Sarah Grand', in *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Reception*, ed. by Ann Heilmann and Stephanie Forward, 4 vols (London: Routledge, 2000), I, pp. 220-29 (p. 220). First published in the *Humanitarian* (1896).

<sup>5</sup> For critical studies of New Woman fiction see for example Ann Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First Wave Feminism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the fin-de-siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Lynn Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), and *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de-siècle Feminisms*, ed. by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). For anthologies see for example, *The Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, and *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles and Drama of the 1890s*, ed. by Carolyn Christensen Nelson (Peterborough: Broadview, 2001).

to life' in another capacity: they should be keenly alert to the paranormal insights and flickerings of the supernatural that haunt their supposedly realistic fiction.

Cosima's horror of the supernatural, which both fascinates and horrifies her, and the robust endorsement of realism in her writing, seem representative of the seriousness of purpose with which New Women writers viewed their own vocation. If they turned to popular fiction (sensational, supernatural, decadent) and explored its possibilities, New Women were concerned that they could jeopardize their claim to legitimate social commentary.

However, New Woman writers were radically ambivalent about the supernatural, both disturbed by and irresistibly drawn to the subject. Despite their firm defence of realism, and scorn for popular fiction, New Woman writers *did* test the potential of supernatural themes like telepathy, inspiration by unknown agencies, and scenes of Gothic horror. While Ann Heilmann has noted that New Woman writers employ the supernatural in their writing, she has interpreted the supernatural, and in particular the Gothic, as peripheral to their central concern of political realism: '[w]hile moving into allegorical, utopian and non-realist, sensationalist, mythical, even dream-like and surrealist sequences of writing, New Woman fiction retained its links with realism in that it always located the condition of woman's oppression in contemporary social reality'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction*, p. 9. Heilmann argues that texts like Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and Emma Frances Brooke's *A Superfluous Woman* (1894) utilised symbolic figures such as 'the madwoman in the attic' Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, and the monster creation in *Frankenstein* in their novels to reinforce the idea that the marital home was often a place of violence and danger: '[b]y linking Mary Shelley's idea of "hideous progeny" of a mad scientist who, in his attempt to circumvent the maternal, interferes with female reproduction, with Bronte's script of the husband whose sexual "past" almost proves fatal for the heroine, New Woman writers created a potent image of female victimization brought about by men's sexual and medical misconduct' (p. 83). See Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (London, 1912), and Brooke, *A Superfluous Woman* (London, 1894). While Heilmann is interested both in how New Woman writers re-imagined, contemporised and politicised Gothic myths in their writing, and in the

Heilmann's theory, however, does not fully investigate elements of the Gothic and the 'unrealistic' in New Woman fiction, nor does she sufficiently encompass New Woman writers writing about women. Far from being secondary to the New Woman's interest in evoking women's oppression, the supernatural subverts generic expectations and is an alternative political tool to realism.

This chapter contends that the act of writing itself in New Woman fiction is a supernatural act; in other words, in scenes of writing, women display extrasensory perception which enhances their literary talent but is also physically and emotionally debilitating. While Chapter Four suggested that women identified with the ghosts of their ghost stories and were haunted by their own female identity, this chapter articulates a different kind of haunting through the driving ambition to write, and also the destructive nature of writing itself that haunts. I have chosen Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* (1897) and George Paston's *A Writer of Books* (1898) in my analysis because they are representative texts in the presentation of the figure of the woman writer in New Woman fiction. These texts need urgent re-examination in order to illustrate how supernatural concerns impact upon a discussion of feminism in fiction in the 1890s.

A consideration of *The Beth Book* and *A Writer of Books* reveals that scenes of writing are figured in the supernatural terms of telepathy or of automatic writing in which authorship and agency are contested sites of power. The uncanny nature of this writing, in which the words seem to be both familiar and alien simultaneously, is perilous, since during the act of composition female protagonists court the unknown that exists beyond masculine definitions of selfhood. Writing forces them to go to the very edge of their

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innovative writing techniques pioneered by these writers, she maintains that New Woman fiction is firmly centred on its realist message.

imaginative powers and to the brink of ill-health where they hover until they rein themselves in at the last to complete their novels. It becomes apparent that the ritual of writing in these novels is an initiatory activity. Though hampered by intense loneliness, poor health, and crippling self-doubt, they use the writing process as a means of ambiguous self-discovery and development.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas my previous chapters have discussed negotiations between machines and typists, and the mesmerist and mesmerised, in New Woman fiction anxieties about sites of power are internalised into the figure of the woman writer, who is doubled and divided between her private artistic ambition and her negotiations with the literary marketplace, and between being a dependent wife and an independent author. In an examination of Grant Allen's *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897), this chapter returns to the discussion about the connection between women, automaticity, and new technology to suggest that in New Woman fiction, technology allows women to adopt either passivity or authoritative agency in the writing process. Furthermore, women writers depicted in New Women fiction are shown to be uncannily able to succeed in a social environment hostile to female ambition: women writers transgressively adopt and turn to their advantage the very systems and discourses which often undermine or frustrate them. For example, Cosima in *A Writer of Books* both engages in and speaks out against censorship in her writing, disguising her political ideas as conventional literary tropes. I suggest that her achievement, becoming a popular writer and a writer with a serious political voice, is itself an uncanny position for a woman writer at the *fin-de-siècle*. Ultimately, in New

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<sup>7</sup> For critical studies of the figure of the woman writer in the nineteenth century, see, for example, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd edn (London: Yale University Press, 2000), and *Silent Voices: Forgotten Novels*

Woman fiction, writing becomes the uncanny means by which female authors can attain heightened consciousness and fresh opportunities in both their art and life.

### **The Ecstasy of Writing: Grand's *The Beth Book* and Extrasensory Perception in New Woman Fiction**

Sarah Grand's Beth in *The Beth Book* is possessed with the desire for expression, but for her writing is always an ambiguous means of articulating her views. In part, this is because Beth is deeply anxious about the origin of influence in her writing. Indeed, she describes her writing as a kind of telepathy, in which the origins of impression are unknown, or as the OED defines it as 'the communication of impressions of any kind from one mind to another, independently of recognised channels of sense'. Beth describes her own creative impulses in the following terms: '[t]hings come into my mind, but I don't think them and I can't say them' (p. 178). Here, Beth telepathically receives impressions from unknown channels. The quotation suggests that while she knows what she wants to articulate, the language she needs to express herself is elusive and the act of writing cannot adequately express her thoughts. Her mind also seems undemarcated, almost as if there is something illicit or taboo about her ideas which can enter and leave her channels of mind unbidden. The notion that she 'can't say them' reinforces the possibility that these are forbidden thoughts, but it is also suggestive about the voice of the New Woman in society, who was 'saying' things that were controversial to hear about such as the changing role of women and male sexual vice.<sup>8</sup> The fact that she docs

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by *Victorian Women Writers*, ed. by Brenda Ayres, Contributions in Women's Study, 200 (London: Praeger, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> New Women were giving voice to the controversial issue of male sexuality and vice, subjects which were 'unspeakable' in polite society. Authors like Emma Frances Brooke in *A Superfluous Woman*, Mérie

not think them either is threatening to Beth because their irrational appearance in her mind conflicts with the rational thinking she, as a figure in a New Woman text, ought to uphold and demonstrate.

In a discussion of the poetry she has written, Beth makes distinctions between this kind of telepathic verse that appears in her mind, and the material poetry that she would compose were she to make writing a serious enterprise:

At least, I didn't make it up, it just came to me. When I make it up it'll most likely be quite different. It is like the stuff for a dress you know, when you buy it. You get it made up, and it's the same stuff, and it's quite different, too, in a way. You've got it put into shape, and it's good for something. (p. 178)

Again, because Beth is anxious about writing which she channels from an unknown origin and which impresses itself upon her mind, she implies that when she 'really' writes, her writing will be as concrete, domestic, rational, useful and material as the dress she uses in her analogy. Beth's decision to be more dismissive of the irrational writing that 'comes to her' and to concentrate on the realistic writing that she 'makes up' echoes the desires of the New Woman writer, both to write realistically and to use writing to voice the internalisation of cultural taboos at the end of the century. At the same time, however, writing is uncanny for Beth, the product of her own words and the creation of

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Muriel Dowie in *Gallia* (ed. by Helen Small, new edn [London: Everyman, 1995], first published in 1895) and Sarah Grand in *The Beth Book* and *The Heavenly Twins* were particularly concerned with the male role in the spread of syphilis. Many New Women were furious that the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864 and 1866 meant that prostitutes could be detained in hospitals and were blamed for the spread of disease when men were free to visit prostitutes and possibly infect their wives (and by extension their children) with syphilis. While New Women fiction began after most of these acts were repealed, they used the Contagious Diseases Acts as a platform to express their anger at the wrongs against women in marriage. For more on the New Woman's reaction against male sexual vice, see for example, Emma Liggins, 'Writing Against the

another agency, and regardless of her desire to edit out the unknown words that come to her, she cannot write without the influence of that initial, unknown agency.

Beth is both repelled by her telepathic perception and its potential to damage her claims to serious realist and political literature, and also imaginatively drawn to it. While she embraces realism, eventually publishing a work of non-fiction (p. 518), and vowing 'I should avoid the abnormal' (p. 373) in her writing, it is the abnormal which fascinates her.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, Beth does not write that she 'will avoid the abnormal', but rather that she 'should', suggesting that she is aware of the realistic literary conventions she feels pressured to follow, and is yet conflicted about whether or not she will apply them to her own writing. Furthermore, the notion that she 'should' avoid taboo ideas suggests that it is male editorial policies which put her under pressure to uphold a writing style which adheres to popular conventions. Despite this, the abnormal becomes an irresistible temptation for her, and she delights in taking the risk of writing about the illicit, and in plunging herself into writing which is enticing and scandalous because of its 'abnormality'.

