

Ball State University's
Digital Literature Review



Historical Hauntings and
Modern-Day Manifestations

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THE DIGITAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The *Digital Literature Review* is a journal showcasing undergraduate student work in literature and cultural studies. The journal is produced by undergraduate students at Ball State University who are involved in the *Digital Literature Review* immersive learning project. Our goal is to provide a forum where undergraduate students can showcase their research projects and disseminate their valuable contributions to ongoing academic conversations.

The *Digital Literature Review* is published annually in the spring. The deadline for submissions is in early January. We welcome original articles relating to each year's theme. Articles should range from 3000-5000 words; every article is reviewed by undergraduate students on the journal's editorial team. Notification of initial decision is in February. All authors receive constructive feedback concerning submissions.

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THE DIGITAL LITERATURE REVIEW

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Ghosts and hauntings occupy an unusual space within cultural consciousness and academic discourse. Throughout their historical trajectory and within contemporary culture, themes of ghosts and hauntings consistently surface and remain as present today as they have ever been. In spite of the prevalence of these themes, both from a historical perspective and within our current cultural context, the subject of ghosts and hauntings is often relegated outside the bounds of serious academic study. This first issue of the *Digital Literature Review* aims to present ghosts and hauntings as relevant and necessary subjects worthy of analysis and critical attention. This volume seeks to illustrate that analysis of ghosts and hauntings reveals important truths about our cultural histories and contemporary lives.

The articles and critical editions collected here theorize ghosts and hauntings from the perspective of multiple disciplines and schools of critical thought. In their individual articles, authors utilize a range of frameworks to analyze historical and contemporary representations of ghosts and hauntings, including sociology, film theory, postcolonial theory, gender and queer studies, and psychoanalysis. In the critical editions, the co-editors provide annotated versions of published ghost stories. These ghost stories appear alongside introductions and collected documents, written and assembled by the co-editors, that contextualize the specific story's representations of ghosts and hauntings within particular historical periods and social movements. Out of this multidisciplinary approach come several questions that are of particular importance to this edition: How can we understand ghosts and hauntings as being socially, culturally, and historically inscribed or constituted? What does the study of ghosts and hauntings reveal about our historical and contemporary contexts? In what ways do ghosts and hauntings illuminate anxieties, particularly about the transgression of boundaries, including those of space and time, as well as of gender, race, and class? Finally, in what ways do ghosts and hauntings create opportunities for representing marginalized narratives and lives?

In their exploration of these questions, the authors and co-editors included in this issue call attention to important, recurring themes. Several authors explore how ghosts and hauntings function as a means of calling attention to institutional violence and oppression. These articles examine the impact of cultural hauntings and times in history that linger in the public memory. Often these moments are ones in which great atrocities are committed, acts of violence whose memory is an open wound within the cultural psyche. In "Spells, Spirits, and Charms in the Harlem Renaissance," Jamie Battaglia examines the Harlem Renaissance and how Voodoo was used as a spectral weapon against the oppression of African Americans. The articles "Cultural Incursion into Wendigo Territory," by Jackson Eflin, and "Dealing With Our Bloody Past: Repression vs. Recognition of American History in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*," by Kameron McBride, examine how histories of colonial

violence haunt modern popular culture. In “Except the Haunted, Hidden Thing Was Me’: Ghostly Matters and Transsexual Haunting,” Esther Wolfe explores motifs of ghostliness and spectrality in transsexual representation, arguing for the recognition of transsexual oppression as a contemporary form of cultural haunting. Reading history as haunting allows a chance for the ghosts of the past to find some peace.

Ghosts also disorder our constructed understanding of time and place, displacing boundaries of inside and outside, private and public. In this vein, several authors look at how ghosts are constituted within various architectures and different types of social space. In “Beware the House that Feels: The Impact of Sentient House Hauntings on Literary Families,” Ashley Starling uses Freud’s theory of the uncanny and its relationship to deconstruction to describe the unsettling nature of the haunted house through its disordering of private, domestic space. Rebekah Hobbs’s article, “A Place to Mourn: Why the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is Crucial to American Healing,” analyzes the ghostly architecture of the Vietnam memorial, examining the ways in which the memorial space blurs the boundaries of private and public.

Several authors in this issue explore how ghosts and hauntings portray the spectral, immaterial workings of media and technology, both historically and within contemporary culture. In “Resurfacing Specters in the House of Media: The Ghosts of Columbine in *American Horror Story: Murder House*,” Jared Lynch illustrates how the recurring narrative framing of the Columbine tragedy in the media renders the event ghostly. In “Multilayered Specter, Multifaceted Presence: A Critical Edition of H.P. Lovecraft’s ‘The Tomb,’” co-editors Shelby Hatfield, Rebekah Hobbs, and Jared Lynch use Lovecraft’s short story to contextualize the ghostly disordering of time and space in relation to emerging technologies such as the telephone and long-distance travel that altered the ways people of the early 1900s conceived time and distance.

Ghosts and hauntings also express anxieties about the capitalist economic system, particularly the immaterial functioning of markets; the spectral relationships between capital, labor, and production; and the divisions of class. In this vein, several editions in this issue explore how ghosts are used both to resist and reassert dominant class and economic structures. In “The Peasant Ghost: A Critical Edition of ‘The Ghost of Sakura’ as Adapted by A. B. Mitford,” co-editors Kameron McBride and Jordan Meyer illustrate how ghosts and hauntings function as a means by which to manage and maintain the class structures of feudal Japan through the lens of a traditional folktale. In “Dead End Job: A Critical Edition of ‘The Transferred Ghost’ by Frank Stockton,” co-editors Jackson Eflin, Wendy Faunce, and Brittany Means explore “The Transferred Ghost” to show how Stockton uses the theme of haunting to make a humorous critique of capitalism and institutional bureaucracy. Finally, in “Shadows and Specters: A Critical Edition of ‘The Shadow in the Corner’

by M.E. Braddon,” co-editors Rachael Heffner, Elizabeth Palmer, Malorie Palmer, and Esther Wolfe explore M.E Braddon’s short story to illustrate how the haunting motif is used to represent the spectral absent-presence of the female working class during the Victorian Period.

Several authors also consider how ghosts and hauntings express the spectrality of gender roles, as well as the historical condition of women’s oppression. In “Ghostly Hands: A Critical Edition of Henry James’s ‘The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,’” co-editors Morgan Aprill and Lauren Lutz use their edition of Henry James’s tale to portray the ways in which complex dynamics of gender and power in nineteenth-century America are communicated through the trope of spectral, disembodied hands. In “Ghosts of Loss: Rossetti’s Haunted Poetry,” co-editors Ruth Weller-Passman, Mackenzie Fluharty, and Ashley Starling illustrate how the ghostly structures of poetry provided an outlet for women of the Victorian era to communicate their grief, loss, and fears as well as their marginalized subjectivities and secret selves.

Other articles in this volume stand alone in their representations of ghosts and hauntings. In “At Home in Babel: The Language of Hyperreality in the Immigrant Narrative,” author Abigail Shachar shows how the ghostly concept of the simulacrum or the hyperreal reveals the haunted, spectral nature of immigrant narratives in the United States. In “The Spirit of a Thought in a Fictional World: Summoning Ghosts to the Stage,” author Ruth Weller-Passman investigates ghostliness through the medium of theatre, unpacking the utilization of props and the use of silence to show the spectrality of the stage.

Taken together, the articles in this first issue of the *Digital Literature Review* illuminate the underlying cultural contexts of historical and contemporary representations of ghosts and hauntings, and they explore the ways authors use ghosts to express national traumas, cultural anxieties, and silenced voices. In this way, the articles in this issue also demonstrate the relevance of the study of ghosts and hauntings to current academic discourse. These articles also touch on a deeper kind of work. In traditional tales of haunting, ghosts haunt the living because a violence done remains unrecognized and unresolved. In this way, to study ghosts and hauntings is to engage in a collective, cultural working-through of the injustice of both the present and the past. Ghosts linger because they are unheard. This issue does the work of listening to them.

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Incursion Into Wendigo Territory

Jackson Eflin, *Ball State University*

This article explores modern urban legends that appropriate the idea of the Wendigo, a spirit from various Native American tribal legends. These urban legends are informed by a cultural guilt of the dispossession of Native American territories, but the victory of monster over protagonist demonstrates the futility of these attempts to comprehend histories of atrocities.

“There are places that can take your memory away.” – Jack Wawastases

Much has been taken from the indigenous peoples of the Americas: land, history, identity, name, and voice. The colonization of the Americas took place on both a physical and cultural level, and so, in the end, even myths were colonized. But as the line of the Frontier was pushed westward, a curious legend slipped through the cracks, and the attempts to hunt down and capture this legend go on today. Called Wendigo, Windigo, Whitiko, Atchen, Chenoo, or a host of other names by different peoples, the legend of the cannibal spirit who brings snow and hunger in its cloven gait was just as terrifying to settlers as it was to natives, and so attempts to settle it persist. The people and the places that created the Wendigo are colonized now, mapped and measured, a thousand cultures swallowed up by trading posts and concrete roads. But the memory of the Wendigo and all it represents haunts the collective unconscious of America, a howling reminder of colonial dispossession. The use of the Wendigo in modern urban legends shows how America is wrestling with this guilt. If we accept Cynthia Landrum’s assertion of “urban legends represented as warnings or cautionary tales” (266), then these narratives can be seen as cautionary tales against forgetting the history of the territories America has colonized.

Understanding the Wendigo’s place in both native and colonial mythology gives a perspective into the larger conflict it represents in the collective unconscious of America as a whole. This paper will examine the original myths of the Wendigo and how their use in the lore of modern urban legends circulated on anonymous internet forums represents an ongoing struggle over a stretch of cultural territory by deconstructing the presentation of Wendigos in these stories and how the intentional presentation of the monster reflects representations of Native Americans.

Before proceeding, it is vital to explore a bit of where the Wendigo myth comes from. This is a thorny issue, as these stories are in many ways not mine to tell. Deirdre Keenan, exploring the difficulties of representing the overlap of her Irish ancestral history and the history of Native Americans asks, “[H]ow can I represent indigenous voices rather than ‘voices that have been ventriloquized’ out of an ‘imperialist nostalgia?’” (186). This essay comes from a similar place as Keenan’s, written by a colonizer, not a native, and thus these examinations of traditional myths should not be seen as authoritative recitations but as

reflections that show a shape of history, but not the only shape.

Appearing in myths from the Great Lakes and regions north and west, told by the Cree, Algonquin, Ojibwe, and Mi'kmaq peoples,¹ amongst others, the nature of the Wendigo varies wildly, but the common threads are of cold and hunger. In the stories, a tribe's village will often be having trouble feeding itself due to the scarcity of game or other machinations of a Wendigo in the area. The Wendigo will use a wide repertoire of tricks, from vanishing the meat off of still-living game to mimicking the face or voice of a hunter, to lure prey away from home, where it will eat or possess them, causing them to "go Wendigo."² Usually the Wendigo is defeated by destroying its icy heart. In these stories, the death of the Wendigo signals the end of starvation, and in some cases the end of winter and the coming of summer.

Howard Norman argues in his introduction to *Where the Chill Came From: Cree Wendigo Tales and Journeys*, that the Wendigo upset the "old agreement" of the hunt, that humans hunt and animals are hunted. As part of the arrangement, the Cree allow hunting ground to rest and replenish and they tell stories about the slain animals to honor them. The Wendigo, however, obstructs hunting, or hunts in the village, where no one is supposed to be prey. Wendigos use their tricks to isolate a person, a manifestation of a very real fear of losing your way while hunting, and the danger of a lost hunting party turning to cannibalism if unsuccessful. This taboo against cannibalism is one of the metaphors the Wendigo makes material.

D. H. Turner, in "Wendigo Mythology and the Analysis of Cree Social Structure," relates a myth in which a man and his son eat their grandchild and wife, respectively. This act of devouring incorporates one into the other, which Turner explores as an upsetting of the traditional method of incorporation of others into the family through marriage. He highlights this by referring to the characters as "Grandfather/Grandson" and "Father/Mother," showing how the consumed still have presence in the consumer. He explains that Cree tribes space themselves across the landscape to facilitate proper social relations. The transgressing of boundaries, both physical and genealogical, disrupts the natural order of things.

In both of these interpretations, the Wendigo is responsible for the radical upsetting of properly defined lines, both in landscape and social structure. The Wendigo carries the fear of consumption in two ways, both the simple fear of being eaten but also the fear of "going Wendigo" yourself, being possessed or infected, the Wendigo getting into you. Either way, someone is where they do not belong, and this trespass is terrifying.

The Wendigo's connection to territory goes back to when colonists first encountered it. The writings of Jesuit Minister and Evangelist Paul Le Jeune, which contain the earliest known reference to the Wendigo, also contain a territorial theme:

...this Devilish Woman³ added that [the Wendigo] had eaten some Attikamegouekhin—these are the tribes that live north of the River which is called the Three Rivers,—and that he would eat a great many more of them if he were not called elsewhere. But that *Atchen*,⁴ (a sort of Werewolf), would come in his place to devour them, if they made a village, as they had decided

Notes

1. It should be noted that the lines between these cultures are somewhat fuzzy, and the way they are defined comes from both native and Western categorizations. Originality of the Wendigo myth thus can vary wildly depending on the source of the story.
2. The Wendigo is consistently described as possessing, as opposed to the more apt infecting. This repeated use of possession to describe "going Wendigo" suggests an unconscious connection between the Wendigo and ownership.
3. A religious official doing trance work to facilitate glossolalia. Le Jeune reinterprets this as demonic possession.
4. "*Atchen*" or "*Chenoo*" is generally accepted to be the Montagnais-Naskapi word for the Wendigo, or at least for a being of such similar mythology that the differences are primarily linguistic.

to do; that he would come to get them, even up to the French Fort; that he would slaughter the French themselves. (Le Jeune 7)

The wording, “*even up to the French fort...the French themselves*” has a subtle implication of the French being on some higher order. Something about their French-ness, their civilized-ness, apparently makes their space better, gives them some inherent guard against the evils of the wild. This establishment of the “better space” is an attempt to reassert colonial power by relegating native space as being in some nebulous way inferior, more prone to predation. The description of the Atchen as “some kind of werewolf” is also a colonial move. This changes the threat from a native one, and thus beyond the territory of colonial mythology, to something within European understanding. While there are similarities between the Wendigo and the werewolf, both animalistic anthropophages who were once human, the werewolf can become human again, whereas once you “go Wendigo” you never go back.⁵ This subtle move to put down stakes in this unfamiliar territory shows the conqueror’s response to the unknown, to redefine or jettison to a safe distance. Even if it isn’t understood, it is at least pushed to the periphery.

Over the next four hundred years, the Wendigo would stalk the edges of American discourse. For native writers it was often used as a metaphorical device, as seen in *Tracks* or *Solar Storms*. In *Tracks: A Novel* by Ojibwe author Louise Erdrich, the narrator contextualizes the maddening depression brought on by deaths from plague by saying that “We had gone half Windigo (6),”⁶ that is, gone half mad from the extremes of loss and winter. The narrator’s abusive mother in Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms* is said to be possessed by the Wendigo. On the other hand, for colonial writers it was a fertile ground for mining boogeymen. August Delerth added it to the canon of the Cthulhu Mythos in *Ithaqua*. In *Pet Semetary* by Stephen King, the necromantic properties of the eponymous cemetery are attributed to a Wendigo having soured the ground. All of these references draw on the power of a symbol with deep cultural roots, though in Hogan’s and Erdrich’s cases the invocation of the Wendigo integrates the narratorial present with their cultures’ pasts, while Delerth’s and King’s invocations attempt to connect their characters’ troubles to a longer narrative that breaches cultural boundaries. The use in *Ithaqua* and *Pet Semetary* can be seen as what Boyd and Thrush call “the settler society’s attempts to make a usable history out of its colonial past” (xxiii). This colonial past is full of ghosts that haunt the colonized present, and the native-born spirit that haunts the Americans around King’s cemetery is just another example, the anxieties of colonial guilt refusing to stay buried.

This brings the narrative to the modern-day, where the Wendigo is quite fashionable on the imageboard. Since the story nicknamed “Cabin Fever,” posted in 2012, started the recent Wendigo fad, over fifty Wendigo-related stories have become creepypastas. Such stories are posted on *Achan*, a largely anonymous forum where posts are usually deleted after a few days of inactivity. Thus good stories are copied down as text documents, which can be easily copied and pasted into a new thread. This “copy and paste” method of story sharing became abbreviated to copypasta, the subset of horror stories being referred to

Notes

5. In all fairness to Le Jeune, explaining the Wendigo is rather difficult. It acts a bit like a Werewolf in its anthropophagia and living in the woods, but its supernatural powers make it seem like a sorcerer. For this paper I will use a hauntological lens, addressing it like a ghost in order to examine a cultural role it plays. Technically the Wendigo is a type of Manitou, an Algonquin word that refers to a variety of spirits.

6. The phrase “going Wendigo” or “to go Wendigo” is a recurring phrase that indicates a person has been fully possessed and overtaken by the cannibalistic mania of the Wendigo.

as creepypasta. A majority of the Wendigo creepypastas follow the same format, with young adults being hunted by some thing in the woods, and so repetitious is the formula that new stories are often met with accusations of unoriginality. I'll be looking at two of these stories closely, to show how they reflect this pattern of cultural colonization. While there are a variety to choose from, these two have clear and unambiguous links to the Wendigo, as opposed to merely a shade bearing its shape without realizing it is doing so.

These stories are valuable to examine because they are a snapshot of modern American culture. The Wendigo appears in many other stories, both on *Achan* and elsewhere, but the stories examined here have the added advantage of being anonymous. Unattached to faces and names, each individual post must be read on its own merits, with no history to distort them. And yet despite being free of history, the stories keep circling back to aspects of history that haunt the cultures that created them. The inescapability of the Wendigo, even in a space beyond identity, shows how deeply its teeth are dug into the culture of America, thus the stories repeat with only small changes, always trying to grasp the shape of a history that refuses to stay quiet.

The story that started the trend, "Cabin Fever," was posted some time in summer 2012.⁷ The narrator, "a city kid from Chicago," goes camping with cousins on their family's land in Alabama. During the first day of camping, the teenagers run into a neighbor, Tanner, who joins them. Between them, there are five girls and six guys. A typical camping day goes by, and Tanner pops home to ask permission to stay the night, two campers going with him as an honor guard. An hour later they come running back into the cabin, followed by everyone else, reporting strange goings on in the woods: someone following them on the path, spasming, back turned the whole time. They assume it's some mischievous rednecks until one of the cousins begins to panic, "going on about how he went to school with a native kid that was telling him about the goat man." He is chastised for worrying everyone, but continues, "going on and on about how it's the goat man 'and how we're in his woods.'" The narrator interrupts the narrative for a moment to explain that at the time he had never heard of the Goatman:

but then a couple years ago⁸ the year before I graduated from college I had a Menom⁹ for a roommate and I ended up asking him about it. And to sum it up, it's basically a fucking man with the head of a goat and he can shape shift and he gets among groups of people to terrorize them. It's also supposed to be kind of like the Wendigo and it's bad mojo to even talk about it and even worse if you see it.

They eventually calm down, cooking three sausage packs, each with four sausages in them. An argument breaks out when the narrator is accused of taking two, which he denies, having given one to everyone specifically.

About then it dawns on them what is wrong, just as a camper who had accompanied Tanner starts screaming for everyone to get out. Everyone flees the cabin and, upon counting, realizes that now there are only eleven people where there had been twelve. The narrator

Notes

7. I should point out that this isn't the story's actual name. All these stories were posted as forum comments, and were thus title-less. For ease of reference I have given them each a name.

8. A couple years ago: Here the narrator reveals that this story is not only not recent, but is constructed from information from various points in his life. This ties into my research, especially Deirdre Keenan's writing about construction of narratives and histories. The separation from the immediacy of the events brings into question legitimacy of both memory and narrative.

9. Menom: a member of the Menominee Nation, an indigenous tribe native to Michigan and Wisconsin.

realizes that, with so many people who all knew only a few others in the group, it had been easy for the Goatman to slip in. The story continues in this vein for quite some time, juggling numbers so that it is easy to lose track of how many people should be there.

Eventually Tanner darts home for a gun. Upon returning, he and the narrator realize the Goatman slipped in and out again, and the narrator starts to panic: “But at least I feel better because we can be American and shoot the fuck out of whatever it is if it comes back.” Terrifying sounds of the Goatman trying to get in last through the night, sounding like an animal failing to imitate human speech, until a few shots are fired into the darkness, driving it off. Screeching noises persist, echoing in the woods.

Tanner stays awake through the night and realizes that at some point some one, or something, has slipped into the cabin. Not wanting to scare anyone he says nothing, watching as it pretends to sleep, standing up occasionally in the dark to jitter and lie down again. They hurry home the next morning and, arriving at the house, the Goatman gives Tanner a dead-eye stare, lags to the back of the group, and then vanishes into the forest.

The Goatman in this narrative explores the classic idea of haunting that can be described as the “present absence.” Avery Gordon wrestles with this idea, exploring how absences in narrative, history, and memory can only be reconstructed by examining the shape of the gaps they leave behind. She differentiates the ghost from haunting, defining haunting as “that which appears to not be there, a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or empirical evidence if you like, that tells you that a haunting is taking place” (Gordon 8). The ghost, to Gordon, is the marker of a gap in history, culture, or memory, “cajoling us to reconsider” (6). This applies significantly to this narrative, which is riddled with absent presences.

One of the absent presences is the smell that always seems to signal the coming of the Goatman. At the start it smells “like ozone,” but towards the end of the narrative it evolves into “an actual nasty gross blood smell, like cooking blood and singed hair.” The smell comes and goes, but at one point the smell just vanishes. The narrator tells us “usually smells fade away or get less. It just literally was there one second and then not the second.” Not only does this underline the supernatural nature of the threat being faced, but it also calls attention to absences. Later, when the Goatman, in the form of one of the campers, is writhing, as though she were laughing, but silently, causes the narrator to realize that the woods are totally devoid of any sound, no birds or squirrels to be heard. Again, the actions of the spectre draw attention to absences, and while this absence is literal, others are less so.

The Goatman is never given a form or a voice, and is only ever able to imitate, only able to interact with the world in the form of an intruder. The native figure never speaks with its own words; instead the words of the invader are put into its mouth, and it is ventriloquized like a puppet. Kathryn Shanley explores this idea of ventriloquism as an unvoicing of native peoples, their stories told by people claiming to speak with their voice. The native voice here is removed. Shanley states, “[T]he exclusion of Indian voices perpetuates the idea that non-Indians can speak for Indians better than Indians can speak for themselves” (688). The unvoicing of natives removes the ability to tell their own story, and thus define themselves. This puts the native in a spectral position, present but unable to affect change, intangible.

When the Wendigo is given voice, even the voice is spectral as it cannot be defined. In many creepypastas, there will be a moment where the author will try to describe the noises, always failing to properly articulate them, defining them as “not human, not like any animal ever heard.” For the author of “Cabin Fever,” the creatures trying to imitate human speech sound “like those YouTube cats and dogs whose owners teach them how to ‘talk.’”

The narrator describes the way all people of all languages have a certain cadence, and that this is like none of them.

The Goatman's not-quite-human behavior and inability to quite mimic human speech plays on the literary device of the uncanny, that which reveals the strangeness in the familiar. Gesa Mackenthun states that "the literary mode of the uncanny fulfils a memory function; it brings to light forgotten or subjugated knowledges. The greatest uncanny effect is when a 'Rememory' (to borrow Morrison's term)¹⁰ invades the family home" (98). It is the subjugated knowledge being pushed to the forefront that is more terrifying than the Goatman's physical trespass. The characters put a great deal of effort into keeping the Wendigo out of the family's home, despite its seeming ability to come and go freely. After all, according to one of the panicking campers, these are "his woods." The fear of these buried memories resurging to recolonize territory from which they had been pushed shines through here in the Goatman's almost casual ability to reinvade spaces thought entirely safe. The Goatman literally unsettles, both by being a fearful presence and by uprooting the settler's assumptions that the settled land is a controlled property, as opposed to an unwilling hostage. The unvoiced monster brings to light the voiceless victims, silenced so that their presence may be ignored or forgotten.