Beth is tempted again by the 'abnormal' when, in a moment of wakefulness she reaches for a novel, 'a shilling shocker [ . . . ]. The story was of an extremely sensational kind, and she found herself being wrought up by it to a high pitch of nervous excitement' (p. 436). The novel is exhilaratingly terrifying for her, and when while reading she hears the cries of a dog that her husband has been experimenting upon, she imaginatively

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"Husband-Fiend": Syphilis and Male Sexual Vice in the New Woman Novel', *Women's Writing*, 7 (2000), 175-95. See also Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*.

<sup>9</sup> The OED defines abnormal as 'deviating from the ordinary type; contrary to rule or system; irregular, unusual, aberrant'.



transforms the scene into one of Gothic horror (p. 437).<sup>10</sup> When she realizes that the dog is suffering she ends its life, but ‘she felt the stronger for a brave determination, and more herself than she had done for many months’ (p. 437). Her actions suggest that not only does re-imagining the scene of the vivisectionist table as a moment of Gothic suspense give her the courage to save the animal from further suffering, but also passing through the terrors of witnessing the dog’s pain enables her to rediscover herself: she regains some of the confidence and moral strength she feels she has lost since her marriage to Dr. Maclure. Indeed, she is symbolically vivisectioning herself, dissecting and criticising the aspects of her life which threaten to undermine her ambitions. While the process of putting herself ‘under the knife’ is painful, it is also a necessary operation which will motivate and inspire her literary endeavours.<sup>11</sup>

Beth is most often confronted with moments of extrasensory perception, however, when she is writing, and it is these scenes of writing that ultimately act as initiatory processes. For Beth, writing is both a torment and a triumph, causing her poor mental and physical health, but also giving her a purpose and usefulness that she lacks in her stifling, unhappy marriage. She insists to herself, almost desperately, ‘I shall succeed! I shall succeed!’ (p. 389), suggesting that for her writing is an ambiguous means of achieving personal success. While she is aware of the potential benefits of her success, she also discovers that the cost of writing is high: ‘Now the things she did not care about she

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<sup>10</sup> See also Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction*, which discusses this passage in depth in Gothic terms (p. 93). Many New Women were opposed to vivisection. Significantly, in ‘Gynaecology, Pornography, and the Antivivisection Debate’, *Victorian Studies*, 28 (1985), 413-37, Coral Lansbury argues that part of the problem within discussions of vivisection was that the medical community treated women like the animals they were vivisectioning (she refers particularly to gynaecology and theories of the female body). See also *Animal Welfare and Anti-Vivisection 1870-1910: Nineteenth Century Woman’s Mission*, ed. by Susan Hamilton (New York: Routledge, 2004).

began to do with a rush, so as to get to her writing. She wanted to be always at that; and the consequence was a wearing sensation, as of one who is driven to death, and has never time enough for any single thing' (p. 423). The fact that she is 'driven to death' is suggestive of the intoxicating nature of her writing process: she is both energized to write, and also worn away with effort to continue writing.

The phrase 'wearing sensation' is also significant, making ambiguous the negative effects of her writing. Although the phrase implies she is overworked, the term 'wearing' suggests that she is performing identity and taking on a guise in order to write. The term 'sensation' is defined in the OED as '[a] condition of excited feeling produced in a community by some occurrence; a strong impression (e.g. of horror, admiration, surprise, etc.) produced in an audience or body of spectators and manifested by their demeanour', and 'an event or a person that "creates a sensation"'.<sup>12</sup> Her writing may exhaust her, but it also creates a sensation, suggesting that the public hungers after the kind of writing that is emotionally and physically draining to produce. Furthermore, the use of the word 'sensation' suggests that Beth herself is inspired by this destructive process of writing: it fills her with 'horror' and 'admiration' for her accomplishments. Finally, the term 'sensation' also evokes the notion of Victorian sensation fiction. Although most popular in the 1860s, sensation fiction had a revival at the end of the century (for example *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Trilby*), and dealt with many of the themes Beth herself is both anxious to avoid and drawn to represent in her writing (and

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<sup>11</sup> See also *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in which Wilde also uses vivisection as a symbol for self-investigation: '[Lord Henry] had begun by vivisectioning himself, as he had ended by vivisectioning others. Human life – that appeared to him the one thing worth investigating' (p. 66).

<sup>12</sup> The OED cites 1864 and 1884 as the first usages of the phrase 'creating a sensation'.

also the kind of fiction which thrills her late at night), such as the Gothic and moments of psychological suspense.<sup>13</sup>

Beth herself is aware of the contradictions in the ways in which she perceives her writing, and suggests yet another contradiction, that the process of writing is comparable to being in love: 'She had the same warm glow in her chest, the same sort of yearning, half anxious, half pleasant, wholly desirable' (p. 181). The comparison between being in love and writing is radically ambiguous, however, since Beth has never really been in love. Perhaps Beth's 'yearning' is for literary influence or patronage, rather than for emotional attachment. Furthermore, comparing her heightened perception to something as sentimental and as conventional as love suggests again the ongoing conflict Beth faces between her delight in reaching the very limits of herself, and her desire for the rational and the tame. Her writing process is 'half anxious, half pleasant, wholly desirable', but it is not love that brings her these conflicting sensations, but rather the ecstasy of inspiration. The OED defines ecstasy as 'the state of being "beside oneself", thrown into a frenzy or a stupor with anxiety, astonishment, fear or passion' and 'the state of trance supposed to be a concomitant of prophetic inspiration; hence, Poetic frenzy or rapture'.<sup>14</sup> Beth is filled with both 'anxiety' and 'passion' when she writes, sending her into a deep

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<sup>13</sup> Some of the most popular sensation novelists were Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) and M.E.Braddon (1837-1915). Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), like Grand's *The Beth Book*, is also concerned with heightened perception, although Collins focuses on the trance state in mesmerism, rather than other kinds of extrasensory perception like telepathy. For more on mesmerism in *The Moonstone*, see John Sutherland, 'Introduction', in *The Moonstone*, by Wilkie Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. vii-xxix. For more on sensation fiction, see for example, *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction, 1855-1890*, ed. by Andrew Maunder, 6 vols (London: Pickering, 2004); *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, ed. by Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore, and Lynn Pykett, *The Sensation Novel: From The Woman In White to The Moonstone* (Plymouth, U.K.: Northcote, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> For theories on ecstasy, see for example, Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, trans. by Bernard and Caroline Schutze, ed. by Sylvere Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1988), and Jeanette Winterson, *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (London: Vintage, 1996).

trance state which is simultaneously exalted and fearful.<sup>15</sup> Timothy Clark suggests that '[i]nspiration is held to blur conceptions of agency: the writer is possessed or dispossessed and may undergo an extreme state of elation'.<sup>16</sup> The suspension of agency during her writing is an anxious time for Beth, and yet both her elation and her possessed/dispossessed body are essential to her writing process: it is the ecstasy, the fear *and* the rapture, which propels her to write.

Beth uses her writing to help her overcome her depression and feeling of helplessness and isolation in her marriage: 'during the writing of [her book] she enjoyed an interval of unalloyed happiness, the most perfect that she had ever known. [ . . . ] The terrible sense of loneliness, from which she had always suffered [ . . . ], was suspended' (pp. 423-24). Indeed, it is when she discovers a room of her own, secret from her husband and where she can write without interruption, that she is able to begin to make decisions about her future career. In addition, this initial freedom from her husband is what eventually gives her the courage to leave him entirely. Although the 'unalloyed happiness' she feels about her writing is only momentary (the phrase itself suggests that her happiness is too perfect, or too good to be true), and although writing fills her equally with despair and elation (she describes how writing 'had ceased to be a pleasure, and become an effort to express herself in that way' [p. 517]), this suggests once again that it is the intoxicating highs and lows of the activity that fascinate her, just as it is the

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<sup>15</sup> Late nineteenth-century writers were interested in the ways in which inspiration and the trance state could be closely linked, and how inspiration was both a destructive and a rapturous moment. In J. -K. Huysman's *Against Nature* (1884), Des Esseintes is inspired by art which evokes feelings of both horror and delight. For him, inspiration in art is 'the feverish desire for the unknown, the unsatisfied longing for the ideal, the craving to escape from the horrible realities of life, to cross the frontiers of thought, to grope after uncertainty' (J. -K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. by Robert Baldick [London: Penguin, 1959], pp. 114-15).

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 3.

entrancing nature of the telepathic which inspire her. But this destructive nature of writing is ultimately conducive to Beth's creative process, for it allows her to exist at the very limits of herself and gives her the multiplied perception which inspires her writing.

For example, when she is at the seaside she spontaneously composes a poem which is the product of some unknown agency or telepathic power that Beth cannot define (p. 209). The poem is later shown to be a foreshadowing of her Aunt Victoria's death, suggesting that Beth harnesses psychic power, but it also demonstrates how closely Beth's creative life and the supernatural are intertwined. Once again, Beth's writing is here figured both as telepathic, and as automatic writing, both processes in which agency is suspended. Indeed, in a description of the moments in which things 'come to her', Beth says 'I have to hold myself in a certain attitude – not my body, you know, *myself* – hold myself in suspense as it were, or suspend something in myself, stop something, push something aside' (p. 213). The 'suspense' she speaks of seems not only to allude to a moment of horror, and to psychological states as if she is in suspended animation, or a somnambolic or mesmeric trance, but also to the trance state of ecstasy. She seems to write in a liminal state of both horror and rapture, the trance allowing her to balance between the two in order to find inspiration. In this moment of fearful exhilaration she is putting aside literary conventions and social and masculine expectations, pushing away her rationale in order to most freely express herself. While her words suggest that she is pushing aside her own consciousness, allowing for another self or consciousness to enter, and to use her body as a medium for its message, there is also the suggestion that that other consciousness is Beth's most revelatory one.

Certainly, Beth's method of writing is suggestive of the automatic writers of the spiritualist séances, who believed they were transcribing the messages of the dead; displacing their own conscious minds to allow for the entry of the words of the spirits.<sup>17</sup> Beth's writing process is also reminiscent of the theories posited by researchers of the SPR, who like F.W.H. Myers, suggested that phenomena such as automatic writing could be the result of a 'secondary self' or unconscious thought.<sup>18</sup> The fact that the discourse on automatic writing is linked to mental science and pre-Freudian theories of the subconscious, and the idea that Beth's telepathy may be a result of her 'secondary self' implies that her unconscious thoughts are spilling onto the page in order that she reclaim herself from the role of repressed and oppressed woman in the late nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> This process of writing gives her access to her innermost thoughts which suggests her writing is the expression of the anger she feels at her unequal situation in marriage and society.

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Oppenheim and Owen. See also Heilmann's recent critical studies on Sarah Grand, theosophy, spiritualism and the female artist. In 'Visionary Desires: Theosophy, Auto-Eroticism and the Seventh-Wave Artist in Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book*', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 26 (2004), 29-46, Heilmann argues '[i]n conceptualising her protagonist as a feminine artist whose inner development reflects the principles laid down by female theosophists, Grand, aiming to strike a blow at malestream attempts to invalidate women's achievements asserted in no uncertain terms the authority and even "genius" of female cultural, socio-political and philosophical activity' (p. 42). See also Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> For Myers's views on automatic writing see for example, Myers, 'Automatic Writing'. The term 'secondary self' is one Myers himself uses to describe the unconscious mind, but is not synonymous with Freud's theories about the subconscious.

<sup>19</sup> For further analysis on the ways in which women wrote to express their unconscious desires, see for example, Diana Price Herndl, 'The Writing Cure: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Anna O., and "Hysterical" Writing', *NWSA*, 1, (1988), 52-74. See also Heilmann, 'Narrating the Hysteric: Fin-de-Siècle Medical Discourse and Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*', in *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact*, ed. by Angeliqne Richardson and Chris Willis, pp. 123-35. Heilmann suggests that the fact that women activists and sufferers of nervous breakdowns like Bertha Pappenheim, Sarah Grand and Charlotte Perkins Gilman 'broke free from patriarchal and medical discourses [. . .] reflect the conditions and pressures under which the New Woman labored towards the close of the nineteenth century' (p. 134). See also Stephanie Forward, 'A Study in Yellow: Mona Caird's "The Yellow Drawing Room"', *Women's Writing*, 7 (2000), 295-307. In an examination of Caird's forgotten story, which has striking similarities to Gilman's work, Forward suggests that New Woman writers like Caird were concerned about the subject of hysteria. The article

While Beth is consciously aware of the wrongs of her husband, and of society in condoning such a marriage, this theory explains in part why Beth finds writing to be such an emotionally intensive experience. After writing until she is both mentally and physically exhausted, '[w]riting became a rage with [Beth]' (p. 424), suggesting that writing is a cathartic exercise for her, a means for her to articulate her frustration with a society which is hostile to women's ambition. The term 'rage' is also, however, suggestive of inspiration: the OED defines the word as '[p]oetic or prophetic enthusiasm or inspiration'. Furthermore, the expression 'all the rage', (according to the OED in use since 1785), suggests that writing is also a trend: writing for Beth is an outcry against thwarted ambition, a driving inspiration, and a fashionable accessory. The notion of her writing as a trend suggests that she wants her writing to become 'all the rage': she craves the potential to write a bestseller.

As I have suggested, Beth's writing gives her greater confidence and ultimately allows her to separate from her husband. Although this writing comes at a cost to health and happiness, Beth is amongst many women writer figures in New Woman fiction possessed with extrasensory perception which grants the gift of great literary talent. Cosima in *A Writer of Books*, for example, uses her power to help her edit her work:

by the aid of the sixth sense which she may be said to have developed, she perceived passages crying out for improvement, skeleton characters who needed flesh upon their bones, and scenes into which by a touch she could infuse the warmth, the colour, the perfume of life. (p. 232)

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implies that like Gilman, Caird was using 'striking images' (p. 304) to describe the plight of woman at the end of the century.

While Cosima seems to be able to magic paper to life, Hester in *Red Pottage* (1899) serves as another example of a woman writer in New Woman fiction who uses her paranormal insights to enhance her writing. Hester sees her heightened perception as a means to bring her outside of herself and closer to a godly power: 'Hester spoke brokenly with awe and reverence of her book, as of some mighty presence, some constraining power outside herself'.<sup>20</sup> While these women writers stand on the edge of a power greater than themselves they continue to desire to express themselves, not merely for literary greatness, which they all in varying degrees achieve, but also to create outside of normal human possibility, and to be consumed by inspiration.

To an extent, women writers in New Woman fiction are able to harness moments of heightened perception in order to bring them to the brink of the inaccessible, the beautiful and the other-worldly. George Paston, for example, suggests that Cosima has a masterful control over her writing:

Her imagination had now become a well-tuned instrument upon which she played with a virtuoso's hand. Like Gautier, she could launch her sentences into the air, knowing that they would fall upon their feet like cats, her brain was almost painlessly delivered of *le mot juste*, and her characters had blood in their veins and flesh in their bones. (p. 206)

Here, Cosima has not only fine-tuned her writing skills, but in doing so she also gains access to another level of her consciousness. The comparison of the musical virtuoso and

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<sup>20</sup> Mary Cholmondeley, *Red Pottage* (London: Virago, 1985), p. 335. For more on *Red Pottage*, see, for example, Vineta Colby, "'Devoted Amateur": Mary Cholmondeley and *Red Pottage*', *Essays in Criticism*, 20 (1970), 213-28; Wendy Parkins, 'Home and Away: The New Woman and Domesticity in Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage*', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 10 (1999), 47-55; Catherine Rainwater and William Scheick, 'Aliens in the Garden: The Re-Vision of Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage*', *Philological Quarterly*, 71 (1992), 101-19, and Showalter, 'Introduction', in *Red Pottage*, by Mary Cholmondeley (London: Virago, 1985), pp. vi-xv.



the writer is apt in a discussion of multiplied perception particularly when, as Phyllis Weliver points out, '[m]usic was an important component of mental science and a central metaphor for explaining and conceptualizing theories of consciousness' (p. 8). Not only was music used 'in Victorian writings about mesmerism, hypnotism, the development of double consciousness, double personality, memory and theories of identity' (Weliver, p. 8), but the violin particularly was connected to mental science: 'the metaphor of vibrating strings was an extremely popular means by which to explain how mesmerism worked' (Weliver, p. 64).<sup>21</sup> Cosima's mind is like the vibrating strings of the violin, enabling her to reach other powers within herself, whether they comprise the secondary or unconscious self, or even mesmeric power.<sup>22</sup>

Despite their access to powers of extrasensory perception, writing nearly destroys writers like Beth and Cosima's physical and mental health. Indeed, Cosima states that she writes *almost* painlessly, suggesting that the process is painful indeed. In an earlier passage Cosima writes 'Literature is the most lonely of all trades [. . .] The writer works in silence and privacy, spinning his plot, making his effects, wrestling with his difficulties, with none to see, none to help, none to applaud' (p. 95). The word 'trade' here also suggests that a writer must face deprivation and give up the social, and domestic aspects of her life as a trade off for a heightened literary experience.

Writing is as often a torment for women writers as it is a pleasure, for while at times Beth finds no occupation which gives her greater happiness, at other times writing

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<sup>21</sup> Du Maurier's *Trilby* further explores the links between music and mesmerism.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Hardy's 'The Fiddler of the Reels', in *The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1928), pp. 401-19 is also concerned with the links between mesmerism and the violin. In the story Car'line both fears and desires the mesmeric sounds of Mop's violin: '[a]fter the first moments of paralyzed reverie the familiar tune in the familiar rendering made [Car'line] laugh and shed tears simultaneously' (p. 414).

for her is obsessive and compulsive: '[s]he would spend hours over one sentence, turning it and twisting it, and never be satisfied; and when she was at last obliged to stop [. . .], she went with her brain congested, and her complexion, which was naturally pale and transparent, all flushed and blotched with streaks of crimson' (p. 425). Her 'congested' brain suggests that not only is she 'full', but that she is overloaded: she has gorged on her writing and it has sustained her, while at the same time consumingly, overwhelmingly filling her. Like a vampire drains blood, Beth drains herself of energy, and also like a vampire, she is overcharged because of it.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps the ways in which writing is both imaginatively fascinating and physically and mentally draining is best demonstrated in the case of Mary Erle, a failed painter gone writer in *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894) by Ella Hepworth Dixon.<sup>24</sup> While writing lends Mary the potential for financial independence and meaningful employment, her health fails severely as a result of the strain she puts upon herself to create 'a little bit of real observation' (p. 147). The doctor warns her against the strains of working too hard, echoing late nineteenth-century medical fears about the dangers of women writing, and suggests she leave London, and treat herself with arsenic and strychnine. Mary decides to buy the medicines, but her comment that '[w]e've got to be dosed with poisons to makes us fit to sit at a desk and write' (p. 148) is a telling

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<sup>23</sup> Both *The Beth Book* and *Dracula* were published in 1897, but although Grand could not have read Stoker's work before writing her own, there are striking resemblances between this passage and Stoker's descriptions of Lucy as she changes into a vampire: Lucy, who is naturally pale and 'bloodless' (Stoker, p. 111) as a vampire has lips 'crimson with fresh blood' and blood on her face (p. 211), which seems suggestive of Beth's own streaked red and white complexion.