Another creepypasta dealing with issues of the control over native presence and space, "Territories," was posted on July 23, 2013. Posted along with the opening text was a map pointing to a point in the deep Canadian wilderness west of the Great Slave Lake. The narrator is in the Canadian Army, 3rd Canadian Division, his traveling companion a reservation-born Algonquin named Pannoowau. They drive off road for a few days and eventually make camp a few miles from their car. In the night they are disturbed by something moving around their campground.

Pannoowau assists the narrator in trying to track whatever thing is stalking their camp, leaving "kind of 'morphed' human footprint[s]." At one point they hear a terrible shriek, "like the sound a pig makes when it's being butchered while still alive." Pannoowau declares that "Bad Spirits walk among us," which the narrator disbelieves. Eventually Pannoowau convinces him to return to camp. However, their trail back vanishes, and Pannoowau, not wanting to worry the narrator, says nothing. This is when a critical portion of the narrative happens. Pannoowau is explaining his methods to get unlost:

"I figured if we walked in the same direction we came, we would get to the camp. Even our own tracks are gone." "We need to stop now and figure out where in the hell we are." I took my backpack off and opened it up, searching for my map and compass. While I was busy in my backpack, I saw Pannoowau scramble for his rifle from the corner of my eye. He brought it up and fired off three rounds. I looked at him and said "What happened?" I also brought up my rifle, but noticing Pannoowau's face was white as the snow on the ground. "Weendigo..." he said.

The narrator and Pannoowau make it back to camp, whereupon the narrator finally sees the Wendigo standing there at the edge of the treeline around camp: "It looked so skinny that its bones were almost pushing out of its skin. The eyes appeared so sunken, almost black, and the bony fingers were jagged like twigs. It was just standing there, watching us."

Notes

10. From the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, whose character Sethe describes a "Rememory" as a memory so powerful that it hangs in the air, and can be encountered by anyone walking through the space. The word is a part of the novel's running theme of the use of memories to reconstruct the past.

The Wendigo, while visually frightening due to the uncanniness of its form (close enough to human but far enough to seem wrong) does nothing dangerous. It merely watches. The narrator and Pannoowau begin firing on the creature, but when the smoke clears it had vanished without a body. They run for the car, but on the journey Pannoowau is separated from the narrator unnoticed. The narrator makes it to his car and starts to drive for the main road when he sees Pannoowau in front of him. “I screamed, ‘Get in the car!!’ Instead of running to the passenger door, he twitched and seemed to float towards the driver’s door. My instincts once again kicked in and I slammed the pedal.”

The narrator makes it back to the government roads and contacts the police, telling them that his friend was hurt in a hunting accident. The story ends by informing us, “They still haven’t found him.”

Pannoowau is a fascinating character in this narrative. The narrator informs us, “He also lives in Alberta, but was born on a reservation. His family had taught him all the legends and customs when he was growing up, but he handles modern society well.” This congratulatory nod to Pannoowau, who “handles modern society well,” seems to carry a subconscious idea that natives ought not to be able to, relegating the native to an undisclosed past, coming from a reservation, a space removed within popular conception from modern spaces, his ancestry giving him some greater connection to the land. Meanwhile the narrator is part of the army, an active, voluntary agent of the colonial government. They come from two different worlds, and their alliance and eventual separation suggests an instability of this arrangement. Interestingly, the name the narrator gives to his native companion, “Pannoowau,” means “he lies” in Algonquin,¹¹ something that wouldn’t be obvious to the common reader but seems to be an in-joke or subtle acknowledgement of the falseness of the story. Now, naturally that could be it, a subtle nod to the way a fictional story is being told as truth in the traditional mode of the urban legend, a tacit admission that this story is a fabrication.¹² But the connection to lies and storytelling runs deeper. It is through Pannoowau that we learn that “bad spirits” are present, that the threat is a “Wendigo” that will get them killed. When they are lost, he says nothing until confronted. As they draw closer to the inevitable meeting with the Wendigo, he seems to grow stranger, more distant, more connected to the land. This is a recursion of a frequent role that native characters are relegated to, that of the noble savage. According to Shanley, “many of the ‘Indian’ voices most popular in mainstream America reinscribe nineteenth-century romantic images of Noble Savages” (677). These “romantic images” assuage a guilty colonial conscience. Ascribing nobility to the “savage” is what Renato Rosaldo describes as “a particular kind of nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed” (69). This imperialist nostalgia retells the dispossession of indigenous peoples as an inevitability instead of a crime, suggesting that the conquered savage could never have survived into the modern era and couldn’t help being lost to history. Stating that Pannoowau “adapts to modern society well” places him in this romanticized past. This justifies his knowledge of tracking and spirits. But in the end, Pannoowau goes Wendigo. This seems to subvert the idea of the romanticized native, an image meant to assuage a guilty conscience. The monster must be shot, unquestionably, and, if it has no right to life, it certainly has no right to territory. Colonialism is thus justified by making the native a monster that needed conquering. But it is not until this attempt to reassert colonial power occurs that the monsters come out.

Notes

11. Trumbull, *Natick Dictionary*

12. Other indications are present, notably the irregularity of the weather, described at 5°, far colder than it would be in the region in question during hunting season, as well as the nonexistence of the narrator’s military regiment at the time the story took place.

In “Territories,” the protagonists don’t encounter any great danger, the Wendigo being heard but unseen, an absent presence in the night, until the narrator ceases to trust Pannooowau’s sense of direction and connection to the land and utilizes more modern technologies of the map and compass, both used to define space and therefore control territory. It is not until these symbols that force definition onto the land come out that the Wendigo comes out as well. The issue of colonial incursion into what was once untamed space is brought to the forefront, the intellectual conflict becoming manifested in a physical danger. However, the danger is still not quite present. Pannooowau is the only one able to perceive it at first. The narrator doesn’t see it until he reaches the perceived safe space of the camp. The camp is separated from the Wendigo’s space just beyond the tree line, the boundary entirely conceptual and not at all defined. The closeness of the monster has all but broken down the conceptions of territory that are a vital aspect of the colonial process, the establishment of native and non-native territories now shown to be illusory as opposed to intrinsic. The flimsiness of these boundaries shows how the real memories of colonial violence, unfiltered by imperialist nostalgia, can resurface in what Richard Terdiman calls “the pasts we carry but do not entirely cognize [that] regularly rise to colonize our present” (346). This fear of being incorporated, rather than an incorporator, contributes to the fear of the Wendigo, the narrative betraying the narrator as it allows the past to unsettle the present.

But the territorial nature of the Wendigo goes beyond physical boundaries. The colonization of the new world cannot be total until the natives are pushed out of all of their territories, both physical and cultural. Landrum explores how captured lands and objects, “[t]rophies of the Indian wars” (272), hold spiritual power, stating that “these ‘vessels’ of power carried the energy of the land and the people that they represented” (273). Using the example of trophies taken after the massacre at Wounded Knee, Landrum states that by holding hostage these vessels of spiritual power, “the northern plains people were both militarily and spiritually disarmed” (262). By telling stories of the Wendigo, colonial culture can attempt to reassert its ownership of the captured trophy of the Wendigo, though the repeated victory of the Wendigo in driving the narrators out of its territory suggests that this ownership is highly tenuous, history resisting redefinition. The more that colonial culture tries to mold the Wendigo into a useable shape, the more it slips away, leaving the hand trying to grasp it reshaped around its absence, and the words trying to define assert control telling stories of fear and flight.

And this brings me back to the issue of stories and who gets to tell them. The act of telling the story is an intently defining act. The words used, portrayals of characters and places, by their very nature define history or culture in some way, even unknowingly. The act of redefining something belonging to someone else is a violent act, a charge into and occupying of cultural territory. But the unsettling nature of the Wendigo prevents it from being defined by the colonizer, allowing it to slip into and out of conquered territory.

For one, the Wendigo can be seen to represent the native, portrayed as a lurking danger in the forest. The auditory difference, especially the narrator of “Cabin Fever” focusing on the sound of the speech, is noteworthy. The English language has a vast etymological family tree, deriving from both Germanic and Romantic languages, and can thus find similarity in most European language patterns, whether it be sonically or syntactically. However, languages from tribes in the Americas follow different rules and thus sound noticeably different. There are different phonemes and rules for constructing sentences and declining nouns. Most European languages decline nouns based on masculine/feminine, where many

languages from northern America decline based on animate/inanimate. Interestingly, some words like *ahsin*, stone, decline as animate, suggesting an understanding of the land as having “potential for movement, for speech and volition—for personhood” (Smith and Fiore 62). The cultural differences runs so deep that even the thought behind the language is changed. The Wendigo in these tales triggers all the screen memories of the fear that plagued the colonizers of a people with uncanny faces, of a land with potential to speak.

However, another reading interprets the Wendigo as the colonizer. This is not an uncommon rhetorical device, seen in many narratives. Theresa S. Smith and Jill M. Fiore unpacks one such narrative, Linda Hogan’s novel *Solar Storms*, wherein builders of a hydroelectric dam in once sacred ground are likened to Wendigos: “Like Windigos, the murderers of the land are gluttons who, with greed and trickery, seal their own fates in a landscape that offers no sustenance any more. . . they can only live by attempting to take life, both literally and figuratively, from others” (Smith and Fiore 76). In “Cabin Fever” the Wendigo is constantly in amongst the humans, taking on their forms and voices. If read assuming Wendigo-as-colonist, the meaning is clear. The Wendigo can easily assume the form of the colonist because the colonist has already become the Wendigo. This uncanny doubling unsettles both characters and reader, as it shows how flimsy the borderline between colonist and cannibal is.

The indecisive quality of the metaphor, whether it makes colonist or native into the monster, indicates the ongoing struggle over the cultural territory in which the Wendigo resides. The perpetuation of narratives often so similar that they are rapidly growing unpopular for lack of originality suggests that colonial culture is revisiting the issue over and over, the guilty colonial conscience trying to redefine its past until the monster in colonized territory is no longer in the mirror as well. Perhaps this is why posters on an anonymous board find the Wendigo so terrifying and yet so enthralling. On an anonymous board, a space without identity, a monster that can be made to look like both native and colonizer carries the weight of both identities and histories, challenging the very idea that an identity can be free of history.

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Spells, Spirits, and Charms in the Harlem Renaissance

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This article analyzes specific examples of magic found in two major artistic outlets of the Harlem Renaissance, jazz, and literature. Characters use voodoo and hoodoo to seek power and revenge, control the supposed stronger party, and give meaning to seemingly insignificant occurrences, thus offering a way for the artists of the Harlem Renaissance to control their own lives and black aesthetic achievement.

The Harlem Renaissance began in the early 1900s and created a new appreciation for the African-American race and heritage by fostering an emphasis on using history to educate the black population and create a sense of racial pride (Giggie 4). One example of using history to unite the African-American race was through voodoo or hoodoo, which derived from traditional African religion. In order to understand what voodoo and hoodoo was to the Harlem Renaissance, it is important to look at the history of the traditional Vodun beliefs and how the Great Migration brought magic to Harlem. Besides outlining the history of voodoo, hoodoo, and migration patterns, I will also be looking at specific examples of magic found in two major artistic outlets of the Harlem Renaissance, jazz and literature. I argue that through these pieces of art, it is evident that voodoo and hoodoo are both used to represent power by seeking revenge, controlling the supposed stronger party, and giving meaning to seemingly insignificant occurrences as a way for the artists of the Harlem Renaissance to control their own lives and artistic black movement.

Voodoo and hoodoo derive from the traditional African religion known as Vodun, which arrived in America with the settling of Jamestown in 1619 and with the slave trade (Mulira 112). The white settlers were scared of Vodun and did not understand the beliefs or practices; they would often try to suppress it. The forced suppression caused the blending of the traditional Vodun beliefs with other religions, such as Catholicism, creating an off-shoot of Vodun in the Caribbean and southern United States known as voodoo (Raboteau 115). Through the use of voodoo, one could pray to a specific deity with certain dances, offer a particular food or animal to the deity, or dress a specific way in order to receive protection (37). Another way to pray for help was by evoking spirits or ancestors, ultimately connecting Vodun worshippers with their past (36). Calling to ancestors proved to the Vodun believers that there were others “in charge” of their well-being besides those suppressing them, like slave masters. One way that the voodoo worshippers were in control over their own lives was through herb concoctions, like potions, that the herb doctor or Voodoo Queen would create as remedies for certain ailments (37).

The invoking of spirits, praying to someone or something other than the Christian God,

the wild songs or dances, and the herbal concoctions seemed like dangerous magic to the white slave owners, something that was ultimately against their religion and way of life (Raboteau 37). To the voodoo worshippers, their religion was harmless and meant to be peaceful. However, there is a negative component to voodoo referred to as “hoodoo” (“Voodooism”). Although both traditions look for omens and meaning within ordinary life, hoodoo is harmful in nature, with curses, potions, and charms that are meant to cause physical or mental damage (Mulira 114). One aspect of hoodoo is the “fetish” (“Voodooism”) that is made of cat or dog teeth, blood, feces of some sort, and is tied with a string. The fetish is left on the property of someone that one wishes to harm without the victim knowing. Another way a person can be cursed besides the fetish is through spirit hauntings, which in voodoo was seen as a good thing by making it apparent that ancestors or loved ones were watching over. However, with hoodoo, a spirit could be evoked to harm an individual or family (Mulira 114). To protect oneself from these spirits, a charm is needed to ward off evil, such as a rabbit’s foot. The rabbit’s foot and the fetish are two examples of gris-gris (“New Orleans”), which is defined as an object that wards off or stirs up magic. Another item considered to be gris-gris is the voodoo doll, typically used to inflict physical damage on someone without him or her knowing. In all, African Americans during slavery and early American history used hoodoo “to obtain revenge for their injuries, and to discover and punish their enemies” (“Voodooism”).

Both voodoo and hoodoo are found in the Harlem Renaissance because of the Great Migration, which took place in the beginning of the twentieth century and until the 1970s in America (Gregory 12). During the Great Migration, eight million African Americans traveled from their southern homes and into major northern cities (14). The period of significant demographic change was considered to be “one of the greatest and most rapid internal movements of people in history” (15). The reason behind this “rapid internal movement” (15) was the lack of opportunity and equality for the African-American population in the South, especially with the passing of the Jim Crow laws, which permitted acts of segregation and hate. Besides the inequality the African Americans faced, there was little industry because people were still tied to land and agricultural production (23). For African Americans without land, there was no way to support a family. However, locations in the North such as Harlem were calling their names, and the same goes for African Americans from the Caribbean Islands like Barbados and Jamaica (23). With the migration northward to places like Harlem, African Americans brought their culture and traditional voodoo beliefs, songs, and dances with them (23). The influx of African culture in Harlem especially led to a new kind of “racial expression” (Giggie 132) in art, literature, song, and dance. Alain Locke in his essay “The New Negro,” argues the importance of the new generation of African Americans, who were uniting in the artistic center of Harlem as well as creating and contributing to the intellectual progress of the race. He writes,

...more immediate hope rests in the revaluation by white and black alike of the Negro in terms of his artistic endowments and cultural contributions, past and prospective. It must be increasingly recognized that the Negro has already made very substantial contributions, not only in his folk-art, music especially, which has always found appreciation.... (15)

Locke is pointing out the African American appreciation for the past and present forms of art coming out of the Harlem Renaissance. He argues that the “racial expression” is evident

in the folk-art and music and that there is a sense of hope found within the “New Negro” who uses his past to contribute to society, thus creating a new racial pride and autonomy. The emphasis on the black culture and race is what led to the Harlem Renaissance with the publishing of African-American artwork.

During the Harlem Renaissance, there was a new appreciation for the African roots and heritage, which can be seen in jazz and literature. Jazz was a major part of the Harlem Renaissance, and for some artists voodoo or hoodoo was influential to their pieces. Jelly Roll Morton, the “inventor of jazz” (“New Orleans”), credits voodoo as one of the main influences to his work. In fact, his godmother, Eulalie Hécaud was a famous Voodoo Queen in the South (“New Orleans”). One of the biggest stars during the Harlem Renaissance was Louis Armstrong, who grew up in New Orleans and roamed the streets of Storyville, which was a red-light district filled with cabarets, clubs, and shops (“New Orleans”). These shops were typically voodoo stores containing charms, potions, or fortune-tellers and were located next to the clubs or cabarets that Armstrong would sneak into (underage) in order to learn jazz (“New Orleans”). Another artist was Oscar “Papa” Celestin, who was a headliner during the early 1900s on Bourbon Street and openly credited voodoo as the inspiration to his work (“New Orleans”). Celestin crafted a song entitled “Marie Laveau,” which was about the most famous Voodoo Queen in New Orleans (“New Orleans”).

Voodoo served not only as the inspiration for jazz musicians but was also the subject of many jazz songs during the Harlem Renaissance. “Hoodoo Blues” by Bessie Brown, published in 1924, was about a woman who steals the singer’s man and who wants to seek revenge through hoodoo curses (Brown). Bessie sings that she will: “sprinkle ding ’em dust all around her door” (Brown line 3) and “Burn a candle on her picture” (line 8). One way to curse someone with hoodoo was by taking his or her picture and burning a candle on the face of the photo, as well as spreading ashes or dust on the property of the victim, as Brown sings in the song (Mulira 114). Brown goes further and sings that she is “Goin’ neath her window, gonna lay a black cat bone” (Brown line 6) and that she has “some gris-gris, tote it up in a sack” (line 8) that she’s planning on wearing. Again, this ties back to the use of hoodoo objects known as gris-gris that evoke magic, like the sack that she wears to protect herself from curses or the bone that she places under the window of the victim to stir up harmful magic. It is interesting that Brown is singing about having power over another woman’s well-being by inconspicuously placing hoodoo charms on the property of the victim. The woman initially had power over Brown by taking her man from her but, because of hoodoo, Brown has the power over the woman. The roles are reversed. The power struggle shown in “Hoodoo Blues” can be linked with the white race holding power over the African Americans with the Jim Crow laws and taking away something that they find important: equality and justice. When Brown sings about using hoodoo to seek revenge on the “other woman,” she is in control over the one who wronged her, which is paralleled with the idea that the African Americans wanted to gain power and control over their own race without white interference or suppression.

Published four years after Bessie Brown’s jazz song, Ma Rainey came out with her song titled “Black Dust Blues,” which dealt with power being exercised over another person using hoodoo. The song is about a woman who is mad at Rainey because she feels like her man was stolen by her; it is quite similar to the concept of Brown’s earlier song. In order to seek revenge, the woman places black dust around Ma Rainey’s door. In line fifteen, Ma Rainey goes on to sing that the “black dust’s got me walking on all fours like a cat.” The woman was mad and wanted revenge for her man leaving her, so hoodoo was the only way

for her to get the gratification she sought. For the victim of the curse, the only explanation for why she was walking like a cat was hoodoo. It seems as though hoodoo provides meaning and reason behind these unusual patterns or happenings within the context of the song. In this case, as readers or listeners, we see what hoodoo was like through the eyes of the singer who was the victim. It is evident that the person controlling her has the power and is able to do her harm. Ma Rainey is used as an example of the supposed stronger party—because she initially stole the woman's partner—being controlled through hoodoo by the weaker party.

Voodoo and hoodoo were important to the Harlem Renaissance because they tied in the traditional African beliefs with the idea of “racial expression” (Giggie 132). These songs are mainly about revenge and having the control to inflict harm, which is central to the practice of hoodoo. In some ways, there is an element of control that the believer of hoodoo has over another person. This power struggle can be linked with the idea that voodoo or hoodoo was something that could not be taken away by the white race; African Americans had control over it during the Harlem Renaissance. The writers and artists had the power to make the movement into anything that they wanted, and the Renaissance was something they could own and create. In times when they felt like they may not have had the artistic power to create anything they wanted, they yearned or aimed for it. They also looked to control their own race because society in the early 1900s was enforced by white leaders who worked to suppress the black race, which was evident with the Jim Crow laws. With cases of voodoo and hoodoo in jazz and literature, the weaker of the two parties were able to triumph over the more powerful using the spells, charms, or curses. The use of voodoo or hoodoo is a direct representation of the power that the African-American race yearned for; they wanted to triumph over the white race that worked to suppress them in society. Control and power were what the African Americans wanted, and magic served as the means to get that message across.

Jazz music contained copious references to voodoo and hoodoo, but it was not the only artistic outlet mentioning voodoo or hoodoo from the Harlem Renaissance. During this time of emphasis on black culture and artistry, many pieces of literature also included voodoo or hoodoo as subject matter. One reason behind the presence of magic in literature was because of immigration from the West Indies to the United States, namely Harlem. The Great Migration was not only made up of immigrants moving from the South to the North but also from out of the country and into it. For example, Albert Raboteau points out that during the Great Migration, “Immigrants from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Haiti... introduced the traditional gods of Africa to the United States” (105). These immigrants helped to spread traditional voodoo and hoodoo beliefs and customs to the black and Hispanic families across the United States during the early 1900s (Raboteau 105). In Cuba and Haiti especially, the believers of voodoo and hoodoo would practice different rituals that involved singing, dancing, and drumming, which ultimately derived from Africa and the traditional Vodun beliefs (105). These rituals and celebrations of the gods came to America along with the idea that the spirits have control or power over the lives of others. By appeasing the gods, the voodoo worshippers would contract the favor of the gods and would then be healed or given luck (105). There was also a major belief in spirit possessions and the impact that the spirits had on the lives of people. During these spirit possessions, “entranced mediums made personal contact between gods and humans possible by embodying the god for the community” (105). If something may have gone wrong, the voodoo priests would look to the spirits as the cause and prescribe different methods to set things right (105). These voodoo beliefs from the West Indies came into the United States during the Harlem Renaissance, which can be seen with the famous writers who were from these same regions. Claude McKay

grew up in Sunny Ville, Jamaica and was familiar with voodoo and hoodoo beliefs, which he brought with him to Harlem (“Claude McKay: 1889-1948”). The same goes for Eric Walrond, who was from Barbados and also wrote about voodoo and hoodoo (Honey and Patton 410). When these writers came to the United States, they brought their beliefs with them and incorporated the magic into their work. The same goes for Zora Neale Hurston, who did anthropological research on voodoo in Haiti and Jamaica, which led to many books and stories related to the voodoo she observed on the islands (322-323). Instead of leaving her research on the island, she brought it back to Harlem and shared it with the African American community. These writers incorporated voodoo and hoodoo culture into their work in order to display the power that the characters in their stories had over others as well as to show how the voodoo and hoodoo culture was something that was a part of them.

One such example is *Home to Harlem* by Claude McKay, which was published during the Harlem Renaissance. In the novel, Jake is suffering from a painful STD, and his landlady is watching over him periodically. At one point, Jake decides to go out to a restaurant without telling his landlady, who decides to look for him in his apartment (McKay 118). She went into the kitchen, stumbled, and broke a white bowl, then “made a sign with her rabbit foot, and murmured foggily: ‘Theah’s sure a cross coming to thisa house. I wonder it’s foh who?’” (118). Following the breaking of the bowl, the answer to her question is given, when Jake comes into the room supported by two men (118). First, the rabbit foot in this story represents an example of gris-gris or a protection charm that was important to both voodoo and hoodoo (Mulira 114). The breaking of the bowl is seen as some kind of omen, and because of this omen the landlady was able to determine that someone in the house was sick or seriously ill. She is attaching meaning to an insignificant event (the breaking of the bowl) as well as bringing luck and protection to herself by giving meaning to the rabbit’s foot. With the foot in her possession, she can control her own luck and create a power in knowing (through voodoo and hoodoo) that something has gone awry.

The idea of power and control is apparent through other works such as Zora Neale Hurston’s “Spunk.” Hurston was very interested in voodoo in the Caribbean and included it in both stories and novels such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Tell My Horse* (Honey and Patton 322-323). “Spunk” is told through the eyes of the townspeople, who gossip about the love triangle between Joe, Spunk, and Lena. Spunk has taken Joe’s wife, Lena, and they walk arm in arm throughout the town. Joe finally is fed up with their affair, so he goes with a razor to kill Spunk, who is a large and fierce man (Hurston 326). Spunk ends up killing Joe and moving in with Lena. However, Joe comes back as a spirit and haunts both Spunk and Lena as a black bobcat. One of the gossiping men, Elijah, was reporting to Walter about the bobcat when he says, “jus’ as they was goin’ to bed, a big black bobcat, black all over, you hear me, black, walked round and round that house and howled” (328), and when Spunk went to shoot it, the bobcat just stared in his eyes. Elijah went on, “But Spunk says twan’t no bob-cat nohow. He says it was Joe done sneaked back from Hell!” (328). The gossiping men believe it was the spirit of Joe because there are no black bobcats in that area and it was highly symbolic that the bobcat stared at Spunk. The appearance of the black bobcat shows how spirits could come back and harm the living, cursing Spunk because he stole Joe’s wife. The story makes it seem as though some kind of magic or spiritualism is involved to seek revenge. Spunk’s luck did not get any better when he felt as though he was continuously being pushed, yet no one was behind him. Finally, he was pushed to his death, and his last words were, “[H]e pushed me, Ligeó the dirty hound pushed me in the back” (329). Spunk’s final death is similar to how Joe anticipated killing

Spunk in the first place, by sneaking up on him from behind with a razor. This relates to voodoo and hoodoo because it shows how the spirits could be present on Earth, meddling with living humans.

Spiritualism was a major belief within the traditional Vodun religion and the belief in spirits was evident with Joe coming back to earth to haunt Spunk (Mulira 115). In terms of voodoo, there is no other reason as to why Spunk fell; his death was blamed on a spirit, nothing else. This points to the idea of magic providing an explanation for unusual occurrences. Joe had the power over Spunk in the end because he was able to seek revenge on the man that took his wife. The story also suggests that a weaker person (like Joe) can ultimately have power over someone who is perceived to have more control (Spunk). The power struggle between the characters in "Spunk" is comparable to the Harlem Renaissance because the African-American artists wanted control over their own movement and conditions in life. They did not feel as though the white race had any right to hold power over them, and, by showing the weaker overcoming the more powerful, Hurston is giving hope to the African-American race. She is using voodoo and hoodoo to show the representation of the black race (the weaker) holding power over the white race (more powerful). In the case of "Spunk," voodoo or hoodoo represents spiritualism, power, revenge, and the idea that magic can explain unusual events.

These same ideals can be found in another story by Hurston called "Black Death." The main character was an "excessively black hoodoo man" (Hurston) named Old Man Morgan who was well-known by everybody (except for the white people) because he could "kill any person indicated and paid for, without ever leaving his house or even seeing his victim" (Hurston). For example, Morgan "caused Emma Taylor's teeth to drop out," he "put a sprig of Lena Merchant's hair in a bottle, corked it and threw it into a running stream with the neck pointing upstream, and she went crazy," and "sent Old Lady Crooms [his voodoo rival] to her death in the Lake" (Hurston). Morgan would make concoctions or charms from the woods where he would dig for different roots and herbs (Hurston). The story "Black Death" displays the important aspects of hoodoo culture, including herbal medicine, potions, charms, and curses. Old Man Morgan was able to exert power or exact revenge over others by doing them physical harm. For example, in the text, a man named Beau got a woman pregnant. Unfortunately, Beau refused to marry her and left her with her mother. In order to seek revenge on Beau, Mrs. Boger (the mother of the pregnant woman) awoke in the middle of the night with "all Africa" in her blood, "tribal drums beating," and walked over to Morgan's cabin (Hurston). Before she knew what she was doing, Morgan gave her a gun and put the image of Beau onto a mirror. Mrs. Boger shot the gun, killing Beau in the mirror and in reality. His death was pronounced "natural" because it stemmed from a supposed heart attack (Hurston). Hurston's last remark in the story was that the white people still had no idea and would not believe this story, but the African Americans knew Morgan was behind Beau's death. Hurston's story connects Africa with hoodoo and hoodoo with the Harlem Renaissance, showing the power that the hoodoo men had over others by seeking revenge. Hoodoo was a source of culture that gave the African Americans some sort of autonomy; whites didn't understand it in the way that they did, and no matter what injustices the white race did to the African Americans, they could not take voodoo or hoodoo away from them. The use of magic goes along with the idea of the power struggle as well because Beau had power over the Boger women by declaring that he wanted nothing to do with the woman he impregnated. Beau left her helpless, and one way that the two hurt women sought revenge or power over Beau was through the use of hoodoo. The story represents the

idea of the weak gaining power over the supposedly strong, and the use of hoodoo ties to the African Americans in the Harlem Renaissance wanting control over their own lives and conditions despite their supposed minority race status or weaker position in society.

The power struggle between strong and weak is found in Eric Walrond's "The Voodoo's Revenge." Published in 1925 in a popular magazine during the Renaissance, *Opportunity*, the short story was influenced by his childhood in Barbados (410). The story is about Nestor Villaine who lives as an "obeah man" (Walrond 412), which was a sacred person who knew and practiced voodoo or hoodoo. It takes place on a Caribbean island where shipping was prominent as well as men who sang "voodoo melodies" (411). Nestor was unjustly thrown in prison for 60 days, and when he got out, he wanted revenge on the man who put him in jail and caused him the most trouble. He finds a waiter named Sambola, who was a young male server at the Chess Club meetings his victim attended. Nestor made Sambola drink a potion out of a vial but also gave him a second vial that contained an odorless and colorless concoction to slip into Governor Manual Salzedo's drink (418). When Sambola snuck the vial into the governor's drink undetected, Salzedo promptly died, shocking the people of the island. In fact, "not even the enterprising reporters of the fictional press [knew what happened]—not one of them ever thought of linking the governor's death with the finding a few days later of a Negro's shark bitten body fished up out of the black lagoon on Faulke's River" (418). It makes the reader come to the conclusion that voodoo or hoodoo occurred and that the narrator knows something that the reader does not. Sambola continued to serve drinks at the Chess Club meetings but,

Only sometimes, a strange, smoky gleam would creep into his eyes. On nights when he'd go to that brothel on the banks of the river...there were those who couldn't help compare it with the cat-like light they had often seen in the eyes of the old grouchy trader, Nestor Villaine. As a matter of fact, folk oftentimes, for no reason they could explain, referred to Sambola as Nestor Villaine. (418)

The ending of the story points to some kind of body-switching or magic that may have taken place. Because Nestor was a voodoo man, it is apparent that the vials he gave out were likely potions, and hoodoo was done to seek revenge on the governor. Nestor may not have had control over his own life when he was in jail, but once he got out, he took revenge and held power over the governor. "The Voodoo's Revenge" represents the power struggle between the weak and the strong.

In terms of a racial struggle, Nestor Villaine represents the African-American race that is being suppressed by the governor, who holds the most political power, much like the white race in the 1900s. The way in which Villaine took control was through the use of hoodoo, which allowed him power over the governor. Voodoo or hoodoo is linked with the weak having power over the supposed stronger, like the African Americans yearning for power over their suppressors, the white race. Through these artistic outlets of the Harlem Renaissance, it is evident that power is what drove the references to magic. Voodoo or hoodoo was used as a means to seek revenge, explain unusual occurrences, and most importantly, represent the suppressed African-American race in the struggle for power. Racial pride and power fits in with the idea of the New Negro, a term used to describe the educated, socially aware, and independent African American. The New Negro respects his past but looks to the future. Voodoo and hoodoo served as that outlet by allowing the black race to embrace

their traditional African roots while also looking to empower the race and triumph over suppressors. Hoodoo and voodoo were important to the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro because it served as a way for African Americans to look at their past while also embracing the power and control they sought for the future.

The Harlem Renaissance served as a time of artistic growth for the members of the black community. African-American people from the South came to Harlem in large numbers for many different reasons, including injustice and lack of opportunity. The period of the Great Migration added culture to Harlem through songs, dance, rituals, and religion. Two types of art that took off within the Harlem Renaissance were jazz and literature, both containing references to Vodun, or voodoo and hoodoo. The common denominator found in the jazz and literature pieces is voodoo and hoodoo as a representation of attempting to control one's own life, which meant seeking revenge on others, providing an explanation for coincidental occurrences, and, most importantly, representing the idea that the minority race wanted power over their own lives. Artists from the Harlem Renaissance looked to voodoo or hoodoo in order to give their characters that same control or power over events or their lives within the stories or songs that they yearned for in the early 1900s. These artists wanted to show the population, white, black, or even any race, that, like the characters that had control in the stories, power could be found in the minority. These stories and songs serve as a representation of the want, need, or acquisition of power during the Harlem Renaissance.

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Dealing With Our Bloody Past: Repression vs. Recognition of American History in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*

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This essay explores how director Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* establishes the Overlook Hotel as an environment where conservative complacency has become the norm and all hope of progression is lost. By using a maze motif and the backdrop of Native American genocide *The Shining* explores and critiques how modern America was constructed.

Introduction

In 1980 anticipation was high in the United States for Stanley Kubrick's new film *The Shining*, as it would be the iconic director's first foray into the horror genre. Yet, when the first trailer for *The Shining* premiered in the U.S., audiences only witnessed one horrific image to tease the film. The trailer started on a shot of a hallway ending in an elevator. Audience members may have noticed the Native American motif on the elevator doors and the columns in the hallway, or perhaps the mezzo-American red paint covering the hallways and columns. Names began to scroll up the screen in the electric blue font that was used for the credits in *The Shining* as menacing music built louder and louder in the background. There was a slight pause as the name "Stanley Kubrick" passed before blood suddenly began to trickle out from the corners of the elevator. The doors never opened, yet they could not contain the river of red that gushed out of every crevice of the door, engulfing the camera and audience itself. This image, one of the signature scenes of *The Shining*, is the most literal portrayal of the blood upon which the Overlook Hotel was built. Film historian Geoffrey Cocks interpreted this image as "...the blood of centuries, the blood of millions, and, in particular, the blood of war and genocide in Kubrick's own century" (185). Even though the doors of the elevator desperately try to contain and conceal the blood, they cannot, for the blood is the very structure of the hotel itself, or as film critic Bill Blakemore interprets: "the blood upon which this nation, like most nations, was built as was the Overlook Hotel" (Blakemore).

In *The Shining*, director Stanley Kubrick uses ghosts and the motif of being trapped in a maze in order to critique how contemporary America was built and how individuals choose to interpret this history. The Overlook Hotel is constructed as a haunted environment where characters must choose to interpret or repress America's own bloody past, a choice that ultimately decides their own fate. The resort hotel buries its bloody history within itself to the point where it cannot be contained and leaks from the walls themselves. However,

the ghosts within the hotel are not the spirits of the Native Americans but instead those of the previous residents of the hotel, those who have also been lost within the macabre trappings of the hotel and are doomed to repeat the same cycles of violence over and over. Jack Torrance, the doomed caretaker of the hotel in the film, is an individual corrupted and entrapped by the bloody history of the hotel and, by extension, America. The ghosts of the hotel haunt Jack and lead him to not only accept the history of the hotel but allow him to become obsessed and eventually entrapped forever within it. By contrast, Jack's son Danny resists this corruption and is able to escape the metaphorical and literal maze by taking a more objective view of the Overlook Hotel. While much scholarship has been written about the motif of the maze in *The Shining* and the idea of genocide's presence in the film, there has not been an exploration of Danny and Jack as representations of differing paths of confronting American history. This paper will examine how Jack grows to represent the complacent conservatism of the hotel while Danny offers the audience some hope for a progressive future.

Jack as damaged goods

Jack Torrance is not a mentally stable person at the beginning of *The Shining*. This fact might seem obvious to those who have seen the film; certainly by the end we have seen enough evidence to conclude that Jack has been brought to madness by the ghosts of the hotel, but it is important to note that Jack is not exactly a model citizen prior to the events of the film. He is a recovering alcoholic with a history of abusing his only son, Danny, and who mistreats and clearly does not love his wife, Wendy. When he accepts the responsibility of looking after the hotel for an entire winter, in his mind he is starting over. He even mentions several times that he is starting to outline an ambiguous "writing project." The ultimate irony ends up being that there could not be a place more ill-suited for Torrance to start over than the hotel. In fact, his own history of violence fits perfectly with the Overlook's own grisly past.

The history of the Overlook Hotel is mostly parsed out in two conversations with the hotel's manager, Stuart Ullman. The first of these takes place as Jack is interviewing for the position and meets Ullman in his office. During this conversation, Ullman tells Jack about an incident where a previous caretaker "hacked his family to pieces, and then neatly stacked them in a room before putting both barrels of a shotgun in his mouth." This is information that Jack brushes aside, claiming that Wendy will love it, since she's a "horror film and novel buff," implying that the haunted history of the hotel is more of an attraction than an actual deterrent. This moment is where we first see how the history and violence linked to the hotel is treated in such a candid manner. Randy Rasmussen, an author who breaks down films scene-by-scene in his work, thinks this moment is so ridiculous that he relates it to *Dr. Strangelove*, another Kubrick film: "like President Muffley trying to tell Premier Kisseff about a nuclear attack on Russia, he [Ullman] alternately acknowledges and minimizes the horror" (Rasmussen 239). Essentially, the idea of Ullman withholding this information about the hotel seems so ridiculous that it is comparable to a black comedy.

Ghostly representations and Native Americans in The Shining

The second of these history lessons occurs as Ullman leads Jack, Wendy, and Danny on a tour of the hotel and the grounds. Here, we quickly learn that the hotel was built on

an ancient Native American burial ground. Ullman passes over this casually, remarking that a few attacks were even repelled during the construction of the hotel. Once again, Ullman talks about a violent episode in the hotel's past without much consideration. Rasmussen also notes this in his analysis: "His casual manner reduces a once passionate cultural conflict to a trivial footnote in history" (245). From this very early point in the film, Kubrick is planting the idea of the hotel's history being repressed. What we as an audience can infer from Ullman's actions is that the denial of the history of the hotel has been passed all the way down to the present day. This is further evoked when Wendy asks whether famous people had stayed at the hotel in the past. Ullman replies: "Oh yes, in its heyday movie stars...all the best people." As he says this the group walks through a hallway leading to the Colorado Lounge, a room rife with visible Native American décor and even a portrait of what looks to be a chief hanging on the wall: "We are invited to read the cues in the room historically and clearly in relation to the violent history of the American frontier and the destruction of the Native Americans" (Luckhurst 43). From the get-go, *The Shining* is anything but subtle about presenting the history of the hotel as haunted by the genocide of Native Americans, and yet nobody at the hotel seems unsettled by this fact.

By introducing the possibility of Native American ghosts, Kubrick is evoking a popular trope that has haunted American horror stories for a long time. The presence of a Native American haunting brings out a very unique response in American audiences, and can even lead to questioning the basis upon which the United States is founded:

...the ghosting of American Indians presents us with a host of doubts about America and the American ideology....Ghostly Indians present us with the possibility of vanishing ourselves, being swallowed up into another person, another ideology. When ghostly Indian figures haunt the white American imagination, they serve as constant reminders of the fragility of national identity. (Bergland 5)

By this, Bergland infers that the presence of Native American ghosts challenge our sense of national pride and the ideology upon which this nation was founded. In *The Shining* we see this enacted by the fact that the Native Americans don't appear as ghosts. Rather, the ghosts in the film are trying actively to preserve their dominance over the Native Americans. Contrary to the initial set up of the film, these Native American ghosts are not present nor trying to exact revenge on the patrons of the hotel. Rather, every hallway is decorated with some sort of piece of art or pattern that evokes Native American culture. This is a choice Kubrick specifically makes to link the violence that takes place over the course of the film with the history of the hotel. As the story unfolds and we witness Jack slowly slip into madness, the audience is constantly reminded that he is haunted by the past of the hotel and everything that has happened there. Or, as film scholar Bill Blakemore says, "*The Shining* is also about America's general inability to admit the gravity of the genocide of the Native Americans—or, more exactly, its ability to 'overlook' that genocide" (Blakemore). As Blakemore suggests, the ghosts of the Overlook want to overlook the genocide and continue life as they best remember it. However, the Overlook Hotel's past is a maze of violence and bloodshed that manifests itself into these ghosts that haunt Jack until he becomes one of them. Jack wants to repress his violent past while

the hotel has already been doing that since its construction. Thus, the film chronicles Jack's slide towards acceptance within the mazes of the hotel.

Danny and his hope for the future

Jack's son Danny also comes emotionally damaged to the Overlook Hotel, though in a very unique way. Danny learns from Dick Holloran, the kindly African American cook of the Overlook, that he has the ability to "shine." This is a kind of telepathic power that enables him to see visions, either from the past or the future. Danny also has an imaginary friend named Tony who he says is "a little boy that lives inside my mouth." Danny uses Tony as a coping mechanism for these images he sees; his ability to create a reliable method to deal with these visions already places Danny ahead of his father in terms of how he chooses to confront the past.

A crucial scene illustrating how Danny understands the past occurs as Jack has been touring the hotel while Wendy and Danny take stock of the kitchen stores. Dick gets Danny ice cream and tells him about his ability to "shine," and that he will see some horrifying images in the hotel. However, he comforts Danny with one piece of wisdom: "They're like pictures in a book, Doc, they can't hurt you." This quote forms the crux that juxtaposes Danny and Jack as representations of different reactions and interpretations of American history. Danny is told to treat his visions of the hotel as harmless images. Danny acknowledges these specters in the hotel but never gives in to their influence. Jack, on the other hand, initially chooses to repress these images but eventually gives in to them because he simply can't handle the haunting and instead gives himself over to the hotel. Roger Luckhurst, a scholar with *The British Film Institute*, describes the film as "a pessimistic account of the human failure ever to escape the ineluctable forces that entrap men" (87). Jack represents this entrapment, while the "ineluctable forces" are represented by the ghosts and their steadfast desire to cling to the past.

Jack and Danny as two different paths

"Pictures in a book" becomes a metaphor that both literally and psychologically explains the film. Dick is, of course, referring to Danny's ability to "shine" and see the horrific images of the hotel's grisly past. However, we also get a literal interpretation of these pictures in a book. In Stephen King's original novel upon which the film is based, Jack takes a trip to the basement of the hotel where he discovers a photo album containing a pictorial history of the hotel. While this scene doesn't appear in the film version, we do see the picture book open on Jack's desk as he tries to work on his "writing project," perhaps a source of inspiration for whatever he is writing about. As we see later in the film, however, the picture book is no muse and instead drives Jack to construct his gleefully psychotic "All Work and No Play Makes Jack a Dull Boy" manuscript, a hopelessly winding maze of text that seems totally removed from rational thought. Jack and Danny are both given similar images of the history and violence of the hotel's past, and yet "Danny, Jack, and Wendy each make of Overlook and its past what he or she is equipped and inclined to make of it" (Rasmussen 234). What Rasmussen illustrates is that the main characters of *The Shining* each see the past of the Overlook through a different lens. However, it is how each character reacts to these ghosts that separate how they interpret the Overlook's past.

Danny and Jack also navigate the space of the hotel in very different ways. Three times in the film we get the famous shots of Danny riding around the hotel in his big wheel, exploring his surroundings and understanding the mazelike corridors of the hotel. By contrast, Jack sits in the middle of the hotel, unwilling or unable to explore the hotel. These scenes set up the hotel as a dizzying labyrinth where the interior begins to look similar to the famous hedge maze in the back of the hotel, as film scholar and professor Mario Falsetto notes in his stylistic analysis of Kubrick's films:

One of *The Shining's* most impressive features is the way it carefully sets up comparisons between the interior spaces of the hotel and the exterior maze space...Perhaps the most intriguing interpretation of the film's spatial strategies involves reading the space as a metaphorical landscape for Jack's (Jack Nicholson) deteriorating mind. The final nine-minute sequence of Jack chasing Danny through the maze could be viewed as a metaphor for Jack's frenzied mental condition. (70)

Here Falsetto connects the hotel's mazelike structure with Jack's deteriorating mental state. This idea can actually be pushed farther to connect the idea that Jack becomes more ghostly as the spaces of the hotel begin to trap him. Jack's deteriorating mind is actually just adjusting to the attitudes of the ghosts of the Overlook, willingly becoming trapped within maze. As Danny wanders and probes, navigating the space, Jack remains still, squatting over his typewriter in eerie concentration. Danny goes out and explores the hotel's hedge maze with his mother while Jack is content to stay inside and watch them from a window. As author Juli Kearns points out in the documentary *Room 237*, Jack literally becomes the Minotaur at the center of the maze, trapped in his own space, unwilling and unable to move and express himself as an individual.

Significantly, Jack wants to stay inside the hotel's maze rather than explore its surroundings...Symbolically, he wants to "forget" himself (Jack Torrance in the present time) and to "remember" not how to escape from the center of the maze but how to command its static and enclosed timelessness. (Nelson 207)

As Nelson points out, Jack is becoming more and more a part of the maze and, by extension, the Overlook Hotel. Jack is becoming similar to the ghosts of the hotel, complacent and happy with the time he's being trapped in.

Jack's subverted feelings surfacing

The first time Jack physically interacts with a ghost is after Danny encounters the ghostly woman in Room 237. Upon seeing mysterious injuries on Danny's neck, Wendy accuses Jack of injuring their son, causing Jack to storm off into the "Gold Ballroom," the main party room of the hotel, and stare into the mirror across the dry bar, begging for some alcohol. Before long, Jack is greeted by Lloyd, the calm yet sinister-looking bar-keep that begins to liquor Jack up and lets him rant about his dissatisfaction with Wendy. The interesting part of their conversation is when Jack references "White Man's Burden," without any provocation, a poem by Rudyard Kipling that is commonly interpreted as a

poem endorsing imperialist rule of other countries:

The implication, of course, was that the Empire existed not for the benefit—economic or strategic or otherwise—of Britain itself, but in order that primitive peoples, incapable of self-government, could, with British guidance, eventually become civilized (and Christianized). (Cody)

Jack's reference to this poem that justifies imperialism in the middle of casual conversation suggests that he is giving in to the influence of the hotel. As Cody notes, Kipling may be suggesting through his poem that it is up to white "Empires" to colonize "primitive people." The fact that Jack is beginning to think in these terms represents his assimilation into the ghosts of the hotel. As film scholar Thomas Nelson points out: "...the fact [is] that soon he will forget himself and only remember a once latent urge to dominate and rule" (Nelson 223). As Cody notes, the poem is commonly inferring that it is up to white "Empires" to colonize "primitive people." Jack beginning to think in these terms represents his assimilation into the ghosts of the hotel. Film scholar Thomas Nelson points out: "...the fact that soon he will *forget* himself and only remember a once latent urge to dominate and rule" (Nelson 223). What Nelson suggests is that Jack is now remembering this desire to rule and his psychological makeup is becoming more akin to the ghosts of the hotel.