<sup>24</sup> The name Mary Erle is probably an overt reference to Marion Erle in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856). Like Dixon's Mary, Marion Erle never marries, but is also freed from having to be dependent on a man. See 'Aurora Leigh', in *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Frowde, 1904), pp. 374-539. For more on this reading of *Aurora Leigh*, in which Marion Erle is seen as a feminist figure, see Kathleen Blake, *Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983).

description of the ways in which writing acts as both a poison and a cure and is deeply intoxicating for women writers.<sup>25</sup> For women writers, their paranormal insight only serves to exacerbate the oppositional potentialities of their artistic discipline: it gives them creative power and takes away their physical health, offers them literary greatness, and withholds it by denying them the ability to fully recover from their moments of ecstatic inspiration.

Ultimately, Beth decides to become a feminist public speaker. Writing is indeed an initiatory process for her, a trial which she must undergo in order to prepare her for her career in oratory. As her friend Angelica suggests, '[y]our writing may have helped to perfect you in some other form of expression' (p. 520). Even as a public speaker, however, Beth inevitably returns to her writing, drafting manuscripts that she will recite. Although the process of speaking and writing are delicately intertwined, Beth is eager to dismiss writing as a distraction from her true calling in life: '[s]he had been misled herself, and so had everyone else, by her pretty talent for writing, her love of turning

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<sup>25</sup> While I discuss the perceived dangers of reading and writing for women in depth in Chapter Four, Jane Wood, in *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), particularly emphasizes medical concerns for the New Woman's intellectual endeavors. For discussions of the New Woman, health and gender roles, see, for example, Patricia Murphy, 'Reevaluating Female "Inferiority": Sarah Grand versus Charles Darwin', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 26 (1998), 221-36, and Angelique Richardson, 'Allopathic Pills? Health, Fitness and New Woman Fictions', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 10 (1999), 1-20. *The Story of a Modern Woman* is often read as a deeply pessimistic text, an example of the failure of women to achieve both financial independence and happiness. See for example Erin Williams, 'Female Celibacy in the Fiction of Gissing and Dixon: The Silent Strike of the Suburbanites', *ELT*, 45 (2002), 259-79. Williams argues that for Mary 'acceding to marriage comes at the cost of liberty, but rejecting it dooms one to bitter solitude and social marginality. With the past lost and the future inaccessible, the narrative forecloses upon any prospect of progress towards either felicity or independence' (p. 272). I suggest that *The Story of a Modern Woman* can be read as a more positive text, in which Mary both retains her liberty and supports herself with her writing. Margaret D. Stetz is also making strides towards reclaiming Dixon's oeuvre from such overt pessimism and suggests that Dixon often uses humour to discuss gender relations. See Margaret D. Stetz, 'The Laugh of the New Woman', in *The Victorian Comic Spirit: New Perspectives*, ed. by Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 219-41.

phrases, her play on the music of words. The writing had come of cultivation, but this – the last discovered power - was the natural gift' (p. 525).

This passage, however, undermines Beth's struggles with her writing, and glosses over the great difficulties and triumphs she faced as a writer. Once again, this is suggestive about Beth's discomfort with her own extrasensory perception: by claiming that oration is her 'natural gift', her writing by contrast becomes an unnatural or supernatural gift, one that must be forsaken for its potential threat to Beth's political agenda. While she fears that her supernatural writing may have jeopardized her claims to speak seriously for the plight of women and that oratory is the most natural and resolute means of expressing her views, her public speaking is shown to be influenced by the very kind of heightened power she is anxious about. When she speaks, she holds her audience under some kind of magical spell, hypnotizing and mesmerizing them with her words (she 'held them with curious talk' [p. 525]) and bringing them at last to 'a kind of awakening' (p. 419). Indeed, she herself is captivated by her own power. Ideala suggests that she will be 'impelled to choose' (p. 391) a means of expressing herself, and Beth herself believes that she is propelled into the career by an outside force: 'her vocation – discovered by accident, and with dismay for it was not what she would have chosen for herself in any way had it occurred to her that she had any choice in the matter' (p. 524). The choice of the word vocation is significant, for while it implies a career choice, it also connotes divine or spiritual influence.

Beth both chooses and is chosen, mesmerizes and is mesmerized by her speaking. Speaking is 'surpris[ing] and bewilder[ing]' (p. 419), an 'agony' (p. 420), but also a process which leaves her 'awestricken' (p. 420). Expression itself is exhilarating and

terrifying for Beth, a moment of ecstasy which brings her into a trance state and fills her with both rapture and bewildered horror at making a public appearance.<sup>26</sup>

### Grant Allen's *The Typewriter Girl* and Powerful Automaticity in New Women Writing

In Chapter One I examined the uncanny effect of technology on the nameless telegraph girl in James's 'In the Cage', whose social position is so helpless that she is ultimately denied a voice, and is made automatic by her daily repetitive and mindless tasks. Indeed, while James and other Gothic writers such as Bram Stoker are concerned with technologies of writing and the New Woman, they figure women writers as being trapped into automaticity by the machine. For example, Mina in *Dracula* may keep a journal in which she records her private thoughts and anxieties, but Stoker suggests that her role in the novel is to act as a transcribing machine for the words of the other characters: she types out all of the journal entries, letters, telegrams and written material pertinent to understanding and finding Dracula, and then copies it out.<sup>27</sup> She even transcribes

<sup>26</sup> Verena Tarrant in Henry James's *The Bostonians* also seems to go into a trance state while she speaks. In 'Possession and Personality: Spiritualism in *The Bostonians*', *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography*, 49 (1978), 580-91, Susan Wolstenholme argues that Verena's trance-like oration, and her relationships with the other characters in the novel suggest that she 'is simply lost in vacuity [. . .]. She is lost amid the inner working of her own mind, which consists of nothing but the personalities of the people around her' (p. 591). Wolstenholme fails to recognize, however, the mesmeric effect Verena has, not only on her audiences, but also on Basil Ransom and Olive Chancellor. As I argue in Chapter Three, mesmerism is a dynamic site of the exchange of powers, in which both the mesmerist and the mesmerized share control. Although Verena does not attain the same ecstatic heights of perception open to Beth, she nevertheless finds an element of power in her public speaking.

<sup>27</sup> For discussions of *Dracula* and the New Woman see for example, 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: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 78-95; Per Serritslev Petersen, 'Fictional Constructions of Female Vampirism in the Nineteenth-Century *Fin-de-siècle* Crisis of Masculinity and its Aftermath: Bram Stoker, Joseph Conrad, D.H. Lawrence', in *Fins de Siècles / New Beginnings*, ed. by Ib Johansen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2000), pp. 41-70; Catherine Sandbach-Dahlstrom, 'Bram Stoker's Dracula: Innocent Femina Sensualis, The Angel in the House, and the Nature of Woman at the Fin de Siècle', in *The Crossroads of Gender and Century Endings*, ed. by Alcinda Pinheiro de Sousa, Luisa Maria Flora and Teresa de Atai de Malafaia (Lisbon: University of

Dracula's thoughts when hypnotized, repeating what he sees and hears in a way that reminds Harker 'as though she were interpreting something' (p. 312). Although the word 'interpret' suggests agency, an ability to decipher and to make intelligible, in this excerpt it suggests rather that Mina is simply reading aloud the thoughts of the Count, conveying the message, without any adaptation or clarification of its contents. Despite the fact that under hypnosis Mina and Dracula share an exchange of powers and knowledge which leads to Dracula's destruction, Stoker denies Mina decisive authorial agency, and even uses her to mock the figure of the New Woman. On the subject of marriage, for example, Mina sarcastically remarks

[s]ome of the New Woman writers will someday start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other sleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the New Woman won't condescend in future to accept; she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it too! (p. 89).

Both 'In the Cage' and *Dracula* use the supernatural (telepathy in 'In the Cage', and mesmeric control in *Dracula*) and concepts of uncanny technology to identify the writing female body with the writing machine, a process which ultimately jeopardizes their identity. New woman fiction, however, suggests that women writers are more positively accessing the writing machines within themselves: automatic writing serves not to subsume women into the machine, but rather to invest them with the ability to use automaticity to tap into hidden springs of creativity and independence.