In the following scene we see Jack give himself over to direct physical contact with these ghosts in a way Danny never does. Up to this point in the film, Danny is invited several times by the ghostly sisters that haunt the hallways to "come play with us... forever and ever," and yet he resists. Jack, on the other hand, is enticed sexually by an attractive young woman ghost in Room 237, the same ghost who terrorized Danny moments earlier. Danny is recognizing and acknowledging these ghosts, but still resisting their influence. As Jack begins to engage with her, however, he pulls back to realize she is a decaying corpse, which becomes very representative of the enticing, yet rotten foundation of the hotel: "The rotting corpse of a now much older woman that Jack embraces is only revealed—as ever—in the revealing mirror, the logic of dreams making desire turn to revulsion" (Luckhurst 64). In other words, Jack actually sees through the hotel's invitation to become trapped in a moment of glory but accepts it anyway. After this encounter, Jack goes back to the room with Wendy and claims that he didn't see anything in the room. In this scene we see that Jack is now perfectly content to be in the middle of the maze. Despite being confronted with such a horrifying experience that clearly points to the dark nature of the hotel, Jack represses the incident and decides to stay.

By this point in the film, astute viewers will note the clothing choices of the film begin to slowly change as the story nears its end. Towards the beginning of the film Wendy and Danny are clad in clothes with a red, white, and blue color scheme, while Jack wears clothes befitting a schoolteacher. As the film goes on, however, and he becomes more aware of the ghosts in the hotel, Jack begins to look sloppier and disheveled while he only wears clothes with red, white, and blue. Danny and Wendy, however, slowly begin to shed the patriotic scheme in favor of different colors. In fact, Wendy actually dons a yellow cardigan covered in teepees towards the end of the film. This acts as another visual clue that Jack is becoming more and more rooted in the frontier-American perspective of the ghosts and sees Wendy and Danny as enemies that need to be eliminated, which is literally represented by their clothing.

A scene that shows Jack's full acceptance of the hotel's influence is a discussion he has

with the ghost of the prior caretaker, Grady. This is during Jack's second trip to the Gold Room, but this time more than just Lloyd are present. In fact, an entire party is going on with hundreds of partygoers dressed in dazzling 1920s attire. The discussion between Grady and Jack begins after Grady spills a drink on Jack, causing them to retreat into the bathroom to clean up. What follows is an interaction ripe with misidentification of both the two characters and the time which they live in. "Grady" at this point in the story resonates with audiences as the name of the previous caretaker who, according to Ullman, murdered his entire family with an axe. However, this Grady claims his name is Delbert, while the Grady mentioned earlier in the film is named Charles. Jack attempts to confront Grady, accusing him of being the previous caretaker; however, Grady denies this and then suggests that Jack has always been the caretaker, claiming, "I should know; I have always been here." *Sight and Sound* film critic Paul Meyersberg notes, "Events that seem to take place in the present may be re-enactments or simply memories of the past. To take *The Shining* at its face value is a mistake" (253). What this means is that *The Shining* is constantly placing its characters in re-enactments of events of the past, forcing them to re-enact moments over and over again. This is because the Overlook Hotel is a maze trapping the ghosts and the Torrance family inside, forcing them to retread the same path over and over.

Grady goes on to further confuse identities by claiming that he had a wife and two daughters (the same as the murderous caretaker Ullman describes at the beginning of the film) and describes how he had to "correct" his wife and children, while suggesting that Jack do the same. Jack accepts this and does indeed try to "correct" Danny and Wendy. However, before he leaves, Grady adds one last statement: "Your son is trying to bring an outside party into this situation... a nigger cook." Jack is slow to respond to Grady; however, he also accepts the idea to eliminate Dick. Professor James Naremore suggests that "the reaction suggests that Jack's repressed racism, already revealed in the earlier conversation with Lloyd, has been given a new outlet" (203). Naremore makes the claim that Jack's repressed racism is given new life by Grady; however, this can be further extended to the idea that Jack is taking the next step towards becoming a ghost. Bit by bit he is accepting a past version of himself and disappearing into attitudes associated with the hotel's glory days.

Race through the maze

Danny indeed has used his ability to "shine" in order to communicate with Dick in a desperate attempt to summon help to the hotel. However, Danny's efforts prove futile as Jack buries his axe deep into Dick's chest, leaving his body to bleed over a Navajo-inspired rug. This act seemingly completes Jack's transition into one of the Overlook's ghosts by spilling the blood—of the minority hotel member no less—that the hotel demands. Drunk on his kill, Jack then chases Danny out of the hotel, howling as they both enter the maze in a frenzied and frantic game of cat and mouse. Jack attempts to track Danny through his footprints while Danny races through the maze he and his mother had playfully navigated only months earlier. This climactic moment also represents the choice Danny makes that ultimately separates him from his father: he retraces his footsteps. While Jack charges ahead, eagerly following the tracks in front of him, Danny retraces a few of his steps to end the trail then races out of the maze while his father is stuck inside. Jack then continues to limp around, his screaming becoming more and more nonsensical until he finally collapses. A cut away reveals a horrifying image of Jack completely fro-

zen, his face permanently stuck in a grotesque grimace as he dies of exposure.

This moment represents the final choice for both characters, the final moment where they decide how they choose to interpret the history of the hotel. Danny chooses to face what has happened and, in a literal act, retraces his steps, accepts the past and then strides forward towards his mother and (we presume) a future. Danny is able to look at the past in such a way that enables forward movement. Jack, on the other hand, traps himself within the maze and chooses to forever reside within the Overlook Hotel. As we see in the final frames of the film, Jack's body not only will be trapped in the hotel forever but his spirit will (and always has been) as well.

The final shot of *The Shining* is the final clue to unlocking the idea of America's past in conjunction with the Overlook Hotel. The photograph depicts a well-dressed Jack attending a party in the Gold Room, with the date on the photo reading: "July 4th, 1921." The simplicity in this lies in the fact that Jack has now officially conceded to the history and culture of the hotel. We just saw him literally captured in the middle of the maze, but now we see Jack entrapped on a more spiritual level. The date "July 4th" has obvious ties to the United States, but the year is every bit as important for this reading. As Luckhurst argues, the 1920s represent perhaps a "return to the last confident moment of class and race hierarchy in America in the 1920s, a response to the economic and social instabilities of the '70s that arguably helped foster the horror boom in the first place. The Overlook is America's past glory, frontier-triumphant, however bathed in blood" (Luckhurst 91). This means that Kubrick's decision to place these ghosts in the 1920s makes sense, because it evokes a time of extravagance and white dominance in America.

Events like the Tulsa Race Riot illustrate that America was struggling with racial acceptance, while at the same time the "roaring '20s" show an America that was drunk on luxury and spending. Thus, the '20s make sense as the apex of Overlook Hotel's history, a time when the hotel was at its absolute peak. The hotel and the ghosts essentially represent a time capsule where the past is always present and they never have to move on from the early '20s. This photograph represents Jack fully accepting this idea and becoming a ghost himself: "Jack has retreated to a distinctly American past, at a moment of national celebration just a few years after a victorious World War and nearly a decade before the Great Depression. *The Shining*, in its characters' perceptions and attitudes is a distinctly *American* nightmare" (Rasmussen 284). Rasmussen's point is well taken: Jack and the ghosts are in a moment that is perfect for them. At the center of the hotel's maze is a preserved past where these ghosts can stay in the same time forever and ever.

As mentioned before, Jack always existed in the Overlook due to his attitudes and how he chooses to interpret the past. He always existed there because of the haunted nature of the Overlook Hotel, which fosters a never-ending cycle that began during the construction and that will seemingly never end. Nelson again explores how the hotel is a maze constructed specifically to entrap Jack and the ghosts in this time: "Rather than exploring and discovering, making choices and risking both failure and success, he prefers to sit inertly in the center of an enclosed world and shine from above in god-like contemplation of the beauty of his creation" (Nelson 229).

In other words, Kubrick sets up the Overlook Hotel as a haunting rooted in complacency and conservatism. The specters of the hotel fight maliciously against anything that may bring about change within the hotel and are excessively good at eliminating anything that could bring this about. The hotel was built on blood, and now it sustains itself through the same blood and the same ghosts, occasionally adding some to their number.

The photograph we see at the end of the film is merely the final visual proof that Jack has accepted this fate and will be a ghost haunting those mazelike corridors for all time.

Conclusion

In an interview concerning why he wanted to tackle the challenge of directing a horror film, Kubrick offered up the following answer: “There’s something inherently wrong with the human personality. There’s an evil side to it. One of the things that horror stories can do is to show us...the dark side without having to confront it directly” (Howard 157). This, perhaps better than anything else, explains the true purpose of Kubrick’s film and explains what the haunted ghosts of the Overlook Hotel should really mean to audiences. Kubrick wanted to offer up a method for audiences to confront the bloody past of America, and any other nation for that matter, without having to become absorbed in the same way as Jack. Instead, audiences are treated to the horror in the same fashion as Danny; the information is laid out in front of us like “pictures in a book.” They are images on the screen that can haunt us but can’t harm us. What is important is that we, the audience, understand the importance of being able to face our faults, to confront our horrible history and be able to understand it, rather than constantly attempting to ignore it. Kubrick himself explained how humans tend to repress this history, rather than face it head on:

I think we tend to be a bit hypocritical about ourselves. We find it very easy not to see our own faults, and I don’t just mean minor faults. I suspect there have been very few people who have done serious wrong who have not rationalized away what they’re done, shifting the blame to those they have injured. We are capable of the greatest good and the greatest evil, and the problem is that we often can’t distinguish between them when it suits our purpose. (qtd. in Ciment 193)

Through these scenes and the mazes with which Kubrick litters his film, the audience gets a clear sense of the very unique haunting that is affecting both Jack and Danny. On the surface the Overlook Hotel is haunted due to being built on an ancient Native American burial ground. However, what we ultimately see in the film is that the hotel is haunted by repression. The ghosts in the hotel represent the ways in which America has denied its bloody past and instead chosen to remain blissfully unaware and live in a time of supposed glory. *The Shining* presents its viewers with two options: either repress this history, like Jack, and do not face the horrors at hand until their influence you; or behave like Danny and respect the horror without letting it fully overtake you. In this sense there is at least the hope of escaping from the vicious cycle that the Overlook represents. Of course Kubrick doesn’t definitively end his film but instead chooses to leave the ending ambiguous, open to all kinds of interpretations. For Jack, Kubrick suggests that the entire story has been repeated throughout history and will continue to be repeated in the future. As Luckhurst points out: “Circularity, by definition, refuses to force an ending. Instead, the last shot is a recursive revelation that demands an instant reviewing of the film to hunt for clues. And so we watch it again. And again” (91). Luckhurst’s idea unlocks the narrative maze that Kubrick sets forth for the audience. Ghosts by definition are trapped in the past; there is no future as much as there is always a present. By finishing the film with the photograph, Kubrick breaks down the idea of a traditional narrative. Instead

of offering an ending, he offers a cycle. The only hope the film offers is that Danny and Wendy escape at the end. They are alone in a blizzard with only a Snow Cat as a means of transportation, but they at least represent the hope of moving forward, unlike Jack and the ghosts of the Overlook.

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“Except That the Haunted, Hidden Thing Was Me”: Ghostly Matters and Transsexual Haunting

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This paper examines motifs of ghostliness and haunting in representations of transsexuality, both in the violent and oppressive representations of transsexuality within a transphobic culture, and in the self-representation and narration of transsexuals themselves. Using scholar Avery Gordon’s definition of haunting—which characterizes haunting as the “knot” of oppression, self-representation, and knowledge production—this paper argues for the necessity of recognizing transsexual oppression as a form of cultural haunting.

“I do not believe in ghosts, although I have seen them with my own eyes. This isn’t so strange, really. A lot of people feel the same way about transsexuals.” –Jennifer Finney Boylan

“Back then I knew very little for certain about whatever it was that afflicted me, but I did know this much: that in order to survive, I’d have to become something like a ghost myself, and keep the nature of my true self hidden. And so I haunted that young body of mine....” –Jennifer Finney Boylan¹

In 2013, Nathan Verhelst, a 44-year-old transsexual man, applied for euthanasia in Belgium after a series of failed transition surgeries. After his death, Nathan’s mother, who in interviews refused to call him by his chosen name or use the male pronouns corresponding to his identity, told Belgium’s *Het Laatste Nieuws*, “When I first saw Nancy, my dream was shattered. She was so ugly. I had a ghost birth. Her death does not bother me” (Gayle).

In 2011, a transsexual author named Coco Papy published a blog post called “Ghosts of D.C.: Violence Against Trans Women in the Nation’s Capital,” detailing the city’s epidemic of unsolved shooting deaths of trans women. For Papy, the D.C. shootings of multiple trans women “[bring] into the light of day” the violence and repression faced by transsexuals. “Much like ghosts, these women’s experiences are continually relegated to the realm of make-believe...that these things just aren’t real. It’s all a ghost story.” Papy’s post ends with a call to action: “in the wake of what is a shamefully violent time in the city of Washington D.C., there is no longer a reason to blindly turn away.”

In her book, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, author Avery Gordon theorizes a complex definition of haunting. Haunting, Gordon claims, is an “experiential modality,” a “sociopolitical-psychological state” characterized by multiple contexts.

Notes

1. Both epigraphs and the quote in the title are taken from Jennifer Finney Boylan’s book, *I’m Looking Through You: Growing up Haunted: A Memoir*. The passage in the title appears on page 176; the epigraphs appear on page 107 and page 25.

In one aspect, haunting is “an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known” (xvi). Analyzing the historical examples of slavery and the Argentinian Dirty War, Gordon posits that haunting is a shared social and historical condition indicative and expressive of the traumatic violence and oppression of institutional or state power. By creating this condition, Gordon argues, haunting also becomes a tool of abusive systems of power to maintain oppressive control and manage populations through the circulation of fear. In this way, haunting “always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present” (xvi). This unresolved state of social violence and state power is one aspect that defines and interprets the experience of haunting.

However, for Gordon, this is not a complete definition. The repressive violence of state power that generates haunting, by “making itself known,” also forces action; it calls us to “see” what has been violently repressed because “the whole essence of a ghost is that it has a real presence, and demands its due, your attention” (xvi). This call to see and act “out of concern for justice” is also an act that defines the experience of haunting. By registering the presence of social violence, “haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a ‘something to be done’” (xvi). According to Gordon, the presence of both repressive violence and self-representative, resistant action, of “force and meaning,” do not merely exist separately but simultaneously and circularly (xvi). Together they form the “knot” or tension that makes up the experience of haunting itself.

This “knot” of repression and self-representation, of “force and meaning,” makes the social and cultural experience of haunting intimately tied to the production of knowledge. Out of this “knot,” haunting produces “subjugated knowledges” as defined by Michel Foucault. Subjugated knowledge “names on the one hand that which official knowledge represses within its own terms, institutions, and archives,” and on the other hand it also refers to “disqualified, marginalized, fugitive knowledge from below and outside the institutions of official knowledge production” (Gordon xvii). Haunting, the seething tangle of abusive power and resistance, produces similarly tangled epistemologies that respond to and dynamically create one another. Seeing haunting becomes a means by which to access “marginalized, disqualified, denied” and oppressed knowledge forms and also to identify the “modalities of power” of privileged forms of knowledge. “This way of seeing” says Gordon, “is transformative, maybe even revolutionary knowledge” (203).

In this paper I excavate the intersections of transsexuality and cultural haunting. My goals are multiple. Firstly, I address what I have come to view as a critical lack of dialogue between two fields that seem to have quite a lot to say to one another: that of theorizing haunting and theorizing transsexual subjectivity. Scholars of haunting as well as trans theorists and activists have moved concentrically for years, circling and overlapping, hearing each other’s echoes without ever being brought into direct conversation. Secondly, I argue, using the critical framework laid out by Gordon in *Ghostly Matters*, for the recognition of the lived experiences of transsexuality as a form of cultural haunting. I will show that a motif of haunting and ghostliness is imbedded in social, political, and psychological representations of transsexuality. Ghostliness and spectrality can be found in a “knot” of transsexual haunting in both the abusive systems of power that oppress people who identify as transsexual and in the expressive acts of transsexuals that create a “something to be done,” that force action and make meaning from their lives. Finally, I explore the relationship between the “knot” of transsexual oppression and self-representation with new forms of knowledge production. Specifically, I illuminate the ways in which transsexual cultural haunting produces “subjugated knowledge” of transsexual subjectivity—both oppressive forms of knowl-

edge production and new epistemologies that exist “outside” of these abusive institutions of epistemic practice.

In this vein, this paper will explore the etymological implications of the term *trans*, the ghostliness of transsexual time and transsexual space, and the language of both transphobic hate speech and transsexual self-ascription. The paper then further emphasizes the paradoxical “knot” of social violence and calls to action by detailing the institutional systems of repression and abuse faced by trans people. This section illuminates the spectral politics of visibility and erasure lived out through police brutality, corrective rapes, through the denial of access to shelter services, and through transsexual relationships to medical and psychiatric practice. The final section of the paper explore the experience of transsexual cultural haunting through its relationship to knowledge production. This section will explore the examples of transsexual transition photography and the emergence of the transsexual autobiography and memoir.

Reading and Writing the Transsexual Body: Transsexual Haunting at the Site of Language

“Haunting was the language by which I tried to reach an understanding of force and meaning” (Gordon xvi).

Some of the clearest representations of transsexuality as an experience of cultural haunting can be found at the site of language. A motif of ghostliness and haunting can be found in transphobic hate speech, an institutional speech used to define and code transsexuality, and can also be found in the speech of trans people to represent themselves. Language is also fundamentally tied to knowledge production, to the way we construct and understand being and the world. In this way, language forms a “knot,” a point of tension like that of haunting.

Language itself is also profoundly ghostly. As the deconstructionist philosophers Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze have noted, language constantly points out the instability of boundaries, doubling, displacing and deferring categories of meaning. What counts as language definition and expression is also bound up in institutions of power. In this way, entering this analysis at the site of language allows us to see the “knot,” to begin to read and write experiences of transsexuality as a form of cultural haunting.

The term *transsexual* fundamentally refers to those whose gender identification does not correspond to their biological or genital sex. The application of this term is also spectral. Transsexuality can refer to “a variety of different identities...cross dressers, drag queens, and transsexuals” (Namaste 1) and is used both interchangeably and distinctly from the term “transgender.” In addition, some have argued that the term “transsexual” excludes gender non-conforming individuals who don’t identify as trans because of their cultural or economic backgrounds (Valentine 4). In addition, it is important to acknowledge that the term transsexual is constituted within Western conceptions of gender, performance, and morality, and is not necessarily representative on a global scale. Indigenous and South East Asian communities, for example, conceptualize gender alterity and non-conformity out of different contexts and specific localities (Reddy 10).

The prefix *trans-* is inherently spectral. *Trans-* means both between and beyond, “to cross” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*) or “go through,” and also refers to being “on or to the other side of” or “into another state or place” (“etymology trans”). The ghostliness of trans can be found within these etymologies. “To cross” or “go through” implies the destabilization and

transgression of a boundary. Similarly, to be both between and beyond is a paradoxical, liminal state, disrupting constructed categories of both time and place. To be both “on or to the other side of” and “into another state or place” also describes multiple states of being. To be “on or to the other side of” implies a state of actualization—a cohesive solidified, realized subject. “Into another state or place” implies a state of movement, a process of going there and getting to—an unrealized state of fragmentation and dissociation from the self.

In this way, the prefix *trans-* alludes to a motif of spectrality within experiences of transsexuality. The word *trans* echoes the way in which transsexual people cross and move through boundaries, destabilizing constructed categories of sex and gender. The prefix *trans-* also hints at embedded paradoxes within trans identification and expression. Transsexuality refers both to those whose gender presentation does not align with their biological sex, and to those who undergo a process of transitioning, including hormones and surgeries, to align their gender presentation with their physical bodies. In this way, transsexuality describes both a state of actualization, cohesion, and realization post-operation as well as a state of fragmentation and dissonance from the self—a state of going to and of transition itself. This is further reinforced by the self-ascriptions of many transsexuals post-operation, who often refer to themselves not only as men and women, but also as transsexual men and transsexual women, and as male-to-female transsexuals and female-to-male transsexuals. Here transsexual identification is rooted both in cohesive actualization of bodily identity in the fragmentation and displacement from the self from one’s gender identity. In this way, to be transsexual is to be both “on or to the other side of,” as well as “into another state or place” (“etymology trans”). To be transsexual is to be both between and beyond categories of sex and gender.

Looking closely at common instances of transphobic hate speech also further reveals a motif of ghosts and haunting. Pushing on slurs like “freaks” unpacks a language of spectrality imbedded in their etymologies and use. The slur *freak* is similarly rooted in spectrality. In its original usage, *freak* meant a “sudden turn of mind,” to “change [or] distort,” and also “to streak or fleck randomly” (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). Here, the meaning of *freak* invokes the transgression of a boundary: to change, to distort, to smear and to fleck, all reference distinctions and categories blurring in and out of one another, altering dimensions and lines. Even the term *randomly* relates to spectrality: to be random is to be outside of or disruptive to order. In this way, the slur *freak* is fundamentally a condemnation of the way transsexuals are perceived to “turn,” “distort,” “change,” and “smear” categories of sex and gender (*Online Etymology Dictionary*).

Slurs themselves exist in the realm of spectrality and haunting. To slur refers not only to abuse through language but also to the blurring together of words, the act of passing over something in order to conceal it. To slur speech collapses boundaries of signification; slurring words blurs together and distorts meaning, changing the meaning of what signs are meant to represent. In this way, the act of slurring parallels the spectrality of transsexual relationships to sex and gender. Transsexual people blur categories of gender and sex, changing the meaning of the signs that are constructed to correspond to them. In this way, transphobic hate speech refers to the slurring of the transsexual body in multiple forms, unpacking transsexual experiences of cultural haunting.

In addition to its presence within transphobic hate speech, a motif of ghostliness and haunting can also be found in the language many transsexuals use to represent themselves and their own lived experiences. Perhaps the most literal representation of the ghostly themes within transsexual self-ascription is the autobiography *I’m Looking Through You: Growing up Haunted: A Memoir* by transsexual author Jennifer Finney Boylan. In her memoir, Boylan

uses the memory of a haunted childhood home to parallel and contextualize her experiences of transsexual identity, which she refers to as growing up in a “haunted body,” and being a ghost herself (30). Boylan’s better-known memoir, *She’s Not There: A Life in Two Genders*, utilizes a similar language of spectrality. As a transsexual woman, the phrase “she’s not there” dictates and narrates an experience of absent-presence. Like Boylan, many other transsexual authors describe the experience of transsexual identity using a language of fragmentation, displacement, and dissociation. Transsexual author Jay Prosser, in his book *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, describes his experience of transsexuality, particularly the process of transitioning, as “a kind of deafening unspoken. In this gendered nonzone, I felt too embodied (only body) yet also disembodied: For what on earth did I embody?” (2). Here, Prosser’s description is inherently ghostly. “Deafening unspoken,” “gendered nonzone,” “too embodied. . . yet also disembodied” are paradoxes that invoke the collapse of boundaries, of being there and not there, visible and not-visible, being and not-being. This spectrality is also reflected in Prosser’s dissociative use of speech. In the sentence, “I felt too embodied (only body) yet also disembodied: For what on earth did I embody?” the presence of the parenthetical “(only body),” the colon, the sudden shift to a question, and the suturing of several sentences, create a sentence that performs the dislocation of the transsexual self from the subject and body. The use of the term *embody* is also spectral. To embody means both to provide with a physical form and also to symbolize (“etymology embody”). In this way, to embody reflects the paradoxical state of transsexual identification as both an actualized, cohesive state brought into physical form and a state of dissociation and fragmentation—the symbol of that identity.

In addition to this spectral language, also common in transsexual representations are descriptions of feeling as if one is in the wrong body. These descriptions are often accompanied by fantasies of excoriation, or to tear off or remove the skin (Prosser 68). Transsexual author Leslie Feinberg describes this in her autobiography, saying pre-transition: “I think how nice it would be to unzip my body from forehead to navel and go on vacation. But there is no escaping it” (qtd. in Prosser 68). Another transsexual author says: “I used to look at my body and think it was a bit like a diver’s suit, it didn’t feel like me inside” (qtd. in Prosser 68). Here, the language of the wrong body also invokes a theme of spectrality, haunting, and ghostliness. The wrong body narrative designates an inner true body within an outer false one, fundamentally displacing the mythic whole of the self, creating profound dissociation and fragmentation: “I am not me,” “I am inside.” Descriptions of the wrong body rupture boundaries of inside and outside, embodied and disembodied, presence and absence, for what does it mean to be in the wrong body? In this way, the common self-representation of the wrong body within transsexual narratives alludes to the haunting of the transsexual body.

Also prevalent in transsexual autobiographies is the appearance of mirror scenes, which, according to Prosser, “perpetuate transsexual narratives with remarkable consistency” (100). In his autobiography, transsexual author Mario Martino describes: “I saw my life as a series of distorted mirrors. . . I saw myself in their crazy reflections as a false image of myself. I was a boy!” (qtd. in Prosser 100). Mirror scenes are also present in *Growing Up Haunted*, in which Boylan describes a life of seeing the “ghost” of a woman in the mirror: “I saw there was someone in the mirror, an older woman with long blonde hair, wearing a white garment like a nightgown. Her eyes were a pair of small red stars. She seemed surprised to see me, and raised one hand to her mouth, as if I were the ghost, as if I were the one floating, translucently, in the mirror” (47). These mirror scenes also foreground the motif of ghostliness embedded in transsexual representation. The mirror scenes of transsexual narratives create a subversion of the Lacanian mirror stage. Rather than feeling united with their image in the mirror, the trans-

sexual person does not recognize their reflected self. Instead of a cohesive image, these mirror scenes reflect dissociation and fragmentation, an absent presence. What is seen in the mirror is simultaneously what is not there and what is not meant to be there. Mirrors themselves are inherently displacing and paradoxical, doubling and deferring the image, reflecting subject as object. In this way, the spectrality of mirror scenes in transsexual narratives literally mirrors that of the transsexual authors themselves. This is further reinforced by Boylan in *Growing up Haunted*. At the conclusion of her memoir, she realizes that the ghost of a woman she had seen in the mirror was the image of her own haunted, secret self.

These examples break analytic ground by allowing us to begin recognizing the knot of haunting embedded in the ghostly motifs of transsexual subjectivity. Entering analysis of transsexual haunting through the site of language also allows us to recognize the structures of institutional power and abuse that further characterize transsexuality as an experience of cultural haunting.

Invisible Lives: Transsexual Haunting and Institutional Repression

“Erasure is a defining condition of how transsexuality is managed in culture and institutions” (Namaste 4).

Erasure Through Restricted Access to Social Services

One important way in which transsexuals experience institutional repression and abuse is through their restricted access to social service resources, particularly homeless shelters and women’s shelters. Transsexuals experience some of the highest rates of homelessness, poverty, and domestic abuse, creating an immediate need for homeless and women’s crisis services. However, transsexuals in immediate need of shelter services are often denied (Namaste 176). Homeless shelters that are willing to accept transsexuals often do so on the basis of the strict enforcement of heteronormative gender codes. Access to resources is contingent upon transsexuals conforming to a gender presentation that is out of alignment with their transsexual identity.

Transsexual women who seek domestic abuse services suffer similar treatment. Women’s shelters typically will only accept transsexual women if they are post-operative. Non-operative or pre-operative transsexual women are often turned away (Namaste 178).

The guidelines for admittance into homeless and women’s shelters implicitly point to transsexual spectrality, to the deconstruction of categories and boundaries. By making access to women’s shelters dependent on post-operative status, institutions deny subjectivity to transsexuals who are more transgressive to gender boundaries, granting partial subjectivity only to those who present sex and gender more cohesively within institutional binary. In addition, by making access to homeless shelters dependent on gender conformity, institutions attempt to recode and resolidify destabilized categories of sex and gender. In this way, the restricted access of transsexuals to social and shelter services further emphasizes transsexuality as an experience of cultural haunting.

Erasure in Medical and Psychiatric Practice

Transsexuals experience complex forms of erasure within psychological and medical study and methodology. Transsexuality is classified within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of*

Mental Disorders (DSM) as gender identity disorder or gender dysphoria, and is considered a form of mental disorder within the field of psychology. The classification of transsexuality as a mental disorder has subsequently resulted in transsexuals having to submit to a diagnosis in order to begin receiving vital healthcare including hormones and surgeries to meet their health needs. Those who submit to a diagnosis in order to obtain vital health care must, according to Prosser, match a “master narrative” of transsexuality when talking to their doctors about their transsexual identity (104). Even in these cases, doctors will often refuse to administer hormones or will only agree to administer hormones with several documents of authorization from psychiatrists, making them especially difficult to obtain legally.

A lack of trans positive physicians also results in many doctors having a limited knowledge of the effects of hormones with relation to transsexual healthcare. As a result, many transsexuals are far more knowledgeable on the effects of hormones on their own bodies than the physicians treating them. Because of this, transsexuals “often educate their doctors about hormones at the beginning of the patient-doctor relationship as well as throughout their treatment” (Prosser 167).

The status of transsexuals within medical and psychiatric institutions of power creates a complex play of oppression and subjectivity. Transsexuals are forced to submit to a diagnosis of a mental disorder in order to meet their vital and immediate healthcare needs, must submit to a script of transsexuality in order to receive hormones, and are often treated by physicians who know less about the effects of hormones on their own bodies. These structures objectify trans people and are forms of institutional repression, attempts to control and manage their transgressive destabilization of categories of gender and sex. However, transsexuals carefully anticipate and perform this master narrative in order to actualize themselves, and actively instruct their doctors on their healthcare needs, subtly forming and influencing the oppressive institutional structures they must navigate in order to survive. This complex dynamic of erasure and subjectivity is also imbedded in the term *disorder*, which refers both to the breakdown of category as well as to the active, constituting act of disordering itself. In this way, the dynamics of psychological and medical practice reveal complex, knotted plays of visibility and erasure, oppression, and subjectivity that further emphasize transsexuality as an experience of cultural haunting as per Gordon’s definition.

Erasure Through Physical Violence

Perhaps the clearest, most literal examples of transsexuality as a form of cultural haunting can be found in transsexual experiences of violence. Information on violence against transsexual people is inherently ghostly. Due to the oppressive institutional systems in place, few crimes against transsexuals are reported. This can be practically attributed to the high rates of police harassment and brutality suffered by transsexuals, as well as to the shared fear of being imprisoned in a holding cell that does not correspond to their gender identification. In addition, traditional means of assessing rates of violence often do not account for the unique conditions of transsexuality. Surveys of violence against LGBTQ persons, for example, disappear the presence of violence against transsexuals within the data of other groups. Similarly, theorizations of violence against LGBTQ persons, including queerbashing and gaybashing, only take into account motivations for hate crime violence linked to sexual orientation. This also renders violence against transsexuals invisible by not taking into account gender identity and presentation in motivations for hate crimes. However, even with many representations of violence rendered all but invisible, Human Rights Watch estimates that one in twelve transsexuals is murdered, and that other rates of violence, including assaults, rapes, and suicides, are some of

the highest of any marginalized group (Giovanniello 1).

One act of violence that particularly emphasizes transsexual spectrality is that of corrective rape. During hate crimes, corrective rape is often used against female-to-male transsexuals with the intent of “showing them they are women,” such as in the case of transsexual Brandon Teena (Halberstam 66). The heinous violence of corrective rape is a violent solidification of boundaries of sex and gender. The rapist aims to violently impose and reassert categories of sex and gender onto the body (and specifically the female body) that has transgressed and destabilized those boundaries. In this way, corrective rape is a violent, traumatic, and oppressive re-ordering of boundaries of sex and gender that are perceived as having been disordered. In this way, violence against transsexuals exists as a spectral absent-presence with transsexuals literally and figuratively disappearing within the abusive systems that repress them.

Subjugated Knowledge: Transsexual Haunting and New Epistemic Forms

“The only theory I trust is a story” (Boylan 25).

Having detailed the knot of institutional oppression and self-representation that makes up cultural experiences of transsexual haunting, we now move into the relationship of transsexual haunting to the production of new forms of knowledge.

One such knowledge form is the representation of transsexual subjectivity in photography. Of particular interest here is the development of transsexual transition photography. In transition photography, the process of physical transitioning is captured in images arranged in sequence. By representing the linear process of transitioning, we recognize the realized transsexual body that emerges post-transition. However, the representation of transsexual identity in transition photography introduces a ghostly paradox. According to Prosser, the effect of transition photography “is double: photographs demand that we concede that transsexuality makes a thorough difference to the body and yet . . . that we discover consistent and continuous identity in that very place of alterity” (75). To recognize the cohesive realization of transsexual subjectivity, we must simultaneously recognize its fragmentation.

The temporality of transition photography is similarly paradoxical. To recognize the supposed linearity of transition requires the presence of the sequence and requires the constant, simultaneous presence of the past. To contextualize and recognize the linearity of transition, one must always look back. In this way, to recognize what is requires the constant deferral to what once was but is no longer there. Transsexual transition photography captures the simultaneous definitions of transsexual identity, representing both the realized, cohesive, actualized form as well as the fragmented, dissociated self. Transsexual transition photography is, in many ways, a method of photographing ghosts, a means of theorizing the ambiguities of transsexual subjectivity.

Another new form of knowledge production is the rapidly growing genre of transsexual autobiography/memoir. According to Prosser—in answer to the question “Why do so many transsexuals write autobiographies?”—“Autobiography brings into relief the split of the transsexual life . . . the difference present in all autobiography between the subject of enunciation and the subject of enunciating. I was a woman, I write as a man, how to join this split? Precisely through narrative” (102). In this way, autobiography creates a paradox similar to that of transition photography, presenting both the cohesive subject and the object of dissociation and presenting linearity through the simultaneous, constant presence of the past. Autobiography itself is a spectral form, blurring categories of fact and fiction, subject and object, past and present and lending itself to the representation of transsexual stories. In many ways, the transsexual

autobiography—in the act of memory—is a literal act of “re-membering” the dissociated, displaced self. This is represented almost literally in Boylan’s *Growing up Haunted*. At the end of her memoir, having completed transition and finally recognized the ghost in the mirror as her own self, she says, “against all odds, I had become solid” (249).

Although no work has previously been done on the intersections of haunting and transsexuality, a prominent motif of ghostliness in conceptions of transsexual subjectivity suggests the presence of something seething and significant at work. Reading transsexual identities and experiences through Avery Gordon’s definition in *Ghostly Matters* as the knot of oppression and self-representation creates new forms of knowledge production; we encounter transsexuality as a form of cultural haunting. There are several reasons why recognizing transsexuality as a form of cultural haunting may be important. Recognizing a haunting gives communities another means by which to recognize abusive systems of power in their lives, to suddenly name and identify oppressions against transsexuals they didn’t realize were being felt, and felt deeply. Naming haunting, seeing ghosts, also provides another way to force action, to create a “something to be done” for transsexual justice (Gordon xvi). In addition, recognizing cultural hauntings creates opportunities for new forms of knowledge production that theorize the complexities of transsexual subjectivity, as well as provide new access to previously existing forms of subjugated knowledge. Finally, as Gordon points out, “the ghostly aspects of social life are not aberrations, but are central to modernity itself” (197). Theorizing transsexuality as a form of cultural haunting and recognizing its ghostly aspects is a key part of understanding our contemporary world. Ultimately, however, the most necessary reason to continue the work of recognizing transsexuality as a form of cultural haunting can be summarized by Gordon herself. It is “because ultimately haunting is about how to transform a shadow of a life into an undiminished life whose shadows touch softly in the spirit of peaceful reconciliation” (208). For transsexuals, the reality of living a shadow of a life is an immediate, violent crisis. The work of creating the means to live an undiminished life is a vital and life-affirming need.

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Resurfacing Specters in the House of Media: The Ghosts of Columbine in *American Horror Story: Murder House*

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This article explores an aspect of haunting and terror that surfaced after the Columbine school shooting, a specter crafted and refined through the journalistic practice of framing. This ghost inhabits the house of media, where it still continues to surface. *American Horror Story: Murder House* presents an incarnation of this ghost, opening a new way of thinking about both journalistic framing and the specter of mass violence.

On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold murdered twelve of their fellow students and a teacher and shot 21 other students at Columbine High School near Littleton, Colorado. This tragedy, which they had been planning meticulously for months, came to be referred to as the worst school shooting in U.S. history and resulted in fifteen deaths when it concluded with Eric and Dylan's suicides. *American Horror Story: Murder House* occurs in Los Angeles in a mirror universe, a double of America. This doubling is subtly enforced by minute details such as a character who smokes Pell Mell cigarettes instead of Pall Malls. There is a house in this mirror that inherits the souls of all who die within the house or on the property, and the ghosts are forced to exist eternally within the constraints of the Murder House. In the fictionalized 1994 Los Angeles, Tate, a character living in the house, suffers a mental breakdown and goes to his high school, Westfield High, and murders fifteen of his fellow classmates. *Murder House* intentionally frames the Westfield High shooting to mirror key elements used in the news media's coverage of Columbine, presenting a ghostly double that occurs in 1994 instead of 1999, at a fictionalized Westfield High School in Los Angeles instead of Columbine in Colorado. The narrative in the show is non-linear, and the shooting is revealed sporadically throughout the season, emphasizing the ghostliness of the specter. Each time the event surfaces, a new frame is presented in an attempt to shed more light on the matter, but it is jarring as the viewer continues to encounter the specter of Westfield High through the progression of *Murder House*. Each frame presents a piece of the fictionalized shooting while also alluding to its internalization of Columbine. Through the intentional framing of the Westfield High massacre in *Murder House*, the show surfaces the societal ghosts of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold and the essence of Columbine, illustrates the ghostly qualities of framing through employing the journalistic practice, and exposes a new thread of American horror that is created in the house of media.

Columbine startled the nation; it disrupted the everyday channel. While the tragedy itself lasted less than an hour, its presence in the news media allowed it to remain on the surface of society's attention well beyond the constraints of its placement in the nation's linear timeline. When tragedies like Columbine occur, mass media is the initial source of information, and, through framing, news media actively direct the eye of the viewer, emphasizing certain

aspects of the event. In his book *Comprehending Columbine*, Ralph W. Larkin writes, “The Columbine massacre was the most important news event in 1999. [...] Because of the magnitude of the story of the Columbine shootings, daily reportage lasted for a full month” (2). The story remained critical through the journalistic practice of framing, in which the salience, or relative importance, of a subject is kindled and perpetuated through persistent refocusing of the key details of a story. The magnitude and ambiguity of the true motives and intentions of Columbine fueled the story’s salience, and the consistent reframing of the event allowed it to remain on the surface of the nation’s attention. “During any event’s life span, the news media often reframe the event by emphasizing different attributes of the event—consciously or unconsciously—in order to keep the story alive and fresh” (Chyi and McCombs 23). This practice is what caused daily reportage to last a month, as different perspectives were unearthed, and presented society with another piece of the mosaic. When Columbine is viewed retrospectively, the salience will forever be filtered through the framed perspectives. *Murder House* uses these tactics to ensnare the essence of this American tragedy, presenting it within a world removed from the actual incident through time and spatial progression.

Several seeds of the specific frames of Columbine were evident in the presentation of news media coverage on April 20, 1999 as the event was unfolding. While coverage was shrouded in a sense of uncertainty, several foundational projections were established in the initial reportage, such as the physical appearance of Eric and Dylan, which came to be a major identifying point of these two perpetrators of typical society. In a compilation of real-time news footage from that day, a news anchor states, “The first description, by the way, of the suspects is that they were wearing long coats, dark boots” (“1999...”). This established a physical description, which became a centrality when discussing the event. In the same compilation another anchor elaborates, “[T]hese gunmen, wearing the black trench coats may have been in a gang within the school that a lot of witnesses describe as the Trench Coat Mafia” (“1999...”). This element of framing came to embody a physical specter that society could fathom as the perpetrators.

In *Murder House*’s 1994 Los Angeles, when Tate decides to murder his fellow classmates, he disregards his typical outfit of jeans and a sweater and dons a pair of black combat boots and a long, dark coat. By dressing in this manner, Tate brings forth the physical essence of Harris and Klebold, dispossessing his actual self, inheriting the spirit of the tragedy. He provides the first physical frame of Columbine, internalizing the physicality of the horror, presenting a face of American fear. After Violet, Tate’s girlfriend, learns of the Westfield High shooting, one of the articles in her search presents the subtitle, “Westfield wasn’t about jocks, Goths, or Trenchcoat Mafia” (“Piggy Piggy”). This reference to Columbine is subtle in its approach, but it yields power to the material phantom that the news media created through this frame of Columbine, which bears an incredible power when resurfaced. It is unnecessary to know the identity of the ghost to still be affected by its visceral symbolism. When Tate inherits this corporeal ghoul, he employs the empowering nature of this particular frame.

Another outlet of the framing that was established in the initial coverage was the targeting of jocks. Shortly after reports began emerging of the event, a Columbine student was interviewed saying, “They were shooting anyone [...] wearing a white hat or playing a sport” (“1999...”). White baseball hats were worn by jocks at Columbine high school, a physical differentiation of social structure. This frame, while developed early in the news media’s coverage, helped to craft the perceived progression of events in Columbine. It was later established that Eric and Dylan were victims of bullying. In the documentary *Colum-*

bine Killers, Brooks Brown, a friend of Eric and Dylan, states in an interview, “They were the bottom two kids in the entire school. Not just out of the senior class—the entire school. They were the two uncoolest kids. They were the losers of the losers” (*Columbine Killers*). Later in the documentary Eric is shown in a home video taken at the school, walking with a friend through the hallways a year before the shooting. Dylan is holding the camera, and they are approached by a “wall of jocks,” who subsequently run into the boys, elbowing them, nearly knocking the camera out of Dylan’s hands. When Brooks Brown comments on this video he says, “You don’t hear them bitching, because they’re so used to it. They don’t go, ‘What the hell was that?’ They go, ‘Uh-huh’ and they just move on because it’s so commonplace” (*Columbine Killers*). While the initial frame of the targeting of jocks appears to be a repercussion of the bullying, it does not stand up to the reality of the shooting. Larkin writes, “It was clear from the outset that the target for Harris and Klebold was their peers. It did not matter whether they were innocent or guilty, jocks or nerds, males or females, or evangelicals or atheists. [...] [T]hey apparently wanted to target the entire peer structure, in which they were at the very bottom” (63). It later became evident that very few of the victims of the Columbine shooting were jocks, or those perceived as responsible for the bullying. The initial news media coverage attempted to supply a more concrete explanation behind the attack, but the actuality of the attack was much darker. This aspect of the initial framing illustrates its equal importance to the overall conception and shaping of Columbine, despite its inaccuracy; framing crafts the reality of an event.

In *Murder House*, the ghosts are allowed to leave the house every Halloween to traverse the larger world. Released from his spatial limits, Tate walks to the beach with Violet, a current resident of the house. They are approached by a group of teenagers who are covered in blood and gore. They are victims of the Westfield High massacre, and they demand answers from Tate as to why he murdered them. Kyle, a football player for the Westfield Wolverines, says to him, “You owe us an explanation. Why did you target the jocks? I never did anything to you” (“Halloween (Part 2)”). This scene occurs before the viewer is aware of the shooting, and the placement is significant as it correlates with the release of this frame in the news media. Before the event was actualized in society’s conception of the event, the intentional targeting of anyone “wearing a white hat” had already received a foundation, providing more reasoning behind the attack. However, when Kevin corrects Kyle saying, “It wasn’t just the jocks, man” (“Halloween (Part 2)”), he mirrors the news media’s inability to capture the explicit reasoning behind this particular frame of Columbine, alluding to the targeting not just of the jocks but rather the entire peer structure of the school. He alters the viewer’s understanding of the Westfield High shooting, illustrating the power of framing; the frame is just as important as the actuality of an event, as they both create reality.

Columbine inherited strong religious overtones due to the news media’s framing of Cassie Bernall. It was initially reported that when Eric and Dylan approached Cassie in the library, they asked her if she believed in God before killing her. Larkin writes, “Perhaps the most celebrated and bizarre aspect of the shootings was the beatification of Cassie Bernall as a Christian martyr who died proclaiming her faith” (39). She became immortalized within the news media. This specific frame of Columbine was continued and reinforced when her mother released the book *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*, which was a biography of Cassie highlighting her selfless act of dying to defend her faith. This frame helped to provide existential meaning to the event, as “the evangelical community sought to define the shootings in religious terms, as a Manichean struggle between good and evil” (Larkin 41). For some it provided a sense of purpose to this terrible attack.

This channel of subscription in the news media inherited further attention when it was revealed that this conversation never took place; it occurred between Klebold and Valeen Schnurr, another student who was injured in the shooting. While this revelation slightly discredited the validity of this frame, it still played a vital role in defining Columbine. The perceived martyrdom of Cassie Bernall is still strongly associated with the shooting, its roots deep despite the martyrdom having never occurred.

In *Murder House*, when the victims of the Westfield High shooting confront Tate about his actions, Stephanie says to him, “You asked me if I believed in God and you put a gun to my head. I said yes. It wasn’t even true when I said yes. And then you pulled the trigger” (“Halloween (Part 2)”). This scene aids in the representation of Columbine through the Westfield High shooting, and it internalizes the religious overtones associated with Columbine. There exists another layer of depth within this encounter. When Stephanie says, “It wasn’t even true when I said yes” she represents the ambiguity wrapped up in this conversation. The following episode in the series begins with the victims of the library killing in Westfield High hearing gunshots down the hallway. This is the most substantial physical allusion to Columbine. The worst of the Columbine shootings took place in the library, where ten students were murdered and many more were injured. The library became a centrality in the representation and memory of Columbine. When Tate enters the library at Westfield High, he stalks around until he finds where the victims are hiding. When he encounters Stephanie, there is no dialogue exchange between them, another nod to the ambiguity of the matter, as it was revealed that that conversation did not occur with Cassie Bernall, another ghostly presence housed within the news media’s framing. This further emphasizes the power of framing, as it was inaccurate when covering Cassie’s martyrdom. That aspect of Columbine still represents the shooting in a manner. The frame continues to have placement even though it is not true.

Perhaps the most surprising frame of the coverage of Columbine focused on the media’s influence on Eric and Dylan, specifically video games, music, and film. Eric and Dylan both played video games such as *Doom* and *Quake*, violent first-person shooters. The news media attributed the violence in these video games as base inspiration for the two boys, fueling their subsurface violent natures. The news media also targeted music artists such as KMFDM and Marilyn Manson, claiming that the music promoted violence and aggression. Through framing these artists in this negative light, the salience was refueled, and society had another entity in which to project reason, another face in which to project fear. By refocusing the eye, the mosaic looms larger. The representation of this frame within *Murder House* is much more subtle, and it is not revealed until the tenth episode in the season. On the morning of the Westfield High shooting, after Tate suffers his mental breakdown, he sits on his bed, awake before his alarm clock. The clock goes off briefly, blaring heavy metal music. Albeit brief, this reference directly embodies this aspect of framing. The news media would study Tate’s habits, and heavy metal music would fall under scrutiny.