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Lisbon, 2000), pp. 63-80; Carol A. Senf, 'Dracula: Stoker's Response to the New Woman', *Victorian Studies*, 26 (1982), 33-49; Showalter, 'Syphilis, Sexuality, and the Fiction of the *Fin de Siècle*', in *Reading Fin de Siècle Fictions*, ed. by Lyn Pykett (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 166-83, and Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale*. For more on *Dracula* and technology like the typewriter, see Mark Seltzer, 'Serial Killer (1)', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 5 (1993), 92-128 and Jennifer Wicke, 'Vampiric Typewriting: *Dracula* and Its Media', *ELH*, 59 (1992), 467-93. While Wicke

New woman fiction that is specifically about women writing machines like the typewriter, for example, is at least in part concerned with this relationship between women and technology. Typewriting was associated not only with automatic writing (as detailed in Chapter One), but also with the New Woman, who often chose to work as a typist to earn a living.<sup>28</sup> New Woman fiction often depicted the figure of the woman typewriter. Rachel in *Red Pottage*, for example, works as a typewriter for several years before coming into her inheritance. In George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893), Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn teach young women typewriting so that they can support themselves.<sup>29</sup> While the fact that 'typewriter' could mean both woman and/or machine is suggestive of the ways in which women in the workforce were received by a society

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argues that 'Mina becomes more and more the author of the text' (p. 485), I suggest that Stoker ultimately never grants her the same powerful potential as the women typists in New Woman fiction.

<sup>28</sup> For critical studies on women typewriters see for example Margery W. Davies, 'Women Clerical Workers and the Typewriter: The Writing Machine', in *Technology and Women's Voices: Keeping in Touch*, ed. by Cheri Kramarae (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 29-40. Davies reports that the number of women typists in the United States rose from 2000 in 1880 to 21,270 in 1890 (p. 32), suggesting that increasingly women were turning to typing to earn a living and that they made up a substantial, if not a majority portion of the clerical workforce. See also Christopher Keep, 'Blinded by the Type: Gender and Information Technology at the Turn of the Century', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 23 (2001), 149-73; Keep, 'The Cultural Work of the Type-Writer Girl', *Victorian Studies*, 40 (1997), 401-26; Jane E. Lewis, 'Women Clerical Workers in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in *The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers Since 1870*, ed. by Gregory Anderson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 27-47; *Literary Secretaries/Secretarial Culture*, ed. by Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Morag Shiach, 'Modernity, Labour and the Typewriters', in *Modernist Sexualities*, ed. by Hugh Stevens and Caroline Howlett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 115-29, and Meta Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls: the Expansion of Clerical Work for Women, 1850-1914', in *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800-1918*, ed. by Angela V. John (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 153-77.

<sup>29</sup> George Gissing, *The Odd Women* (London: Sidgwick, 1915). In 'Cultural Work', Keep shows that the cost of a typewriter was twelve pounds, and women earned on average between twenty-five and thirty shillings a week, which was only enough for room and board (pp. 410-12). Although Keep demonstrates the hardships women typists faced, typewriters still strove to support themselves. A database search of COPAC and the British Library for fiction about typewriters and typewriter girls in the late nineteenth-century suggests it was a popular subject for writers. For titles see for example John Kendrick Bangs, *The Enchanted Typewriter* (New York: Harper, 1899); Julie Edwards, *Estelle's Millionaire Lover: Or the Prettiest Typewriter in New York* (London: Henderson, 1893); Mabel Clare Ervin, *As Told by the Typewriter Girl*, Wright American Series (New York: Herrick, c. 1898). In some entries, this novel is listed as *As Told to the Typewriter Girl*, and A.S.M., *The Banker and the Typewriter*, Wright American Series (New York: Dillingham, 1895). There is also a listing for a song entitled 'Kitty, the Typewriter Girl' by David Reed (London: Sheard, c. 1894). A song for voice and piano, the first line runs 'There's a neat bewitching little maiden down our street / She plays click-er-ti click and click-er-ti click all day'.

anxious about women entering the public sphere,<sup>30</sup> this chapter argues that women have a more complicated relationship with technologies of writing, one which gives them an energy to create and critique (both the ills of society and their own writing), and to have both an active part *and* a passive role in the act of transcription.

Typewriters such as Juliet Appleton in Grant Allen's *The Type-Writer Girl*, for example, transcribe both analytically and mechanically, choosing key moments either to actively engage with or automatically type the words at their disposal. For example, Juliet gives a close reading of the poetry she transcribes and deduces that the verses are about Mr. Blank's love for her. While Juliet is a writing machine, in this moment of analysis she also has agency: she criticizes Blank's poetry, writes a short story and later a novel. Blank, on the contrary, is an empty page. His name implies that he is himself blank and although an editor, not always in control of his typist. Indeed, Juliet takes on the masculine role in their relationship, projecting her ideals onto him and composing him as she would compose a letter.

Juliet's experience as a typewriter suggests ways in which even this most monotonous and mindless writing technology pushes women writers towards realizing literary potential. While this process is an initiatory one, in which Juliet suffers through the repetitive and dull nature of clerical work, poverty, and the realization that she belongs to a class of society which makes her an unsuitable match for Blank, she also seems to take theatrical delight in unhappy situations which she can later use in her novels. As her name implies, Juliet has a flair for drama, romance, and of course fiction, a trait that is emphasized when she re-names Blank as Romeo.

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Clarissa J. Suranyi, 'Introduction', in *The Type-Writer Girl*, by Grant Allen (Peterborough: Broadview, 2004), pp. 9-17.



Indeed, the whole novel is a retelling of Juliet's unfortunate love affair, but it is also a story about transformation, about how she earns a living and develops to become a writer. When she first begins work as a typewriter, Juliet writes dispiritedly, 'However, a type-writer I was, and a type-writer I must remain' (p. 28) and resents having to 'click, click, click, like a machine that I was' (p. 35). By the end of the story, however, she proclaims proudly to Michaela '*I am the type-writer girl!*' (p. 139, emphasis in original) which suggests she embraces her identity, not only as a member of a professional class, as a woman in the workforce, and as the typewriter who stole Blank's heart, but also as the woman who, while yet a typewriter, refuses to become a passive female writing machine. Her transformation from being 'a' typewriter girl to 'the' typewriter girl is also significant, because it suggests a shift away from the anonymity of the masses of typewriter girls to the individual and independent woman she has become. She believes that '[n]o woman is born to be merely a type-writer' (p. 108) and indeed, she also becomes a novelist. At the end of the novel, Juliet writes '[i]f this book succeeds I mean to repay Michaela. Meanwhile, in any case, I am saving up daily every farthing to repay her. For I am still a type-writer girl – at another office' (p. 139). This self-referential, mischievous passage implies that the book does indeed succeed: the reader has access to the book because it has been published, and is in the reader's hands.

Significantly, Allen writes under the female pseudonym Olive Pratt Rayner in *The Type-Writer Girl*, a 'narrative cross-dressing' which according to Clarissa J. Suranyi 'initially creates the illusion of authenticity: who better to describe the experience of a typewriter girl than the girl herself? It also reveals, however, that the text is itself an act of impersonation or masquerade' (p. 10). What Suranyi seems to overlook, however, is

the dynamic of automatic writing and mediumship, in which agency and authorship are often in flux. Allen's choice to write using a woman's name plays with notions of authorship, suggesting that he is perhaps himself a kind of medium or a writing machine for another voice; not the voice of the editor dictating to his typewriter, but the voice of the New Woman dictating at the *fin-de-siècle*.<sup>31</sup>

Allen's depictions of women typists present a more hopeful vision of writing technology than either 'In the Cage' or *Dracula*, texts which offer claustrophobic visions of the meeting between woman and machine. An examination of New Woman fiction about women writers suggests that during the writing process women find the threatening possibilities of becoming automatic conducive: the unconscious, telepathic and trance states they succumb to in order to incite the writing process may automate them, but this automation is also exhilarating, and these states give them heightened agency and perception.<sup>32</sup> The meeting between the machine and the body is both frightening and desirable, posing a risk to the autonomy of the self, but also allowing women to attain powerful writing abilities.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For more on Allen's use of a female pseudonym and his decision to write New Woman fiction (contemporary critics wondered how and if a man could understand women enough to write New Woman fiction), see Vanessa Warne and Colette Colligan, 'The Man who Wrote a New Woman Novel: Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* and the Gendering of New Woman Authorship', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 33 (2005), 21-46. Warne and Colligan argue that Allen's 'pseudonym suggests the complexities surrounding male authorship' (p.43): Allen saw himself as 'a New Man prophet', who could predict and usher in the era of the New Woman (p. 27). However, I suggest that in order to speak for women, he had to speak as a woman, and rather than acting as the harbinger for New Women ideas, he was subordinating himself to the New Woman.

<sup>32</sup> See also Jill Galvan, 'Christians, Infidels, and Women's Channeling in the Writings of Marie Corelli', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31 (2003), 83-97. Galvan suggests that '[r]ather than accept the notion of insipid mediumistic or domestic angels, [Corelli's] work subtly revises the image of inspired femininity, framing women's communications channeling as a vocation marked by active intellectual and social involvement' (p. 84). I take this argument further, applying the notion of powerfully and inspired mediums to the typewriters of New Woman fiction. I also suggest that figures like typists are not only socially and intellectually involved, but that the mediumistic process itself is conducive to creativity.

<sup>33</sup> While my interest in women and new technology of the late nineteenth century is focused on the ways in which women could become connected with and empowered by machines like the typewriter, recent critical studies have become interested in the fusion of the body (and in particular the female body) and the

In *The Beth Book* Beth is aware both of the threat of becoming machine and of its fascination. When she discusses the crowds of people in London she believes that: 'The friction of the crowd rubs out their individuality. In a crowd I feel mentally as if I were a maze of telegraph wires. The thoughts of so many people streaming out in all directions about me entangle and bewilder me' (p. 373).<sup>34</sup> The word 'feels' in this passage suggests that Beth has intent: she is not mechanized by the telegraph wires, but instead has her own agency: she chooses to threaten the control she holds over herself in order to identify with the machine and to harness its power. While here Beth may be anxious about her own agency and autonomy, concerned that her role as a writer may be that of the telegraph machine in which messages simply pass through her, her relationship with her own telepathic-like writing abilities is actually much more complicated.