When discussing the event in their journals, Eric and Dylan referred to the day as NBK, which stood for *Natural Born Killers*, a movie that both boys admired (*Columbine Killers*). The film focuses on mass murderers Mallory and Mickey Knox, who are idolized by the news media, turning them into superstars. The news media in the film glorify their actions, inherently giving them power and immortality. Eric and Dylan viewed themselves in the same Godlike limelight, foreseeing their preservation within the house of media, capable of resurfacing and disrupting the societal timeline. Peter Conrad points out that “They were looking forward, they said, to returning as ‘ghosts’ to create ‘flashbacks’ in the minds of

survivors: they expected to have an afterlife as celluloid phantoms, images flickering in the collective unconsciousness.” In their minds, the boys already existed as ghosts, immortalized in media. Also in their journals the boys wrote that if a movie was made about NBK they wanted it directed by Quentin Tarantino or Steven Spielberg (*Columbine Killers*). In *Murder House* Tate specifically tells Violet that he loves Quentin Tarantino, implying his equal fascination with similar violent media. This explicit connection progresses the viewer along the same avenue, leading eventually to the media-saturated framing of Columbine. The news media would cover the Westfield High shooting in the same light as Columbine, and the influence of media would naturally be brought into focus. Although video games wouldn’t be brought into question, violent media would be examined.

Murder House is a house of media, which houses a room that reflects the internalization of media framing. After Tate murders fifteen of his fellow classmates, he returns home to the Murder House, where a SWAT team surrounds him in his room. After reaching for a gun beneath his pillow, he is killed, and the house inherits his soul, therefore inheriting the media-saturated essence of Columbine. In his theoretical work *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard writes, “[T]hanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed. [...] Here space is everything, for time ceases to quicken memory. [...] Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are” (8-9). Media houses memories, fixes them within its spatial confines, solidifies the occurrence of the event within a linear timeline. Through the house of media the ghost can inhabit and remain in a perpetual spiral, flickering images in a house of images that create solidity. Bachelard dissects the house, writing, “A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality: to distinguish all these images would be to describe the soul of the house” (17). The physicality of the Murder House is created through the non-linear storytelling of the show. It is stitched together frame by frame, room by room throughout the season. The images of the house form a mosaic that constitutes stability and substance, but the actuality of the Murder House is constantly re-imagined soul by inherited soul, as its reality is reinterpreted. Similarly, the house of media is composed of a body of images, the framing of the images provide illusions of stability through providing answers and explanations. In the instance of Columbine, the house is composed of news coverage, home video footage, and documentaries, all of which provide proof of stability. When these frames are picked from the mosaic and analyzed, a clearer picture forms of the essence of the house. Tate is confined to the spatial limitations of the Murder House, just as Eric and Dylan are confined to the house of media; the specters drift within the house, continuing to resurface.

While framing revives and revitalizes a story within the moment, it also fixes the perspective of a story in linearity. “‘Space’ and ‘time’ are two of the most important dimensions pertinent to the coverage of any news events. [...] Therefore, the proposed measurement scheme for media frames is grounded in the time and space dimensions” (Chyi and McCombs 24-25). The Columbine school shooting is established and fixed in space and time within the house of media: April 20, 1999, in Littleton, Colorado. While the frames of the event were also established in the initial coverage of the event, they inherit a ghostly quality since they constantly resurface. It is difficult to discuss a mass shooting, especially a *school* shooting without associating it with Columbine, the most-cited school shooting in the United States. It presented a new fashion by which media could produce its own haunts through framing, in which an event is solidified and grounded in a specific space and time, while the frames in which it is presented perpetuate and resurface in the linear timeline.

Both the Murder House, as well as the larger Media House are haunted by spirits that exist in resurgence. The news media still employ the same framing techniques that were established in the coverage of Columbine. Glenn W. Muschert writes, "First, journalists were unable to draw on previous media frames in covering Columbine, and therefore were forced to develop new frames of coverage for this incident" (165). The specific attributes of the ghost were fixed in the initial coverage, and it becomes impossible to view the ghost without relying upon these prescriptive attributes. Through media, and news media framing, the abstract attributes are just as powerful as viewing the physical specter; specific frames of Columbine are as much a part of the ghost as the physicality of a photo or video of one of the victims or perpetrators.

The frames, ghosts, and essence of Columbine continuously resurface within the house of media, both physically as well as through the abstract conjuring of framing. Documentaries and movies about Columbine perpetuate the presence of Eric and Dylan in the media. Home videos and footage of news coverage on April 20, 1999, consistently form the body of documentaries about Columbine, such as *The Columbine Killers* and *Zero Hour*. The boys were interested in video productions and made home movies with their friends. The documentary *The Columbine Killers* relies heavily upon media produced by Eric and Dylan, such as diary entries and home videos, revealing the darkness that lingered below the surface of the boys, using the media to create a more substantial explanation of the reasoning behind the attack. Another pivotal scene often used in coverage of Columbine is the security footage from the cafeteria, on which viewers witness Eric and Dylan, carrying their firearms, stride across the screen. This scene is one of the most visceral images related with Columbine, as it represents a raw physicality of the event itself. The most notorious videos are much darker though. In a series of videos known as the "basement videotapes," the boys documented their plans as well as captured the means to carry out their plans, revealing the arsenal of firearms procured and homemade bombs produced with which to set the plan into motion. These particular tapes procure an overwhelming ghostly quality, as they are not available to the public. Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* takes a different approach, exploring the different frames of Columbine, and the perpetuation of those frames, rather than the shooting itself. The film explores gun control issues, as well as the media's influence on Eric and Dylan, providing an interview with Marilyn Manson, who fell under the fire of the news media. This documentary, although not explicitly about the Columbine shooting, uses the frames attached to the news media coverage of the event, revealing their ability to conjure the spirit of Columbine.

Murder House is not the first fictionalized Media House to present an incarnation of Columbine. Gus van Sant's *Elephant* presents a dramatized account in which the present manifestations of Eric and Dylan (one of whom is appropriately named Eric) are bullied by their peers and plot to bring guns to their school. In their time outside of class they are shown playing violent first-person shooter video games. The film *Zero Day* is told through the home video footage of two boys, who meticulously plan and carry out a mass shooting at their school. The shooting itself is portrayed through the perspective of the school's security cameras, adding another ghostly layer by furthering the connection between the two events. 2005 saw the release of *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*, a role-playing video game that takes place on the day of the shooting, at Columbine High School. Players are presented with a more visceral manifestation of the ghosts when given the option to play as either Eric or Dylan, and carry out the shooting through a video game. The physical events of Columbine are fixed in the linear timeline on 20 April 1999; the ghosts of the event continue

to resurface within the house of media. The boys foresaw their return as “ghosts” to create “flashbacks,” and their doubled selves continue to surface through various incarnations, inheriting uncanny qualities, as they are established, familiar specters wearing new faces.

Columbine had several societal repercussions outside of the house of media, although the coverage and framing created perspective of the event, and influenced the public’s interpretation. *Murder House* is well aware of the news media coverage that Columbine received and forces the viewer to perpetuate this same coverage when examining the Westfield High massacre, which would in effect receive the same frames to continue the salience, as well as nearly identical societal repercussions. In his book *Terror Post 9/11 and the Media*, David Altheide argues, “[T]he extensive coverage and framing of the Columbine shootings contributed to the broad discourse of fear as well as a more specific context for worrying about and protecting children, legitimating the war on terror, and expanding social control” (118). This incident escalated the severity of repercussions and punishments of youth violence and disciplinary problems. It increased the drive for school security through the pursuit of more lock downs, more security surveillance systems, and stricter gun control, while increasing public support of these issues through constant news coverage. The Westfield High shooting would naturally bring all of these concerns to the surface, calling forth stronger security in schools across the nation, raising questions concerning stricter gun control, and questioning how Tate procured the guns in the first place. When Tate murdered his fellow classmates he set into motion the machine of news media coverage and framing, which would frame the attack in a manner that contributed to the discourse of fear. His actions would be viewed as an attack on class structure and religion—American pillars of structure. However, this terrifying act omits an element of Columbine that is housed specifically within the America on this side of the mirror.

Columbine presented society with a new niche of horror—that of a “new breed of killer. Armed with a gun, a camera, and a computer, they use dehumanizing technology to turn bedroom cyber fantasies into bloody reality” (Conrad). Eric and Dylan existed in an artificial world, removed from reality through technology and media: reality and fiction blurred together through extensive virtual existence through video games; they saw themselves as Mickey and Mallory Knox, already immortalized in the house of media; they blogged religiously, posting rants and fueling aggression, occasionally posting the plans and intentions of “NBK,” already creating virtual echoes of their existence; when they produced the basement tapes the camera removed them from reality. The entire essence of Columbine is documented and captured within media. It lingers and haunts the societal timeline, resurrecting and thriving in the constant resurgence and exposure. The most notable resurfacing of this particular type of specter is Seung-Hui Cho, who murdered 32 people on the Virginia Tech Campus on April 16, 2007. The rampage was broken into two concentrated attacks; in between the outbursts Cho visited a post office to send a package to NBC containing a DVD of a long, angry diatribe detailing his motives for the attack, as well as photos of himself posing with weapons. In his tirade he refers to “martyrs like Eric and Dylan” (ABC), which brings about a clear mirror of Columbine, bringing about the essence of this particular specter, which the boys foreshadowed and instigated. The video and photos immortalize Cho in the house of media, and this physicality was used in the framing of the Virginia Tech massacre. Cho’s video mirrors the basement tapes, as well as the Columbine cafeteria security footage, creating a face in which to house the atrocities that were enacted. The documentary *Virginia Tech Massacre* reveals, “At age 15 he displayed a disturbing new interest. Shortly after the Columbine shootings he wrote an essay at school that alarmed his

teachers. There was no threat against anyone, but he did talk about identifying with [Eric and Dylan]" (*Virginia Tech Massacre*). Cho was haunted by the specters of Columbine, and he perpetuated this thread of horror when he methodically planned the Virginia Tech shooting and captured his ghost in the video and photos he sent to NBC. When new events and new ghosts present themselves, it is inevitable that they will wear similar faces as those who already resided in the house, especially if the established specters have experienced as consistent resurgence as Columbine.

Murder House was released after the advent of this particular ghost, and it is clearly aware of the specters in the house of media. Tate does not inherently fit the American horror that he symbolizes—several studies of school shootings agree that school shootings are not spontaneous events; the perpetrator often announces his intentions. When Eric and Dylan were planning "Columbine" they drew inspiration from the Oklahoma City bombing, the Westside middle school shooting in Jonesboro, Arkansas, and the Waco siege in Texas. The destruction discussed in the original plans of "NBK" in their journals far exceeded the fatality and destruction of the Oklahoma City bombing. Their intent was to "outdo" that event: they planted three propane bombs in the cafeteria, with a timed detonation intended to explode when the cafeteria would be at its fullest capacity. The explosion was also meant to collapse the roof of the cafeteria, causing the library to fall into the cafeteria. If successful, this plan would have killed close to 500 students. Although school shootings and acts of violence in schools had occurred in the past, none of the perpetrators "engaged in long-term planning, collected explosives and weaponry, employed diversionary tactics, reconnoitered their school, tested their weaponry, or thought about killing hundreds of students, devising ways that would maximize destruction" (Larkin 155). In *Murder House*, Tate acts impulsively, responding to his troubles and frustrations at home with outward violence. The absence of premeditation in the Westfield High shooting emphasizes the meticulousness behind the planning of both the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings. It causes the viewer to focus on the motives behind the shooting, and one is given a glimpse at a much darker picture, emphasizing that Tate is merely an incarnation of the ghost, only representing the horror on the surface. What emerges as the true horror is not found within the surface ghost, but within the absence presented in the framing, in which lurks the lingering ghoul, waiting to disrupt the channel.

The media-saturated essence of this event presented society with a new niche of terror, and the framing methods set into motion in the coverage of Columbine continue to be used as more media-saturated mass murders occur. Columbine stands as a tipping point: mass shootings after 1999 are compared to Columbine. The house of media is a haunted place, occupied by terrifying figures, entombed forever in the body of images in which the specter resides, more than capable of truly haunting this American society. *Murder House* invokes the specters of Eric and Dylan and brings them forth from the house of media in which they reside, spatial constraints exhibited through the constant framing/reframing, drawing out the salience of their actions, solidifying their presence and the repercussions caused by their actions. By creating this mirror the show causes the viewer to stumble into a specter within the societal timeline; the reflection causes the viewer to reinterpret the origin of source, as it is both foreign and familiar. Perhaps in the mirror America presented in *American Horror Story: Murder House* there exists an alternate version of *American Horror Story: Murder House*, in which events from this side of the mirror are presented. The thought is terrifying.

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A Place to Mourn: Why the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is Crucial to American Healing

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All memorials offer solace to those who visit, but the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is particularly suited to this cause because of certain aspects of its design. As this article demonstrates, qualities such as its black reflective surface, its gradual increase in height, and the ordering of the names work to create an emotional connection to the names on the wall, bringing them to life and creating a place for grief, and ultimately healing, to occur.

The Vietnam War occurred during a time of great unrest in America. The late 1950s through the 70s are considered some of the wildest times in our nation's history, comprising the struggles for civil rights, women's rights, and protests for and against the war. The Selective Service compounded class tensions, as college students and those in certain professions were able to avoid the draft in the early years of the war. Jan Scruggs served in the war, and when he returned, he determined that a memorial was needed, not just to remember the soldiers who were lost, but also to heal the nation, as he later wrote in his book, *To Heal a Nation*. The turmoil was not a mere hardship, but a national trauma, and as horror stories have taught us, a trauma that is not healed will grow to haunt us. All memorials work to release us from our ghosts, but the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is so compelling because of the nature of the conflict and the time period it represents. Other than the time of the Civil War, the Vietnam Era was the most divisive in our nation's history, and can benefit the most from the release of its ghosts.

Location is central in ghost stories, just as it is crucial for mourning to have a physical presence to associate with the loved one lost. With the Vietnam War, this was complicated by the fact that soldiers died in Vietnam, and those who returned were buried in their local cemeteries. Some who were missing in action still have not been buried. On a national level, there was no place of recognition or mourning until the memorial was built, and the conflict threatened to recede from national memory, back into the realm of suppressed trauma. For Scruggs' idea of healing to occur, the nation would require a single place for mourning.

Furthermore, the memorial itself played a role in our national turmoil, as the design and the architect caused controversy. Maya Lin is a Chinese-American, and she was a Yale undergraduate student when she won the national design competition. Many questioned whether someone who was so ambivalent to the Vietnam War itself, and a female of Asian heritage, could design a fitting memorial for the conflict. The modern design was another point of contention, igniting a national discussion of whether modern, nonrepresentational art was for the masses, or only for the college educated. Some Americans preferred representational art such as statues and flags, and were affronted by a memorial that was so abstract it appeared to make no statement. The controversy over the memorial reveals the degree to which Americans needed a place to mourn together, and the memorial, funded

entirely by donation, became a national project of unification. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial provides a place to remember the Americans we lost, and in so doing, it establishes a place for healing, a place for the nation to confront its ghosts.

All memorials are unique as architectural structures, since their job is not to shelter people or corporations, but to provide a space for people to remember their dead, and they often must work to contain the feelings of loss and to help the viewer connect emotionally with those being mourned. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in particular summons this connection because of the way it was designed, from the chronological ordering of the names, to the reflective quality of the granite, the abstract design, and the angle of the two walls. The design allows it to act as a protection against haunting because it is so adept at incurring those connections for the living through its physical presence.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial has been one of the most frequently visited monuments in Washington, D.C. since the site opened (Greenspan). One reason the Wall remains impactful to so many visitors is because the names are such a central part of the design. When the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, the organization that raised funds to build the memorial, released its design competition guidelines, one of the few stipulations it made was that the memorial must include room to inscribe the names of the 57,661 thousand who were killed, and the 2,500 unaccounted (“Design Competition”). The memorial’s creators sought to create a simple place for veterans and the country to mourn those lost, without a political message, and the best way to do this was by allowing the names speak for themselves. Names, more than any other word, have the ability to recall a person, and they have a special significance. Many visitors come to the wall to find a specific name, but the sight of all the names amplified along the length of the wall is often sobering. Visitors are able for the first time to comprehend exactly how many people had to die for almost 58,000 names to be on the wall. The names reach out to us on a personal level because we identify so closely with our own name. We condense our identity into our names; conversely, we are able to expand the names on the Memorial into people. Despite the powers of language, however, there are limits. Architect Ochsner remarks, “Language allows us to communicate, but in appropriation of things within language, some reality of things themselves is lost” (162). Despite the power of the names, they aren’t fully able to comprise the full impact of the loss that America experienced. Although the names are important, other elements of the design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial play a crucial role in helping visitors conceptualize the loss and value the Wall represents.

One idea from literary analysis that is relevant to my discussion concerns binaries—our understanding of things in opposites, such as life and death, presence and absence. These boundaries are famously broken in Gothic fiction and horror stories, but they apply well to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a place for acknowledging and responding to grief. The Wall opposes our binary understanding of death and life by bridging the gap between the two, allowing the names and memories of the dead to inhabit the same space as the living. This does not occur passively, but the design of the memorial specifically contributes to the link between the living and the dead.

One of the reasons the memorial achieves this link is because we can experience the dead only through our own life experiences. The only way we can relate to them is through our understanding, so we make their lives a part of our experience, whether this is intended or not, and we carry with us parts of everyone who has touched our lives. As Jeffrey Ochsner states, “We ourselves embody in the shape of our own emotional lives those with whom we have interacted” (163), meaning that those we know become a part of us, and are carried

throughout our lives. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial amplifies this connection, prompting Ochsner to call the Memorial a “linking object” (156). His idea is that the Memorial allows the viewer to identify specifically with the names, to take a more emotional and active role as a viewer. Those who gaze upon the wall are allowed to see deeper than the inscribed names and attach meaning to them, connecting on an emotional level, and feeling an emotional presence.

A literary scholar also concerned with ghostly presences, Christine Berthin remarks that “haunting is transgenerational” (4), meaning that the ghosts of any one era continue to have a place in our culture, and that if we refuse to confront the past and reckon with those who were lost from it, the ghosts of our conflicts will not recede. The secrets of the American soldiers who were killed in Vietnam become entombed within the memorial unless they are dealt with, and the viewer who wants to understand is tasked with deriving meaning from the names on the Wall, ensuring that the soldiers mean more than their names. Essentially, readers must bring back the dead to gain meaning from the memorial. The Wall provides a voice to the soldiers, allowing our nation to work through the controversy imposed by the conflict on their own terms.

Part of what makes the Vietnam Veterans Memorial so effective is the fact that it is abstract. Although this was the cause of much controversy at the announcement of Maya Lin’s winning design, something more directly representational would not have been able to accommodate the diverse reactions of Americans to the Vietnam War and to the soldiers. Dolar notes in D. S. Friedman that the postmodern experience is distinguished by a “new consciousness about the uncanny as a fundamental dimension of modernity” (64). Freud’s idea of the uncanny encompasses a fine border between what is familiar and normal and what is disturbing or unsettling, and this can often occur in subliminal ways. What Dolar means is that subjects of the postmodern era (beginning in the 1950s, becoming more popular in the 1970s) were conscious of things hovering at the fringes of what was proper and normal, and artists and creatives sought to include that tension in their work, to force the public to confront things that were beyond the realm of the comfortable in some ways, such as wars and discrimination and change.

There are many advantages to the memorial being abstract instead of strictly representational, like many traditional monuments on the National Mall. Architect Friedman notes the memorial’s “sleek, black, half-buried V...inscribes an iconographical symbolism on the surface of the site, but this mark does not transgress or subvert; rather, it is appropriate decoration. Its phenomenal effect reduces to several binary, compositional devices, involving its reflective surfaces. It does not recode the mall; it schematizes it and sustains it” (73). Although the memorial contrasts in style with the other monuments on the Mall, it adds to them as part of a tapestry of our national history, and is a gesture toward the many voices, some dissenting, who have comprised our nation from its inception. The abstract design allows its meaning to transcend words and target directly the human psyche. Donald Kunze makes the point that “through the use of gesture, the non-present is made present and given a secret status ruled by a non-classical or grotesque order” (28). What the wall communicates is beyond the level of words, except for the names. The abstract qualities break the constraints that are imposed on the other monuments of the Classical style, and the monument conjures meanings that are not representationally present, such as what the Vietnam deaths say about America, and how those losses have affected us a nation. Kunze adds, “Gesture, as a silent language, places us between the pure conventionality of known forms and the mute unintelligibility of objects” (28). The Vietnam Veterans Memorial was designed to trigger enough of the war to affect visitors, but not to tell them what to think

about it, and to allow their own experiences to rise to the surface. Monuments dedicated to Lincoln and Jefferson leave little room for any feeling but awe at the men they commemorate, but the Wall is a place to grieve and reflect, as well as a tribute to those it honors. By avoiding specific ideals, it allows visitors to have their own ideas about the war and about those who were lost. It facilitates grief and eventual healing by coaxing true feelings to the surface, instead of mass-produced patriotism.

One way the memorial achieves this is by using our perception of space and linear time to create a deeper meaning for visitors. Kunze notes, "The phenomenon of virtual space is fundamental to the way human beings relate perceptually, behaviorally, existentially, to their world" (28). The arc of the V creates a separate space from the Mall, and even the traffic on nearby Henry Bacon Drive fades to a whisper at the site of the Wall, creating a peaceful space apart from the busy city. The Wall allows us to perceive at a glance the amount of names, based on the sheer size, and a place is created within the arc for reflection.

One of the first things visitors will notice as they approach is the Memorial's reflective quality, which allows them to see their own image reflected from behind the names, as if the names rise out to meet them, overtaking their image. This exposes the viewer to Lacan's theories of the mirror and the way humans recognize themselves. Lacan proposed that after a human has reached this stage of development, not only can a child recognize himself when reflected in other objects, but the ego, or sense of the self, depends on other objects to provide personality. When visitors stand in front of the Wall, they are able to identify more closely with the names engraved upon it because they see themselves reflected inside it. When gazing upon their reflection in the Wall's surface, people will see a different reflection than the one to which they are accustomed, and they will see reflections of those around them differently from the true version, which allows them to relate to the reflection in a new way. As Lacan stated, "you never look at me from the place from which I see you" (67). The reflection creates a double of the viewer, one who is "real," gazing at the Wall, and one who appears to be inside the wall, looking out. Kunze takes this idea of doubles further when he says, "The unreal presence of the virtual reflections informs us that the real double, always and ever, is that of the living and the dead" (28). This startling image can create a haunting connection, especially for those who served, or were of age to serve, as those names could easily have been theirs. The reflective feature allows the Wall to function as a "space of absence," a site for projection and representation of a person who is not actually there, and a site to access memories (Ochsner 162), of either the viewer or something that will bring meaning to them. Humans can only relate experiences to their own lives, and to process grief, especially for those they do not know, they must have a way to establish the connection. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial allows the names on the wall to be projected on the viewers, until they must confront the significance of those names.

There was some debate at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation about how to present the names on the wall, whether it should be chronological or alphabetical. The final decision to alphabetize by date of death was made in part because there were many doubles of common names, and presenting a long list of "John Smith," for example, would have devalued the men the wall sought to honor. This method would prevent visitors from seeing the names as unique people. The resulting system does not classify the men and women by rank, it merely lists the names, and whether they were killed or missing in action or eventually found. It adds drama by revealing days with higher casualties, some lists continuing for hundreds of names before resuming the top of the alphabet. This listing, however, does not prevent the symbolic and abstract properties of language from being visible. In fact, with

such a long list of names, it is impossible to see all of them at once, so our minds group the names as a whole to better understand them. Viewed this way, the names merge to represent something more than each soldier can represent individually; they tell the story of America's involvement in the conflict, and the loss of American lives.