In this passage Beth becomes a medium, both the telegraph wire and the artist who walks across it. She becomes Nietzsche's vision of man as a tightrope walker: 'Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous going-across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and staying-still.'<sup>35</sup> In embracing the liminal, and in becoming part of the 'maze of

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machine as cyborg. In 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. by Linda J Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 190-233, Donna Haraway argues for viewing cyborgs as a means towards 'transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as part of needed political work' (p. 196). For other studies on the cyborg, see also Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. by P. Foss, P. Patton, and P. Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983); *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*, ed. by Jenny Wolmark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), and *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*, ed. by Gill Kirkup, Linda Janes, Kathryn Woodward, and Fiona Hovenden (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> The use of the word 'maze' is suggestive of the ways in which Beth must negotiate through her own writing process. She is trapped in a labyrinth of ideas, sensations and the people of the crowd which terrify her as well as fascinate her. For Victorian theories on the crowd, see for example Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Dover, 1994), first published in 1899, and Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd* (London: Transaction, 1995), first published in 1895.

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 43. *Zarathustra* was published in parts between 1883-1885, and as a single volume in 1892.

telegraph wires', Beth develops heightened consciousness as well as a literary voice. Inspiration is an ecstasy for Beth, in the true sense of the word. While I have already suggested that 'ecstasy' is linked to a trance state, its etymology also connects it both to the uplifting of the soul, and to 'insanity' and 'bewilderment' (OED). When she writes, Beth is suspended between rapture and insanity, between dream and nightmare, and it is this moment of suspension that fascinates her. Beth is comparable here to Cosima, who is somehow psychically attuned to the world around her, suspended on the strings of the violin and delighting in being swept away by the vibrations of her own writing. Indeed, this passage implies that Beth also delights in balancing on the wires between her own will and the influence of the machine; she thrills in being in the state of suspension and oscillation. There is also a sense that she finds the notion of being swept away by the people in the London crowd intoxicating, that she revels in the possibility of being carried away by the masses. Perhaps this desire is also one for her writing to be taken up by and spread through the crowd. Beth is fascinated by the potential for writing a bestseller which would both terrifyingly and thrillingly jeopardize her agency over her work, and give her the acceptance and recognition she yearns for.

### **The Woman Writer in Paston's *A Writer of Books*: Masking the Message**

In *A Writer of Books*, Cosima's first novel is significantly called *A 'Prentice Hand*, which conjures up images of a disembodied or severed hand, and also of the hand of the automatic writer at the séance, or the hand of the writer of the novel. The title brings up

questions of agency: Whose hand wrote the book? Who inspired the writing? Who was the master to the apprentice?

Unlike Beth, Cosima is certain from the beginning that she wants to write. Significantly, she speaks of writing as her 'profession' (p. 23) which gives an insight, not only into editor Mr. Carlton's views on women writers, but also into how society viewed the New Woman writer:

Carlton eyed her with some amusement. He knew plenty of girls who confessed to 'writing a little,' or 'scribbling nonsense,' but he had never before met one who announced that she had adopted literature for her profession with as much assurance as though she had said she was going to be a governess or a hospital nurse. Yet she did not look like a writing woman, he decided, for he shared the old-fashioned prejudice against literary ladies as a class, though when individually young and pretty he was prepared to forgive them everything, even success. (p. 24)

Women writers, according to Carlton, should not have the confidence to assume writing as their profession, but rather should demonstrate stereotypical feminine hesitancy and modesty for their work: they should deny that they write to earn a living, and instead treat writing as a humble, even forgivable, pastime. Financial independence is something that is achievable for the male writer, but should not be considered for the woman writer.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> For more on expectations for female behaviour around the turn of the century, see contemporary conduct books such as George Black, *The Young Wife's Advice Book, etc.* (London, 1910); William Thomas Pyke, *Conduct and Duty: A Treasure-Book of Intellectual, Physical, Social, and Moral Advice* (London, 1887) and Lyman Beecher Sperry, *Confidential Talks with Husband and Wife: A Book of Information and Advice for the Married and Marriageable* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, 1900). For critical writings on the construction of gender in the nineteenth century, see Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), and Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London: Longman, 1981).

This passage suggests that while male writers can choose professional writing as a career, women writers must only hope for modest recognition, and should therefore turn to other, generically female occupations such as nursing or teaching positions. Writing professionally is somehow distasteful in a woman, not only because professionalism and intellectualism are considered masculine traits in the late nineteenth century, but also because of the notion that women writers were physically less feminine. The writing woman was thought to be unattractive, frumpy and singularly unfeminine, or as Dr. Maclure in *The Beth Book* describes Beth, '[c]oarse and masculine' (p. 366).

The associations between literary women and masculinity meant that women writers were uncomfortably juxtaposed between the masculine/public and feminine/private spheres. Journals, articles and cartoons of the 1890s were full of descriptions, criticisms and satires of the New Woman writer, many of them negatively portraying women writers' talents and physical appearance.<sup>37</sup> Ann Heilmann discusses the confliction women writers felt about their literary success: 'feminist writers problematize the conflicting desires and pressures women artists feel when their private and public roles are in collision. In particular, they explore the precarious balancing act women

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Nelson, and Ledger and Luckhurst, *The Fin de Siècle*. Of course, depictions of the New Woman were not uniformly critical. Constance Harsh's article 'Reviewing New Woman Fiction in the Daily Press: *The Times*, the *Scotsman*, and the *Daily Telegraph*', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 34 (2001), pp. 79-96, suggests that reviews of New Woman fiction were not always negative and that 'the late-Victorian critical practice was a complicated and heterogeneous affair' (p. 91), implying that while the New Woman writer was a controversial figure, her fiction did receive some acclaim. Critics have also argued that defining the New Woman and what characterizes her is no straightforward task. Talia Schaffer's "Nothing but Foolscap and Ink": Inventing the New Woman', in *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact*, ed. by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, pp. 39-53 sees the New Woman as 'a media construct' (p. 39), arguing that New Women themselves were instrumental in creating a kind of fictional idea of the New Woman. In the same collection, Chris Willis in "Heaven defend me from political or highly-educated women!": Packaging the New Woman for Mass Consumption' (pp. 53-65) argues that the New Woman was marketed for mass consumption (p. 64). Sally Ledger shares this idea in *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the fin-de-siècle*, suggesting that the New Woman was a historical construct. While I agree that to an extent the figure of the New Woman was a construct of the media, late Victorian ideas about

artists have to perform between conforming to traditional notions of feminine morality and securing their individual professional survival' (*New Woman Fiction*, p. 159).

Women writers faced considerable difficulties in a literary and social market that was hostile to women's public success as well as to her attempts to gain financial independence.

Indeed, the woman writer's 'private and public roles are in collision' (*New Woman Fiction*, p. 159), but this collision does not mark simply a problematic. Instead, this section will suggest that gaining financial independence is itself uncanny for women writers of the *fin-de-siècle*, and that the act of writing, which takes women writers like Cosima to the very heights of perception also allows them to cross the boundaries between traditional ideas about masculinity and femininity. As a writer of fiction, Cosima is shrewdly able to disguise her writing so that it pleases the mass market, while at the same time addressing the issues of realism and the plight of women she feels are intrinsic to her literary ideals. Her training as an author allows her to inhabit different social roles and to convince her editor that her work conforms to his standards, a clever pretense which gives her absolute authority and agency over her work. The fact that she describes her work as a 'profession' is striking, not only because it implies she is entering a masculine sphere of work, but also because the word itself suggests deceit and artifice: in the OED, profession can be defined as 'a declaration (true or false).' Cosima 'professes' to her editors and to her public that her work is the conventional triple-decker with a happy ending, but she is actually producing writing which conveys her realist and

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gender and of the New Woman herself, my interest is in descriptions of women writers, how they were received, and what that reception suggests about the plight of the woman writer at the end of the century.

feminist message, and which places her at the intersection between her private passions and the reinventions of those passions she creates for her editor.<sup>38</sup>

While Cosima is able to negotiate between her literary ambition and the requirements of her editor, she is still anxious about her role as a woman writer, which threatens to overthrow the balance between her public and private life. When she first considers marrying Tom she believes:

She would so enjoy proving in her own person the fallacy of the prejudice against the domestic capabilities of literary ladies. Like the heroine of an old-fashioned novel, she would arrange that her household should be a model of order; she would attend personally to her husband's comforts, give him nice dinners, darn his socks and sew on his buttons with her own hands. He would never see her with inky fingers or disheveled hair, but when he came home tired in the evening he should always find her prettily dressed and cheerful and good-humoured [. . .]. It was quite a charming little picture, and – the lonely old age of the needy spinster was not a pleasant fate to look forward to.

Here Cosima is anxious about becoming the stereotypical literary lady who lacks domestic happiness. Significantly, the fact that she imagines herself as a heroine in an old-fashioned novel suggests how unrealistic this picture of domestic bliss really is: a fiction, a romance, a fairy tale. But that Cosima, whose literary ambition is 'to learn

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<sup>38</sup> There are few in-depth studies of *A Writer of Books*. See, for example, Maria Carla Martino's 'Woman as Writer/Writer as Woman: George Paston's *A Writer of Books*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32 (2004), 223-38, in which she conservatively argues that the novel 'is closely akin in its construction to the feminist novel, so that we can better define it as a novel on the New Woman novelist' (p. 224). See also Margaret D. Stetz, 'Introduction' (pp. v-xiv) and Anita Miller, 'Afterword' (pp. 261-65) in *A Writer of Books* by George Paston.



something of all sides of life and all sorts of conditions of men' (p. 45) and to write a truly new kind of fiction that describes the condition of women in the 1890s, imaginatively sees herself as a conventional heroine in a conventional plot suggests how uneasy she feels about her role as both a woman and as woman writer in a society hostile to women's ambition.