When Maya Lin designed the memorial, she intended it to slope gently into the ground, to create the illusion of circular time, continuing after the wall slopes into the earth, and allowing the suggestion that America's involvement extends before and after the first and last deaths. Scholars Peter Buse and Andrew Stott examine the ideas of linear time, in which time follows a clear line. They argue in "Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, and History" that ghosts disrupt this idea. Indeed, the multiple locations of mourning made possible by the Vietnam War interrupt the sense of death in time and space for those left behind, and left loved ones without a place to mourn, until the memorial was created. Kunze has noticed another effect of the slope. "The gradual descent into the virtual space created by the wedge allows the discovery of the reflection to creep up on the observer, and in the context of an emotionally charged moment the effect is cleared of all sentimentality and charged with gnostic legibility of what is happening" (28). The names begin about ankle level, increasing slowly, until the wall towers over the visitor at ten feet at the apex. The effect is surprisingly overwhelming in comparison with the Lincoln and Washington Memorials, which the viewer can see at all times by turning to the left or right. While descending to the apex, the names become overwhelming in number, until the height of the wall becomes almost suffocating. As the visitor rises toward the other end of the "V," the view opens before them to the lush green of the Constitution Gardens, and the wall ends at ankle level with a single line of names and an inscription.

Just as there was divisive controversy over the Vietnam War, the presence, location, and design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial created a national stir that lasted until the dedication in 1982. Afterwards, people experienced the Wall, and most dissent died down. Although the site remains popular for tourists, Christina Schwenkel has some concerns about the Wall's transition from memorial to tourist site. She says, "Scholars have identified contradictions and tensions between remembrance and forgetfulness when public memorials and commemorative projects are transformed into historical sites for tourists and other audiences who put such space to alternative social uses" (5). Her concern is that the space can become more about the tourist than about remembering those the memorial is intended to commemorate. She need not worry, however, as the reason the Vietnam Veterans Memorial continues to be so frequently visited is the great effect it has for Americans, in part because of the design elements mentioned above, and the way those design elements create meaning for visitors. Scholar Marita Sturken argues that memorials are sacred ground, which "is charged with meaning. It implies not daily life but worship, contemplation and a suspension of ordinary activities. In a sacred place, all activities have meaning, all are transformed into rituals" (315). As a tourist attraction, the memorial is a place separate from the daily life of Americans and veterans, and making a special trip to the wall, across the nation or across town, is the start of a sacred journey to experience something removed from daily life.

In Schwenkel's article on the topic, she introduces recombinant histories, "a term that suggests the interweaving of representation" (5). This idea is that Vietnam's history of the war is interwoven with the American interpretation of it, and vice versa. There is no one Vietnam War. Ghosts are weaved into the memory of a culture, and that culture dictates their representation. In Vietnam, "unofficial knowledge and memories of the past are redirected, reshaped, and revalued to benefit the market and the state as well as the veterans

themselves” (Schwenkel 20) in the form of tourism. Wartime artifacts like the infamous Zippo lighters, often used to identify American dead, are often sold to American tourists, now as symbols of Vietnamese adaptability or commodification. Although few Americans have the chance to experience the spirits of American soldiers in Vietnam, there are many legends of them lingering. Scholar Heonik Kwon traveled to Vietnam, and he notes, “The Vietnamese call what the outside world refers to as the Vietnam War ‘The American War,’ and many of them believe that the ghosts of those who died tragic deaths in this war abound in their living environment.” As is often the case with any type of superstition, this belief remains strongest among the elder and more rural populations. Aside from that, however, he notes there is some significance to certain places within Vietnam. “The places associated with a history of fierce battle or large-scale civilian killing are believed to harbor a mass of grievous and hungry ghosts.” Traces of the American dead appear on Vietnamese soil, and this relates to the ways Americans mourn on their own soil. Americans and Vietnamese own the ghosts of “The American War,” so our mourning of the war cannot be one-sided. To truly understand and heal from the Vietnam War we must think about the war from the standpoint of the Vietnamese, in addition to the American story.

Such broad aims cannot be accomplished by a representational memorial, and the Wall is so important because it refuses to force a representational concept of the war on viewers, whether one of glory or sadness. The Wall is valuable because it allows the visitor to take and leave whatever is needed. Throughout history, humans have used memorials to either encourage a connection to the dead, in a form such as ancestor-worship, or to appease them, to prevent a haunting. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is both. “The monument is a shared creation that plays a role in group and individual mourning” (Ochsner 160). It is also a way to banish the ghosts of the veterans, by creating a space for them to inhabit and to be remembered.

Another scholar, Marita Sturken, has studied American memorials and their role in the grieving process. She notes the sacredness of a place of death that is also a place of mourning and remembrance, an example of which is the former World Trade Tower site. “The discourse of sacred ground at Ground Zero comes not from the blessings of priests, but, rather, from the loss of life that took place there. Traditionally, in US culture, ground has been considered sacred when blood has been spilled on it” (314). Of course, the Vietnam War is somewhat of an anomaly, as there are several places that can be considered sacred, associated with death. There are some battlefields that are considered sacred, notably Gettysburg, but Americans recognize that not all battleground is sacred, nor are all places of death, even violent ones. This is, in part, because few of America’s wars were fought on our own soil, but it also reveals that there are other characteristics that mark places of remembrance. The place where the body rests is a common sacred site, and many Vietnam veterans have marked graves, suited for mourning on an individual level, but the memorial for any war adds context to the death, most summarizing triumph and victory. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, however, makes no such pretenses, and remains a blank slate for whatever the viewer saw in the war, and what they see in themselves. That is the source of its power, and why it is such a potent place of remembrance and mourning. “When death is transformed into sacrifice and made sacred, it is almost always deployed with such political intent. Thus in US culture, the concept of a sacred place has been almost exclusively secular and national rather than religious” (Sturken 314). The Vietnam Veterans Memorial fits this structure, as it was created for national healing and for the healing of the veterans, as well as the memory of those on the wall, both killed and missing. The space seeks to banish the ghosts harbored in the survivors and the nation, to a special place in our National Mall. 1

The trend of leaving memorabilia at monuments may not have begun at the Wall, but it is one of the memorials that receives the most artifacts, so many that the National Park Service has built a facility, the Museum Resource Center (MRCE) in Maryland, where anthropologists archive and store the objects. People leave objects for many reasons, some of which are to connect with those on the wall, or to leave a part of themselves at the wall. “Throughout history, when people have mourned in the absence of remains, they have substituted ritualized objects (empty coffins, flags, photographs, or headstones) as touchstones, material artifacts that can provide some kind of corporeal presence to mediate the absence of a loved one” (Sturken 313). These are the types of items commonly left at the memorial and private gravesites, demonstrating this most typical form of mourning. Visitors connect with the memorial in another unintended way as well: they take rubbings of the names, attempting to take a piece of the wall with them, continuing the process of mourning and healing through artifacts, and seeking physical representation for their memories.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial was created to honor those who died, and it brings about national peace, being in the end a place for the survivors and the ghosts of the soldiers. Ochsner notes, “When individuals like these do not find their place in the text of symbolic tradition, they return to haunt the living” (160), while Kwon states, “It is against this historical background of generalized destruction and displacement of human lives that people perceive ghosts of war in their environment today.” Without the Memorial, each soldier may have been mourned, but as a whole, the nation would not have been forced to confront the war itself. The wall serves another purposes as well, uniting past and future. “Yet, as Reagan has suggested, the force of memory and forgetting that constitute a nation’s history also shape and secure its collective visions of the future” (Schwenkel 5). If America had refused to confront its motivations and role in Vietnam, we would be a different country today. Just as family secrets can be repressed and passed down through generations, haunting the family with ghosts of people and misdeeds, the actions of nations must be brought to light, or the nation will struggle with its past.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial provides such a place for healing of the past, where Americans can confront the personal and national trauma they experienced, and the dead can be removed from a place of interference with everyday life into a place of honor. This is exactly the role of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial: to provide a place of honor for the lost, of mourning for the veterans, and healing for the nation.

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Beware the House that Feels: The Impact of Sentient House Hauntings on Literary Families

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This essay examines Edgar Allen Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, texts featuring sentient house hauntings. The author focuses on how the family unit in each text undergoes drastic destruction, arguing that the breakdown of the family is the true source of horror in such hauntings where a traditional ghost is not present.

The source of horror behind most literary hauntings can be traced back to a ghost's visual or physical manifestation. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for example, the titular character only realizes the personal horror of his situation after seeing his father's ghostly figure lurking in the hallways of his home. The governess in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* experiences not only horror but madness as well when she visualizes the ghosts of Miss Jessel and Quint. In these instances, it is simple to pinpoint the cause of all negative emotion down to a human-like ghostly entity, and the characters can therefore work to eliminate that source of fear. Works that feature sentient houses in their hauntings, however, weave a complicated web of horror that makes it difficult to determine what actually generates fear in the absence of a familiar ghost form. By looking at several literary works that feature sentient house hauntings, it is evident that the real horror in sentient houses does not come from an actual ghost in this type of haunting; rather, it is the revelation that the family at the center of the haunting is fragile and can be easily damaged beyond repair, which sparks the fear as the haunting displays an underlying cultural anxiety about familial instability as a whole.

Even for enthusiasts that are well-read in ghostly literature, the term *sentient house* may be a concept that is confusing or unclear. Although this type of ghost story has become increasingly popular in fiction and film, there has not always been a single accepted classification for such stories; sentient house is perhaps the most concise designation that has been attributed to this style of haunting. Literally, sentience is defined by Merriam-Webster as "finely sensitive in perception or feeling" ("sentient"). In ghostly literature and film, a house typically displays this quality as it becomes animated in a manner such as rearranging household items, warping its physical walls, or even attempting to inflict physical pain upon its inhabitants. In essence, sentient houses exhibit the characteristics of a typical ghost manifestation but display those characteristics in a dominantly malevolent structural presence rather than a posthumous human-like apparition.

The sentient house figure has evolved over time, the behaviors of its malevolent structure being representative of the time period of its literary publication. One of the first instances of this haunting in literature is Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." In

Poe's work, the sentient house displays qualities of the Gothic genre popular at the time. It is in itself a gloomy backdrop for supernatural events, a setting that reflects the dark nature of the emotional turbulence experienced by the Ushers. The house haunts its inhabitants in a way that is both internal and external in this way; the crumbling house possesses both ghostly behaviors and a catalyst for madness. Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* reflects in its house the anxieties of 1950s America, especially the worries of women in that time. The house specifically targets Eleanor in its haunting, calling out her abnormal social role as an older, unmarried woman in a time when marriage rates were at an all-time high. Likewise, Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* features a sentient house that reflects modern concerns about technology. Navidson uses equipment such as video cameras in order to explain the haunting, yet the house manipulates that technology for its own agenda. This brief timeline shows that sentient houses have evolved throughout their history to reflect the common thoughts of their time, but there is always one element that remains constant in these hauntings: a family at the center of the ordeal that is drastically damaged by various tribulations.

One of the larger concepts that fuels the horror in a sentient house novel is a sense of the uncanny. The uncanny, or *unheimlich* in its original German, was a concept developed by Sigmund Freud in his 1919 essay "The Uncanny." Freud provides multiple definitions for the uncanny, the most prevalent being all that "arouses dread and horror" (930). The uncanny is more complex, however, being both contradictory and complementary in nature: what is familiar becomes unfamiliar, the hidden is revealed, and a lingering sense of unease settles inside one's mind. One definition in particular relates directly to sentient houses and the horror induced by the situation. Freud describes the *heimlich* as being "the enjoyment of quiet content, etc., arousing a sense of agreeable restfulness and security as in one within the four walls of his house" (932) and furthermore associates the opposite of such enjoyment, *unheimlich*, with the idea of a "haunted house" (945). This "homely" and "unhomely" concept directly describes the fear felt in a sentient house haunting. Haunted houses take the familiar security and comfort found in one's home, the familiar and the known, and turns that security into a sense of fear in the face of what is unfamiliar and unknown.

In a sentient house haunting, the uncanny works to destroy the physical representation of a family and throws the safety of the family into question. Metaphorically, a home is typically associated with feelings of comfort, security, and everyday functions. It is the base of family life, the safe haven from the evils of the outside world. Yet this place of domesticity supports an atmosphere that is ripe for malicious intrusion. Anthony Vidler, in *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, states that in haunted houses "the house provide[s] an especially favored site for uncanny disturbances: its apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpen[s] by contrast the terror of invasion by alien spirits" (17). In most horror situations, the home is a shelter into which characters can retreat in their distress, offering at least a temporary sense of security. Haunted houses, particularly ones that feature traditional ghost figures, alter that security by placing the malevolent force within the structure of comfort, but this alteration only lasts until a cleanse or an exorcism dispels the ghost itself. Once the ghost has gone, the house can return to its normal state. Sentient house hauntings are therefore unique in that there is no safety at all to be taken from the haunted house; the only permanent solution to escaping the haunting would be to completely abandon the home, leaving behind the family history and memories associated with the structure. Houses in such sentient hauntings, therefore, are no longer secure in their domesticity.

In *House of Leaves*, the Navidsons' constantly-shifting house reflects the uncanny and

does not allow for any initial establishment of domesticity or familial comfort. The family's initial occupancy of the house on Ash Tree Lane is fueled by Will Navidson's desire to both document how a family settles down and to experience that settlement for himself. "I just thought it would be nice to see how people move into a place and start to inhabit it," Will states early on in the novel. "Personally, I just want to create a cozy little outpost for me and my family" (Danielewski 9). The house therefore begins as a place of familial dreams, but the sentence sets in too quickly for the family to actually achieve any inkling of domesticity. After only weeks in their new home, the Navidsons leave their inanimate dwelling for a few days but return to find something undoubtedly uncanny: a new door appears between the parents' and the children's rooms. Even Zampanó, one of the novel's many narrators, remarks on this change: "In their absence, the Navidsons' home had become something else, and while not exactly sinister or even threatening, the change still destroyed any sense of security or well-being" (28). The immediacy of this intrusion halts the family's domesticity through the will of the sentient house—the house will not allow the family to make the home familiar. Likewise, the fact that the family has to be away for this uncanny door to appear shows that the house is indeed its own entity: while houses typically need an occupying family to bring life inside its walls, the house on Ash Tree Lane establishes itself as an independent living structure. The uncanny in *House of Leaves* therefore works to divide the family and the house from an early stage, destroying Will's hopes to settle his family securely into a new domestic life.

The uncanny plays a similar role in inhibiting familial security in *The Haunting of Hill House* even though Hill House itself gives the impression of comfortable family life. The family unit in this novel is not typical as it consists merely of weak bonds between strangers. These strangers often are depicted in scenes that exaggerate their role as a family of sorts. For instance, they once held a picnic in which "Theodora and Eleanor and Luke brought back a handkerchief full [of strawberries] and lay on the lawn near the doctor, eating them, staining their hands and their mouths; like children, the doctor told them" (Jackson 347). Scenes such as these place the doctor in a parental role and the others as his dependents. Yet the bonds between these strangers are very loose—they are brought together only to experience the haunted house, and this family dissipates once the experience is over. This means that there is always a false sense of security during this sentient house haunting; each individual thinks they are safe in their group but really they are vulnerable as individuals. Tricia Lootens, in "Whose Hand Was I Holding," states that "Hill House will be glad to give you a hand to hold in the night, someone to be there, a sense of belonging. When it is too late, you will realize that all along you were really alone, clinging to your enemy—or to nothing at all" (178). As seen in the quotation from Lootens, the situation is a manifestation of the uncanny: the family unit that seems so familiar in the face of the haunting is yet very unfamiliar in its inner structure and reality. Because the familial bonds are temporary, no complete sense of security can be established in the onset of this haunting.

In "The Fall of the House of Usher," the uncanny plays a vital role in establishing the sentient presence within the house—a presence that will hurry along the destruction of the family. The Usher mansion is unlike the houses in *House of Leaves* and *The Haunting of Hill House* in that the family experiencing the haunting has actually resided in the structure for generations. The house itself has become a symbol of the larger Usher line. As such, it would be expected for this long-established house to give off a sense of security and warmth due to the length of familial inhabitance. However, as the narrator enters this house, what is felt instead is an uneasiness of great proportion. He describes the exterior as "an

atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn—a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued” (Poe 233). This outside impression of the home makes the building that is familiar to the narrator from his youth quite unfamiliar in its sense of uneasiness, and the interior has a similar effect. The narrator even remarks that “while [he] hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this—[he] still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up” (233). This uncanniness early on in Poe’s tale works to initially establish the sentient presence in the Usher mansion; the strange sounds that will occur at the climax of the story do not seem farfetched because the house has already been associated with an uneasy atmosphere.

By using the uncanny in such a manner, authors writing this genre of ghost story destroy the sense of comfort, domesticity, and security that is associated with a home. Taking away these qualities takes away the very physical and emotional foundations of a family unit, rendering the home nothing more than a malevolent house. This only allows for more permanent damage as the family, with no physical place for safety, must leave behind all memories and symbols of their past in order to fully escape a sentient house haunting.

Another common thread in sentient house novels is the onset of madness and lasting psychological change within its characters. The house itself often serves as a reflection of a character’s inner tribulations. For example, Ridvan Askin states that in *House of Leaves* “the house and labyrinth on Ash Tree Lane do not constitute two levels at all—they are located on one and the same level, matter and soul irreducibly folded into one another” (103). Since the house and the labyrinth are “folded” within each other, the labyrinth can be seen as a reflection of the family’s mental state. Furthermore, one of the critics quoted in *House of Leaves*, Ruby Dahl, calls the house a “solipsistic heightener” and states that “the house, the halls, and the rooms all become the self—collapsing, expanding, tilting, closing, but always in perfect relation to the mental state of the individual” (165). This is seen as the family becomes more divided mentally and the descents into the labyrinth become more puzzling, more complicated, and more terrifying. Additionally, as in any haunting experience, sentient houses are bound to leave long-term effects upon the characters. In many works of ghost literature, the text ends either at the end of the haunting or shortly afterward, making it difficult to certainly know any permanent damage for the characters. However, there is enough evidence in sentient house novels to show that the changes that take place psychologically revolve around traits such as personality and life goals. These hauntings work seemingly as a reality check for these characters, causing them to rethink previous priorities and obligations.

These two elements—madness and psychological change—work to destroy the family unit because they place a mental distance between the members within the unit during the haunting and raise the question of familial compatibility after the haunting is complete. In these hauntings, there are two different types of madness displayed: a true mental madness and a temporary obsessive madness. The true madness shows a more permanent effect of a ghost experience; a haunting is such an incomprehensible situation, many simply cannot deal with the thoughtful implications. The obsessive madness, on the other hand, is more of a temporary state that is experienced in the moment of hauntings. Regardless of which type a character exhibits during the course of the novel, madness places that character on a different thought plane than the rest of the family. It is therefore difficult for the family to stick together and resolve the haunting because their understandings of the situation contrast. Furthermore, the changes in psychology and sanity throughout the haunting hint at a later

incompatibility for the family overall. Dale Bailey, in *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction*, creates a formula for haunted houses that names three different options for the eventual climax, one of which is “the house survives, but the skeptical family makes its escape—though not without paying a high price, usually a fatal one” (62). Although the resolutions of sentient house hauntings do often involve a family death, one of the other high prices paid is the mental changes seen in its characters. It is difficult to assume that a family will learn to function as easily as before the haunting if such issues as madness have crept their way into one of the family members. As seen in the sentient house texts, it may take much effort to establish the family back at the level it was before their haunting experience.

In Danielewski’s work, madness works to tear the Navidson family apart as Will becomes increasingly engrossed in exploring the sentient house. As mentioned earlier, the family (with Will in particular) is united in its plan to establish a new life together in the new house. However, when Will becomes obsessively interested in exploring more and more of the house’s curious labyrinth, he creates distance between himself and his partner, Karen. While Karen keeps herself grounded in the more logical, common situations by calling her parents or checking real estate, Will obsesses over the homely anomaly and attempts to connect with outside people who would also find the situation interesting (Danielewski 57). As the haunting progresses, it results in two drastically different goals between the husband and wife: while Will wants nothing more than to answer his curiosity about the haunting, Karen just wants to pack up her children and move. Karen, in this case, wants to keep her family intact and sees leaving the house as the only option for that; however, without Will being a willing participant in her plan, the rift between the couple grows.

Looking at the psychological changes in *House of Leaves* reveals that, during the haunting, Will and Karen revert back to prior versions of themselves, versions that they had to initially abandon in order to maximize their overall compatibility and coherence as a family. Will turns back into the overly goal-focused journalist and shifts away from any personal morality. This is the type of person Will exemplified when he photographed Delia and won his journalism award, a man that is more concerned with getting the perfect photograph and less concerned about the people involved. By putting his focus on the labyrinth and on the strange workings of his house, Will neglects the well-being of his family as a whole. At the climax of the novel, when Will has reached the focus of the labyrinth, he admits in his letter to Karen that this is the type of person he really is: “I should burn the place down, forget about it. But going after something like this is who I am. You know that” (Danielewski 389). Meanwhile, Karen strays from being the faithful wife that she had become into the adulterous woman she was in times prior. Karen struggled to overcome her past adulteries (348-350), yet it is the stress of the sentient house that causes her to turn back to her old, comfortable habits. This is seen in an important scene within the first quarter of the novel: as Will is deep inside the house’s labyrinth, Karen kisses Wax, an outsider brought in to help with the exploration. In this scene both characters present their former selves: Will in his obsessive exploration and Karen in her comfortable infidelity. This throws the overall compatibility of the two into question. Both had to give up their vices in favor of the family’s new start in the new house, but, because they quickly turn back to those vices, it shows a deeper disconnect within the family unit, a disconnect that will permeate long after the haunting is resolved.

“The Fall of the House of Usher” displays a more permanent type of madness destroying the family. The sentient house itself is generally viewed as a metaphor for the crumbling

mental state of Roderick Usher and for the dissolving family itself. Roderick seems to have become mad as part of his illness, yet the sentience within the house escalates this madness, breaking the bonds between Roderick and both his sister and the narrator. The actions within the sentient house prompt the most important question of the story: was Madeline really dead when she was buried, or did Roderick bury her alive in a fit of madness? The truth behind that question, before it has been made clear, has irreparable effects on the individual members of the family unit. Roderick Usher believes that she was indeed alive when buried, and exclaims that he and the narrator “*have put her living in the tomb!* Said I not that my senses were acute? I *now* tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin” (Poe 245). This quote makes the reader question Roderick’s madness: was he truly mad all along and buried his sister alive, or has he just developed madness as a result of the sentient house and only mistakenly believes that she is still alive? Either way, his willing burial of his twin sister separates himself and Madeline, prompting the breaking of the family via life and death. Even if Madeline is truly dead, Roderick has also caused a rift between himself and Poe’s narrator, who can be considered as the other member of his family. The reader is forced to see the narrator as the sane and mentally capable character in this story; therefore, Roderick’s madness distances him from both reality and the narrator. In this short story, overall, the madness displayed causes the breakdown both of the sentient house and of the Usher family.

In *The Haunting of Hill House*, the psychological change separates the “family” by essentially pitting one family member against the others. Specifically, this character is Eleanor as she struggles psychologically throughout the haunting. Lisa Kröger states that “Eleanor’s psychological health is already compromised before she even leaves for Hill House....Some, like Melanie Anderson, may even go as far as to assert that Eleanor herself is haunting Hill House” (151). The latter assertion has quite the separating implication for the family in Hill House. By considering Eleanor’s psychological state as the cause of the haunting, Eleanor is therefore responsible for any harm done to the others in the family unit. She becomes no longer a part of the group of innocent victims but rather an individual instigator in the haunting. Furthermore, viewing Eleanor as having taken on the mentality of Hill House forces her to be classified with the sentient structure and not the living people. This means that she was never truly a part of the “family” established at Hill House but rather an interloper grouped in with the others. Additionally, Eleanor’s madness highlights the lack of dependence with the family unit. At the end of the novel, Eleanor is killed in a moment that causes confusion concerning her sanity (Jackson 417). This not only separates her from the others in terms of life and death but also eliminates her presence completely from the lives of others. They can therefore associate Eleanor with Hill House in their memory, an experience they will most likely want to forget. Eleanor’s thoughts during her final moments also reveal the lack of family dependence. She questions, “Why am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Why don’t they stop me?” (417). That final question reveals that Eleanor does see herself as connected to the others, enough so that they should step in if she were to attempt to harm herself. Yet it can be concluded from the text that no one has helped her: at this moment, with the haunting now being over, the inhabitants are likely to view their temporary associations with each other as being over. The madness and psychological change within Eleanor throughout *The Haunting of Hill House* works to establish the family unit as being simply a loose tie of temporary inhabitants.