Cosima's marriage to Tom is disastrous because she discovers that, in marrying him, she must sacrifice most of her independence: she has become more of a wife than a writer. The balance between the public and the private has been overthrown and Cosima is left to struggle with the feelings of boredom and futility of the housewife: 'her once fertile brain seemed to have become dull and barren, her imagination absolutely refused to work, and she began to fear that her marriage, so far from exercising a stimulating influence upon her mind, had deadened or destroyed her literary faculty' (p. 142). That Cosima's imagination can be both 'fertile' and 'barren' in a passage about the unhappiness she finds in her marriage seems to suggest that she is attempting to cleanse the words of their association with childbearing and the child-rearing duty she is expected to fulfill as a woman and a wife. The desire to produce a work of fiction, to cultivate her writing and for it to flourish has replaced the maternal instinct to 'produce' children. The word 'faculty' here is also suggestive. Paston suggests that Cosima's writing is aided by a 'sixth sense' (p. 232) or an 'intuitive faculty' (as the OED defines it). Cosima's marriage seems to momentarily strip her of this power, and it is only when she finds the courage and resources to leave Tom that she fully regains it. Significantly, Cosima's decision to end her marriage not only gives her access again to the moments of supernatural inspiration which fuel her work, it also allows her to find a balance between conforming

to society's expectations and breaking them: Cosima discovers that she can be both a writer *and* embody feminine traits, she can enter the public sphere as a woman writer and retain her female identity without trepidation. When Cosima discovers Tom's infidelity she realizes that she has the right and the moral responsibility to herself to find the happiness she never found as his wife.

Cosima also argues that women have a greater purpose than simply to follow the traditional paths of finding love and then marrying: '[l]ove may once have been a woman's whole existence, but that was when a skein of embroidery silk was the only other string in her bow. In the life of a modern woman, blessed with an almost inexhaustible supply of strings, love is no less episodic than in the life of a man' (p. 257). The 'strings' in this passage allude once again to Cosima as a violinist, whose 'imagination had now become a well-tuned instrument upon which she played with a virtuoso's hand' (p. 206). Comparing Cosima to a violin whose strings attune her to supernatural perception here links to the discourse on mesmerism, as I have pointed out earlier. Phyllis Weliver quotes from Mesmer's *Dissertatio physico-medica de planetarum influxu* (1766) to demonstrate how Mesmer linked music, and in particular the violin, to mesmerism:

The harmony established between the astral plane and the human plane ought to be admired as much as the ineffable effect of UNIVERSAL GRAVITATION by which our bodies are harmonized [. . .] as a musical instrument furnished with several strings, the exact tone resonates which is in unison with a given tone. Likewise, human bodies react to stellar

configurations with which they are joined by a given harmony. (pp. 63-64).

In accessing the trance state of mesmerism, Cosima finds harmony with her identity as a woman writer, a harmony she lacks in her dealings with the discordant elements of the literary and marital marketplace.

Not only does Cosima write mesmerically, her thoughts like strings (or Beth's telegraph wires) which vibrate with inspiration from a power outside of herself and which she harnesses for use in her novels, but there is also a suggestion that this kind of writing enables her to find the 'harmony of the spheres', a balance between the public and private spheres.<sup>39</sup> She has many strings in her bow, many possibilities in both her career and private life which do not restrict her to love and marriage alone. When Cosima suggests that life and love are 'episodical' (p. 257), she implies that not only are they episodes as in a series of incidents, or the episodes of an illness or psychological state (like the trance-like state of awareness in which she mesmerically writes), or even episodes as musical forms which reinforces her connection to music, the figure of the violinist and mesmerism, but also episodes as in the fictional narratives which make up a story. Love itself is a fiction and women like Cosima can now focus their energies, not on sustaining a conventional lifestyle, but on career and success.

Cosima suggests here that the woman's sphere is changing and expanding, and that authorship itself gives women an enriching life experience. In negotiating between

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<sup>39</sup> Indeed, in a section entitled 'Separate Spheres' in *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction* (pp. 38-47), Weliver discusses the problems women faced in trying to find a balance between the career and the home: 'far from allowing their marriages to exclude careers, or vice versa, professional female musicians from all classes began to have both, despite the fact that combining career and marriage raised complex questions about a woman's place and how she might reconcile the independence required in professional life with the domestic role expected of ideal Victorian wives' (p. 38).

her public, her editor, and her own ideals, Cosima comes to symbolize the New Woman writer herself, whose ability to disguise herself and adopt different social roles makes her a heightened figure, both a woman and a New Woman indeed, with desires for career, independence, and success. However, while the possibilities of being published and of achieving success hold a fascination for women writers like Cosima, it is one which is both attractive and repellent. Indeed, her name may allude to Cosima Wagner (1837-1900), since both Cosimas have links to music and had unconventional lifestyles. Cosima Wagner had an affair and several children with the composer Richard Wagner before marrying him, but she also achieved fame and recognition in her own right: after her husband's death in 1883, she became the director of the Bayreuth Festival, and her diaries recording her life with Wagner have since been published.<sup>40</sup> The name Cosima itself evokes the term 'cosmic', which the OED defines as 'universal; infinite; immense'. Cosima's potential is immense, and her writing may one day receive universal acceptance, but she may also be famously scandalous because of her decisions to disregard marital conventions.

Cosima admits that she wants to write 'for name and fame' (p. 210), but she makes a clear distinction between literary and popular success, and while she refuses to write a best-seller, she desires from a young age to gain celebrity. For example, she keeps a journal, 'the raw material of the masterpiece which, she had already decided, should make her famous in the future' (p. 6). The literary marketplace is both a venue for gaining literary celebrity, and, what Cosima dreads, where her writings could be misinterpreted or misunderstood. Just as Cosima fears that elements of the supernatural in

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<sup>40</sup> See Cosima Wagner, *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, ed. and annotated by Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, trans. and intro. by Geoffrey Skelton (London: Collins, 1978-1980).

her writing would damage her aim of literary realism, celebrity itself, the possibility of being recognized for her ability to create a 'masterpiece' (p. 6), also poses a threat to her political agenda. While fame for her is desirable, achieving fame might disturbingly imply that she has conformed to male literary expectations of great writing, instead of adhering to her own feminist and realist ambitions. The elusiveness of celebrity for Cosima also makes it a ghostly presence in the text, and she is haunted not only by the possibility that she will achieve fame as a novelist, but also by the possibility that she might not. Attempting to challenge conventional expectations is problematic for women writers, as Heilmann suggests, because it forces them to find a way in which they can maintain their feminine morality as well as gain literary success. Ultimately, however, it brings them into contact with the male publishing world where they powerfully and authoritatively learn to negotiate between their own literary ambitions and the requirements of their editor and their public.

Cosima's authorship, as suggested earlier, is influenced by supernatural perception and inspiration, but she is also influenced by male expectations of what should be sold in the literary marketplace. While this is not to suggest that a male-dominated publishing world has a supernatural power over Cosima's literary output, it does suggest that for Cosima to achieve literary recognition and financial independence in a male-dominated profession is uncanny, and that in successfully entering a traditionally masculine sphere of work, she is powerfully and persuasively balancing her own ambitions with those of her editor. Cosima's writing is suggestive of the ways that New Woman writers had to be adept at disguise and camouflage, superficially pleasing their

editors and the reading public while still communicating their observations on real life and the plight of woman at the end of the century.

The 1890s saw a rise in shorter volumes which were more affordable than the triple-deckers which had previously dominated the market, and which lessened the stronghold of lending libraries like Mudie's and Smith's. Although earlier in the Victorian period, 'Mudie and Smith could ruin an author's career by refusing to carry his or her novels',<sup>41</sup> writers at the *fin-de-siècle* were still confronted with the problem of having to censor their work to suit both the reading public and the conventions of the publishing world. Women writers had the added pressure of being judged by male editors, and of seeing their work stripped or banished by male censorship: women had to struggle with the fact that their writing was filtered through a masculine gaze before it ever reached the reading public.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Steve Farmer, 'Appendix F: Literary Censorship in Victorian England', in *The Story of a Modern Woman*, by Ella Hepworth Dixon, p. 267. Farmer includes in his appendices to the novel a number of articles addressing the problem of censorship in the nineteenth century, including an excerpt from George Moore's 'Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals' (1885) (pp. 267-72), and Walter Besant, Eliza Lynn Linton and Thomas Hardy's 'Candour in Fiction' (1890) (pp. 272-87). For more on publishing and the literary market in the nineteenth century see for example Bradley Dean, *The Making of the Victorian Novelist: Anxieties of Authorship in the Mass Market*, ed. by William E. Cain (London: Routledge, 2003) and Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). In *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* (Devon: David & Charles, 1970), Guinevere L. Griest reports that the subscription price for Mudie's was one guinea a year, which meant that only "comfortable" families' (p. 79) could join: 'Mudie's patrons numbered about 25,000 at the time of its founder's death in 1890; Smith's about 15,000 in 1894. By the 1890s, too, the trend towards a one-volume 6s. edition was growing stronger, so that these figures are probably lower than they were when the circulating library was at the height of its power in mid-century. When Mudie's finally closed its doors, *The Times*, estimated, for example, that "at one time" the firm had had over 50,000 subscribers' (p. 79). Significantly, Griest argues that 'Mudie's censorship was primarily directed against works which depicted violations of the established Victorian sexual code, a code which was generally accepted by the members of the established church as well as by those of other denominations' (p. 144). The 'violations' of the 'Victorian sexual code' were certainly something New Woman writers were interested in exploring, and certainly would have faced the difficulties of passing the censorship of the conservative, male librarian.

<sup>42</sup> See also Gaye Tuchman and Nina Fortin's important study, 'Edging Women Out: Some Suggestions about the Structure of Opportunities and the Victorian Novel', *Signs*, 6 (1980), 308-25. 'We propose that the Victorian novel displays the "empty-field phenomenon." That is, when a field or occupation is not socially valued, women and other minorities will populate it heavily. If the field grows in prestige, (white) men may push women (and other minorities) out' (p. 309). 'growing prestige of the novel in England in the

The reaction of many of the male characters to Cosima's writing suggests the ways in which women writers faced both hostility and skepticism in the literary marketplace. While the editor Mr. Carlton does not take her sense of professionalism seriously, he also believes that women can only write well once they have faced great hardships: 'Then, when you were faded, and lonely, and disillusioned, and middle-aged, you might write a great novel' (p. 55). Although Carlton fails to recognize the triumphant outcome which follows this trying period, he nevertheless suggests that writing is an initiatory process. Tom's attitude towards Cosima's writing is practical but unsympathetic: he believes she should sacrifice her talent in favour of money. Mr. Haddon of Haddon & Waller will only publish her novel once she has transformed it into a 'happy ending[s]' (p. 79) that will please the public. Cosima's struggles with male editors are similar to those of Mary Erle in *The Story of a Modern Woman*, whose novel must be censored because she has written about 'a young man making love to his friend's wife' (p. 146). While Mary defends herself for her 'real observation' (p. 147), the editor dismisses her, arguing that '[t]he public won't stand it, my dear girl. They want thoroughly healthy reading [. . .] Must be fit to go into every parsonage in England. Remember that you write chiefly for healthy English homes' (p. 146). Cosima and Mary's editors both suggest here that what the reading public wants is what the male public wants; not stories about the plight of women, about marital affairs, or as in

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Victorian period was one of the factors limiting the opportunities for women to have their work seriously considered and to achieve fame' (p. 309). For more information on the history of women's writing published in the nineteenth century, see, for example, Flint, Shattock, and Terence Allan Hogwood, *'Colour'd Shadows': Contexts in Publishing, Printing, and Reading Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

Cosima's story, about an unhappy couple, but rather conventional stories with conventional endings.

In order to succeed, however, Cosima does not simply comply with her editor's advice or 'sell-out' to the popular market. Instead, she skillfully disguises her writing in order to superficially please her editor while simultaneously keeping her real observations veiled within her work. In this way, her work maintains its edginess as well as her commitment to a political agenda. In writing her first novel Cosima 'was forced to remind herself that if she were to ever gain a hearing, she must begin by suiting herself to the requirements of the public, or at any rate of the publishers' (p. 81). She edits her work, seemingly to the standards that Mr. Haddon requires: she 'transformed tragedy and tears into the conventional white satin, wedding-bells and prospective happiness' (p. 81). Her transformation of her novel implies, however, that not only does she change the work to seemingly meet Haddon's expectations, but also that she transforms it into a more polished, precise piece. She maintains that she cuts out the most 'effective' (p. 81) parts of her writing, but admits they are also the most 'redundant' (p. 81): the work she submits may seem to be written to Haddon's specifications, but Cosima is actually honing her skills and making more precise her ideas and characters.

Cosima's second 'book sold more freely [than the first], and there seemed a chance that in this case the author's profits might actually amount to two figures!' (p. 143), which suggests that she has become even more adept at disguising her own ideas within her work. Indeed, the only character who is aware of the artifice is Quentin Mallory, who says that 'the machinery [in the novel] is too apparent [. . .]. And the author makes gallant, though happily not always successful, efforts to appeal to the average



reader' (p. 143). Although Quentin claims to see through Cosima's charade, the public, and her editor are fooled: the book is well received, sells well, and if Quentin is not distracted by the moments in the novel where she panders to her public, he nevertheless gives evidence that her political message is still a substantial, if submerged part of her work.

Cosima's ability to disguise herself so well depends on her ability to brutally edit her work, a process which is comparable to completing a ritualistic slaughter. Cosima transforms into the symbolic figure of a priestess, who in a moment of controlled violence effectively edits and improves (or redeems) her work:

[d]uring the next few days Cosima was occupied in slashing and mutilating the offspring of her brain, and soon began to feel as if she were up to her elbows in gore. As she sacrificed her most effective, but at the same time redundant passages, she compared herself to the Russian mother who flung some of her children out of a sledge to the wolves in order to save the rest. (p. 81)

In her editorial amputations, she is successfully cutting away *the less effective moments* in her writing, a process which is empowering because it strengthens her work. Like the Russian mother who sacrifices some of her children for the salvation of the others, Cosima must also be professionally ruthless in order not only to deliver her work from its weaker points, but to enhance and enrich it.

The notion of Cosima cutting away the 'offspring of her brain' suggests that she is cutting out the part of herself that would link her to hysteria: she is symbolically cutting away her womb ('hysteric' is the Greek for belonging to the womb) and stopping her

menstrual cycle (she is up to her elbows in gore, perhaps symbolically stemming the flow of blood). This is not an attempt to destroy her role as woman, but rather an amputation of the negative connotations of hysteria which link the female body to female illness. Indeed, Cosima is embracing other aspects of hysteria like 'unhealthy emotion or excitement' (as the OED defines hysteria), which she can use to drive and inspire her writing.

For too long New Women novels have been read as stories of women's failure. Although women writers in New Woman fiction face many hardships, they also act as priestesses for the numinous in women's writing, ritually sacrificing themselves at the altar of inspiration so that they can resurrect themselves as powerfully transformed figures. New Women writers may be anxious about engaging with the supernatural in their novels, but it is the thrilling and destructive nature of extrasensory perception which makes the figure of the writing woman a force to be reckoned with at the end of the century.

## Conclusion

This thesis has explored how writers and mental scientists of the *fin-de-siècle* were radically conflicted between a desire to police the boundaries of science, identity, and writing itself and, conversely, to experience the ecstasy of engaging with the supernatural. Although D.H. Lawrence argues that ‘the Wondrous Victorian Age managed to fasten the door so tight, and light up the compound so brilliantly with electric light, that [. . .] [t]he Unknown became a joke’ (p. 285), problematically, Victorians in the 1880s and 1890s found that they could not, after all, fasten the door of empirical science against supernatural elements. Indeed, even the electric light which ‘brilliantly’ lit up the compound was linked to the Unknown. Like other technological innovations of the period, electricity was seen both as a symbol of materialist science, and as evidence that science could not escape connection with occult phenomena: science was haunted by the possibility that the very techniques it used to eliminate supernatural potential actually evoked it.

Late Victorians tried to keep out the Unknown, but the joke was not only on Lawrence (who failed to see the significance of Victorian supernaturalism on cultural, literary, and psychological developments in the twentieth century), but also on the late Victorians themselves. Indeed, they were unable to regulate the supernatural, but this was in part because they delighted in the haunted and occult elements which crept into fiction and mental science texts. Writers wanted to be ghosted by writing, desiring to give themselves up to moments of ‘mysterious life-suggestion’ (Lawrence, p. 285).

This thesis has treated haunted scenes of writing as crucial to an understanding of authorship, identity, the science of mind and spiritualism at the *fin-de-siècle*, which in turn raises questions about the fascination at the end of the century in resurrecting ghosts. Henry James conjured up the ghost of a pen on his deathbed (perhaps

symbolically bringing back to life the James who wrote by hand rather than the James who dictated to his typist), and spirits were called from the grave by their relatives so that they could appear in photographs. Mesmerism revived all the occult associations in hypnotism, and Vernon Lee revived and exorcised ghosts in her aesthetic writings.

Why were writers in this period drawn to resurrecting ghosts in their work? Women writers were particularly concerned with symbolically bringing themselves back to life through their writing: in exploring their self-identification with ghosts and heightened perception, they could sacrifice themselves at the altar of inspiration and rise up again, phoenix-like. For women writers, ghosts became emblematic not only of women's resistance against legal and political invisibility, but also for her numinous revival from patriarchal subjugation.

Perhaps the notion that writers obsessively resurrected and exorcised ghosts also has something to do with the term 'ghost' itself. One of the definitions for the word in the OED is '[u]sed as the conventional equivalent for L. *spiritus*, in contexts where the sense is *breath* or *a blast*'. A ghost is an afflatus and an inspiration which breathes life and creativity into authors, but 'ghost' can also be defined doubly as '[a] good spirit' and '[a]n evil spirit' (OED). Writers at the end of the century were concerned about sites of power and influence, and ghosts may have offered a means of articulating how authorship itself was a balancing act between good and evil, between engaging with both the rapture and the terror of suspended agency.

Indeed, in writing about ghosts, did late nineteenth-century writers hope that this was a means of ensuring they would haunt the canon? Or does writing about the ghostly make authors spectral figures in literary criticism? I have attempted to resurrect some ghostly figures in the canon, and to show how even canonical writers are drawn to the supernatural. Paradoxically, the fact that they wrote about ghosts

makes these authors the most material witnesses to *fin-de-siècle* anxieties and preoccupations about identity.

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