Overall, madness is an important factor in the dissection of the family unit because those in a collective group must be of one mind within any haunting. It is important for each

member of a family in a sentient house haunting, or even a traditional ghost haunting, to have the same understanding of the situation and how to go about solving the problem. By introducing madness into this equation, a new obstacle is introduced as the haunting problem is now twofold: there is a house haunting the family, but also a mental ghost haunting the mad individual. The psychological effects of hauntings further the breakdown of the family unit as the permanent effects of hauntings are made evident. Each individual in a family does not come out of a haunting unscathed psychologically, making it immensely more difficult for the unit to function collectively as it once did.

The endings of sentient house works showcase a family that is fragile and shaken to its core. In *Beyond Words: Signifying Families in Postmodern American Fiction*, Mary Holland explains that in *House of Leaves*, “the last chapter presents the newly reunited Navidson family, with Will and Karen finally stably wedded, [in a] completely normal house in Vermont, depicted as a homey home” (330). Indeed, it may seem that *House of Leaves* ends with a family that has recovered from its traumatic experience, and in some aspects, it has indeed healed. However, the haunting has left a lasting devastation on the family that will require years to fully heal: Tom, Will’s brother, died in the sentient house; Will himself lost a hand and an eye; and, as Karen recovers from the haunting, she develops cancer. All of these physical and emotional trials mingle with the harsh truth that they must learn how to function as a family once again. The house on Ash Tree Lane still haunts the family, regardless: “The Navidsons may have left the house, they may have even left Virginia, but they will never be able to leave the memory of that place” (Danielewski 526) and even Will “has never stopped wrestling with the meaning of his experience” (527). *House of Leaves* displays a relatively hopeful ending for the family at its conclusion—although the house still mentally haunts them, the family is able to move forward.

Other sentient house works do not end on such a positive note, however. *The Haunting of Hill House* resolves with a broken family that will never become a family again. This temporary grouping of individuals was a product of their situation, and they became essentially a family by choice. With the conclusion of the haunting of the Crane house, the family has dissipated, the strangers not likely to ever encounter each other again. Furthermore, with Eleanor’s death at the very end, the family could never be complete if it were to try to reassemble. Without that one individual, the family could not resurrect its former state at the onset of the work. Finally, “The Fall of the House of Usher” shows a family that is shattered in multiple ways. The physical representation of the family, the large Usher mansion which has housed generations and reflects the living experiences of that family, has been destroyed as it cracked open. The living family has been destroyed as well, as both ultimately cause the death of the other. Only the narrator remains, a man who could be loosely grouped with the Usher family by way of association, but a man that could never replace nor represent the true being of the Usher line. There is no hope of the family ever reconstructing itself at the end of this work. The narrator even describes the outcome of the story as being left as “fragments” of the House of Usher (Poe 245), showing that irreparability. Overall, ghost literature that features a sentient house concludes with families that are broken, sometimes beyond repair, as a result of the haunting.

In conclusion, by looking at sentient house literature such as *House of Leaves*, “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and *The Haunting of Hill House*, it is clear that the terror experienced through the breakdown of the family unit in these hauntings reflects an overall cultural anxiety about such familial turbulence. Families are generally regarded as a collective source of security and comfort. The destruction of the family unit works to strip families of

these qualities, diminishing the value of the unit from an emotional resource to merely an asset for basic survival. This is frightening to an individual in such a family that must learn to take on the complex situations of life without any familial support. By reading sentient house hauntings in literature, therefore, one may gain insight into an anxiety about family instability that is present in overall culture: that an unstable family will ultimately render an individual helplessly alone. It is this thought that provides the real source of terror in sentient house hauntings in place of a ghostly manifestation.

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At Home in Babel: The Language of Hyperreality in the Immigrant Narrative

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Complicated by issues of identity, the immigrant experience is fraught with trauma. As such, authors engage with this theme by manipulating time and setting. These themes reimagine ghosts in hyperreal forms distorted by memories and perceptions. This article investigates hyperreality in the context of immigrant literature, this paper will introduce its audience to the ghosts haunting our muddled realities.



(Sharp)

An artifice of the hyperreal

The Statue of Liberty has served as the iconic representation of the American ideal of freedom since its transportation from France to America in 1886. Positioned a few miles from the auspicious shores of Ellis Island, the statue is the country's symbolic guiding light, ushering immigrants through uncharted waters towards the unknown of their new land. As such, Lady Liberty has been the conventional muse of American romanticism and patriotic nostalgia. Fittingly, The U.S. Postal Service spotlighted the statue as the signature symbol on one of its stamps. Yet this image was not of the actual statue. Instead, the design depicted an imitative replica from the New York City hotel and casino on the Las Vegas strip (Sharp). Reproduced, replicated, and resold, the archetypal representation of the immigrant's dream became an artifice of the hyperreal.

Hyperreality is the existence in which the real and its symbol have become indistinguishable from each other. It is also a significant prism through which to explore current cultural constructions of immigration and polyethnicity in America. Within American discourse, metaphors such as "the belonging," "the roots," and "journey" are used commonly to describe the immigrant experience. Yet these comparisons are generalized and oversimplified, symbolizing an American immigrant experience based on a false reality. These metaphors distort the truth by reframing it, shaping the actual experiences of the foreign-born and the nonwhite. Without truth, immigrants must cling to a hyperreal alternative, filled by ghostly hauntings and sorrowful specters of their unique cultural past.

In particular, ethnic literature serves as a compelling medium to witness the effects of the hyperreal on the immigrant story. While most of these texts are written by and deal with immigrants, they address hyperreality by two simultaneous yet divergent approaches: acceptance and resistance of hyperreal symbolism. In this self-reflexive process, ethnic American artists such as Junot Díaz, Chang-Rae Lee, and Alex Rivera reconstruct reality and reimagine identity, while emphasizing the power of language to shape our consciousness.

A real without origin or reality

Published in 1981, *Simulacra and Simulation* is a philosophical treatise by Jean Baudrillard seeking to disentangle the relationships among reality, symbols, and society. According to the text, these associations have been distorted by the condition of postmodernity. Reality has been exchanged for meaning for symbols and signs, since "[w]e live in a world where there is more and more symbol and less and less meaning" (79). Through a progression of repeated replication, chimerical perceptions give way to create a proliferation of symbolic simulacra, or copies without true original sources. Our society facilitates this destructive process. Society is an authentic fake as it pursues reality in the artificial.

To demonstrate his claim, Baudrillard offers the paradigm of the map, the world, and the society. Geography itself has begun merely to imitate the map, which now determines the organization of the real world, while "[t]he territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory" (121). Meaning and symbol become inverted, obliterating reality and authenticating the fake. Hyperreality plays a similar role in our conception of history. In a hyperreal world, the present day is an imitation of history. Yet, the cyclic nature of history is an artifice. Specters of our past pervade our current moment, clouding our ability to distinguish the real from its simulation.

Yet, postmodern culture is not merely artificial since the notion of artificiality requires

some sense of reality against which to recognize the artifice. Postmodernity is void of any semblance of the real. For Baudrillard, postmodernity “is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real” (3). This shallowness typifies a world in which the distinctions between signified and signifier have all but disappeared through successive reproductions of previous reproductions of reality.

In the hyperreal, there is no longer any distinction between reality and its representation; there is only simulation. In the hyperreal world, our consciousness struggles to define differences between the past and the present, recreating memory in the form of ghosts and hauntings.

Baudrillard identifies a number of cultural phenomena to explain the postmodern conflation of reality with hyperreality. For one, contemporary media including television, film, and the Internet blur the line between reality and fiction. For example, in war films, the media shapes reality in its own image when “[t]he war became film, the film becomes war, the two are joined by their common hemorrhage into technology” (60). Our consciousness mimics this hyperreal process of imitation, allowing pretend ghosts to linger in real life. Similarly, the consumerism of postmodernity forges an alternate and imitated realm of reality. Consumer culture confounds the products that are needed to sustain life with the products for which a need is created by commercial images. With these distinctions muddled, society is detached from the basic ontological inherency necessary to decipher what is needed and what is wanted. Reality is thus destroyed, as consumerism acts as “a kind of genetic code that directs the mutation of the real into the hyperreal” (33). Further, the pervasiveness of the media and consumer culture imposes and reinforces hyperreality in the consciousness of society.

Language controls the frame of reality by giving structure to perception. For Baudrillard, metaphors, images, and other rhetorical devices are the focus of language’s power, as “metaphor is a ‘game’ played with truth” (122). In the depthless postmodern condition, language’s exploitative nature is realized in its contribution to hyperreality since “[t]here is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality: of secondhand truth, objectivity, and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of lived experience, a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared” (96). By masking truth and hiding meaning, language instigates a distortive hyperreality hard to resist.

Baudrillard’s language-driven hyperreality emphasizes the proliferation of symbolism in the postmodern condition. This excess of images and metaphors dulls our ability to discern the real from the artificial. For Dr. Eugene Arva, this hyperreal process of desensitization causes a tangible shift in the way we communicate since, as Baudrillard writes, “caught in the web of a myriad of images, people no longer tell or listen to stories—the traditional carriers of meaning—nor seem to distinguish between reliable and unreliable media” (6). As simulation and simulacra dominate our collective societal consciousness, modes of personal expression and storytelling change. For fiction writer Lorraine López, this hyperreality “spells death to the imagination by shrinking all possibilities to one. These generalizations encourage us to stop considering what can be” (2). These transformative changes to language and its representation also cause shifts in our consciousness, inviting the ghosts of our past to our present reality.

Hyperreality and the immigrant narrative

The effects of a language-driven hyperreality on imagination and storytelling become particularly potent in the context of the immigrant narrative and ethnic literature. Immi-

gration and ethnic otherness has been metaphorized and signified for so long, rendering these experiences susceptible to the distortive agents of hyperreal metaphors and simulated symbolism. Struggling to express an authentic reality in lieu of distortive symbolism, modern ethnic American writers must spin hyperrealism on its head to show truth.

Alex Rivera, Junot Díaz, and Chang-Rae Lee recognize the depthlessness of the postmodern condition, and allow hyperreality to mold the milieus of their immigrant protagonists. Media, technology, and consumerism are the contextual forces by which hyperreality is embedded in the immigrant milieu. As such, oversimplified and overgeneralized terms, such as the “belonging,” “the roots,” and “the journey,” serve as metaphors to frame the ethnic American experience. These terms distort the truth and strip immigrants of their ability to express themselves. To resist this coercive power and give meaning to their protagonists’ experiences, Rivera and Díaz dismantle these symbols and criticize hyperreality.

In Rivera’s film *Sleep Dealer*, Baudrillard’s hyperbolized map paradigm becomes a reality. The film surveys the complicated identities of the immigrant self in a hyperreal and global society. The protagonist, Memo, is held back behind the border separating Mexico and California. Operating futuristic technology, Memo uses his mind to maneuver machinery across the fence on the border and into the United States. Although physically impermeable, the border is porous to psychological forces. In this setting, Memo’s body becomes a ghost, haunting his working mind.

Purposefully, to demonstrate the artificiality of borders and their limits, Rivera exposes his audience to his creation of hyperreality. The disingenuous dispositions of Rivera’s hyperreality are given a mouthpiece in the form of the media. Memo’s world exists as a series of technological symbols and industrial signifiers, mimicking and distorting the semblances of the protagonist’s realities. The media proves to be the chief method of propagation of these technological symbols and virtual signs. For example, the TruNode reality trade platform allows consumers to inhabit representations of worlds that are not their own. Advertised relentlessly on television, members of this society are encouraged to claim someone else’s reality for their own. In the *Sleep Dealer*’s hyperreality, the truth is disguised in television commercials, or tangled between the wires and heavy machinery hookups.

The media-obsessed and technologically-driven hyperreality problematizes the sense of “belonging” in the immigrant narrative. Creating a hyperreal system for pseudo-immigration, the Nodes enable workers to live in Mexico while working in the United States. For Memo, “belonging” becomes a complicated social construct since he lives and works in two different countries. He cannot belong to one country or one identity, as the border divides his nationhood and personhood. Without a basis in reality, “belonging” becomes a hyperreal term, obligating Memo to form arbitrary and rigid distinctions of his existence here and there.

Junot Díaz focuses on another aspect of the postmodern condition. In his novel *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, he examines Latino identities and narratives and the ways in which both are affected and informed by consumer culture. This consumerism is enacted through institutions like the state and the media, and by the very nature of the postmodern age. Set in the urban sprawl of New Jersey, the story of Oscar is dominated by simulation and a consumer-driven hyperreality. Indeed, the consumerism of Oscar’s world creates an alternate realm of reality, visible only among the “colors and shapes” of the mall and the industrial waste of New Jersey (19). Meaningless consumerism destroys reality and, instead, invites hyperreality in which race and consumer culture are inter-

changeable. Consumer culture has engaged Oscar with the hyperreal, conflating aspects of the material with identity.

Oscar himself is consumed by a world obsessed with media, technology, and commercial products. He lives in a replicated virtual world taken up with comic books and video games and excessively preoccupied with “role-playing games, comic books, and Japanese animation” (266). Oscar exists among the signs and symbols of the postmodern age. So intrinsic are these symbols and images to Oscar’s perception of the world around him that they become part of his identity. As such, Díaz constructs Oscar’s identity in the context of comic-book heroes, as he addresses the reader: “You really want to know what being an X-Man feels like? Just be a smart bookish boy of color in a contemporary U.S. ghetto. Mamma Mia! Like having bat wings or a pair of tentacles growing out of your chest” (17). Plagued by the hyperreality of “the Jersey malaise,” Oscar must negotiate the complexity of self-definition in a distortive contemporary age (191).

Bonding questions of identity and the emptiness of metaphors such as the “journey” and “roots,” Díaz shifts questions of the self from reality to the hyperreality. While Oscar struggles to decipher reality from fiction, his sister Lola is confronted with the “metaphor du jour” of ethnic experience: the journey. She gives into the symbolism, traveling to the Dominican Republic in search of her roots, determined to begin “her journey, a first step taken, the beginning of something big” (239). However, Lola’s comfort in these experiences is fleeting as she gets back to New Jersey, without a heightened self-awareness or answers. For Lola and Oscar, these metaphors are empty artifice, instigating a sense of a longing for something unreal.

Similarly, the formidable materialism in Chang-Rae Lee’s novel *A Gesture Life* suggests a cosmos entirely devoted to the worship of the material. The materialism of the novel’s hometown of Bedley Run is represented by the blatant affluence of the protagonist Doc Hata. A Korean immigrant, Hata is the owner of a successful local business, Sunny Medical Supply, earning notoriety and respect for his prosperity. Like a more subtle version of Gatsby, Hata builds an elaborate house, complete with an “impressive flower and herb garden, and a flagstone swimming pool, and leaded glass and wrought iron conservatory” (16). The details of his house captivate his field of perception and mediate his reality in a distortive way. Hata’s house is a chimerical and imitative symbol of his superficial identity.

Interestingly, Hata creates his own hyperreality through his “gestures,” as he defines himself through his polite motions to others. Yet these gestures are merely a hyperreal ruse, as Hata constantly performs these acts without any deeper meaning. Hata’s “gesture life,” a false reality, leads to an interesting discussion about belonging in the immigrant context. Eager to assimilate to Bedley Run and earn the town’s respect, Hata longs for a sense of belonging in America. These longings distort Hata’s reality and divert his attention from the more pressing issues of belonging within his family and the deterioration of his relationship with his daughter.

Hyperreality, trauma, and reconstruction

The immigrant narrative is subject to the forces of an exterior hyperreality. Acting through the simulated channels of media and consumer culture, the omnipresence of a language-driven hyperreality changes the truth and meaning for Rivera, Díaz, and Lee’s protagonists. Although these artists challenge the hyperreal of the current condition,

Rivera and Díaz also self-reflexively employ elements of the hyperreal to imaginatively reframe their protagonists' realities. Arva describes this new form of hyperreality as an exceedingly harsh experiment since "[p]ostmodernist fiction does not stop at only dismantling the signifiers, but also engages in Frankensteinian experiments of creating new ones" (63). Spinning hyperreality on its head, Rivera, Lee, and Díaz reconstruct meaning and reclaim agency in the aftermath of personal trauma and generational tragedy.

The immigrant experience is fraught with trauma; as Jolie Sheffer explains, at the heart of the immigrant trauma, the very relationship between trauma and the immigrant experience, lies the idea of "time rupture." She argues the immigrant reality is split into two: "before immigration" and "after immigration" (7). It is this rip in reality that is the critical cause of trauma.

Ethnic literature also locates trauma in the pain of the chaotic disruption of immigration. Caught in the liminality of virtual immigration, Memo's health and consciousness deteriorates with each cybernetic journey to work on the other side of the border. He is forced to relive the traumatic rupture caused by immigration on a daily basis, losing touch with his family and the reality of his physical existence. Trauma operates in a different and more enduring form in *Oscar Wao*. It is Oscar's mother Beli who immigrates to New Jersey, splitting her reality into life in the Dominican Republic and survival in America. Beli's personal trauma sets off a multigenerational suffering, affecting Lola and Oscar. Díaz focuses on the transgenerational nature of the immigrant trauma as he writes, "There is within the family a silence that stands monument to the generations, that sphinxes all attempts at narrative reconstruction" (571). Similarly, Doc Hata is plagued by the trauma of a distant war and expatriate migration, passing pain and sadness to his daughter Sunny. Unable to reconcile the gulf between his present and past experiences, Hata grows estranged from Sunny.

The experience of trauma brings about interesting effects on personal reality and the landscape of the imagination. Trauma is a dogging ghost, bringing to the surface raw recollections of a bruised history. For literary theorist Kathleen Brogan, contemporary concepts of haunting memories and relived nightmares within immigrant narratives serve as greater discourses about ethnicity, race, and identity in a postmodern America. She argues the hauntings are guised vestiges of a contentious historical past and manifest in literature as reoccurring memories of loss and desolation. In ethnic literature, she writes, "The hauntings that these texts deal with communal memory, cultural transmission, and group inheritance of a traumatic past" (12). Rivera's Memo must confront enduring and harsh social and economic circumstances. Similarly, Díaz's Lola is haunted by the traumas of her ancestry while Lee's Doc Hata is plagued by memories of a distant war. Revisiting memories of the past and communing with hauntings of the present, immigrants reconstruct reality in order to claim agency over their experiences and to resist the distortive symbolism of their new milieus. Arva believes that through the immigrant process of hyperreal reclamation, "traumatic imagination, traumatic memories are turned into narrative memory and alternate reality" (61). This new form of self-created hyperreality reinvents ethnic identity by imaginatively piecing together history and memory that in many cases have been fragmented, erased, or ignored.

Sleep Dealer and *A Gesture Life* subtly accept hyperreality to reform the existence of its protagonists in novel ways. For Rivera, the technological hyperreality introduces depthlessness into the pseudo-immigration experience of Memo. Although the film resists this hyperreality, it puts forth a new form of simulation. Utilizing the nodes to be intimate

with his girlfriend, Luz, Memo uses the hyperreal to gain meaning and authenticate interaction in the throes of trauma. Similarly, Lee critiques the materialist hyperreality perpetuating the falseness of Doc Hata's gestures. Yet, the structure of Hata's narrative abandons convention to express an experienced ontology instead of a literal reality. Weaving in and out of memory, reflection, and narration, Hata's story is a distorted simulation of reality, articulating the truth of the immigrant experience through the hyperreal.

Further, Junot Díaz rhetorically plays with hyperreality, forcing sign and signifier to coexist in *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. In his portrayal of Oscar's existent dystopia, Díaz acknowledges that both consumer-driven hyperrealities and archetypal metaphors contribute to falsification of the immigrant experience. Díaz's fukú curse is an example of a metaphor that plagues the protagonists of *Oscar Wao*. The curse is used to explain the misery of the colonial past, bleak present, and hopeless future of Dominican immigrants. To describe the curse, Díaz writes, "*Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially fukú—generally a cure or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World" (17). Fukú is an important example of "cultural hauntings," as it operates on a trans-generational and trans-continental scale. Literary critic Anne Mahler argues Fukú is the mythological and volatile representation of the specter of immigration. The curse is a lightning-bolt term, as it "attracts all the complicated and problematic meanings affecting the immigrant reality" (121). Fukú is about tragedy, rupture, and trauma.

Yet, Díaz teaches us that the curse can take on different meanings and different contexts. As such, fukú is also a reconstructive paradoxical, as it is both a cause of the hyperreal and the solution for trauma. Fukú gives symbol to an experienced reality, imposing a metaphorical narrative on the unarticulated immigrant narrative. The fukú is an imagined paradigm of the immigrant hyperreal, as it is constructed to both explain and cope with the realities of a painful existence. Cured by a cultural counter spell known as zafa, fukú is both the traumatic inheritance and recreated legacy of the American Dominican people. Díaz blurs the line between curse and counterspell, asking his readership: "Zafa or fukú? You tell me" (568). Lacking any roots in a true and definable reality, the fukú is the ultimate hyperreal force, restructuring our consciousness to cope with destructive circumstance.

At home in Babel

In Judeo-Christian mythology, the Tower of Babel is the quintessential paradigm of the hyperreal. According to the story, a united community attempted to construct a tower to reach the heavens. To punish the greedy, God confuses people's languages, so that they would not be able to return to each other. In a world full of excess language, and thus symbols, God's people lost their means to communicate. Baudrillard's hyperreality operates under the same premise. In the symbolic postmodern condition we have lost the ability to decipher meaning and express truth. Like Babel, America, a land of immigrants, is a transnational environment. Shaped by the threatening forces of postmodernity, the language-driven hyperreality promotes the proliferation of metaphor, specifically emphasizing the belonging, roots, and the journey of the immigrant experience. In this symbolic age, cultural ghosts and individuals' memories haunt the experiences of immigrants. To authenticate the immigrant stories of their protagonists, ethnic American writers both resist and manipulate hyperreality. Rivera, Lee, and Díaz challenge the function of meaning in a distorted reality to reframe the truth of immigration and to confront the ghosts of the past; meaning is a creation and reality is a fake.

The creative process

In thinking about hyperreality in the immigrant narrative, the significance of language to its employment becomes increasingly evident. Language is an intrinsic trope, linking the immigrant experience to the signs and symbols of its milieu. As such, the content and form of this project are preoccupied with language and its effects. In its form my project uses different types of language—analysis and creative writing—to discuss reality in multiple dimensions.

The following is a short story, chronicling the beginnings of an immigrant narrative. The narrative's intention is not to create a synthetic plot for the purposes of modeling hyperreality—for that would be too symbolic in and hyperreal in and of itself. Instead, the narrative presents the immigrant experience in its nakedness. Inspired by Díaz and his tendency to integrate narration and dialogue, the story confounds its storytelling perspective and speaking voice. The text offers more at the beginning than at the end, ironically emphasizing the brevity of the journey rather than the long-term aftermath. Ultimately, through the medium of narrative, this story hopes to show the larger question of this project: How do words and symbols mediate our lived realities?

Return to source

Who am I?

Where am I from?

The airplane crumbled into pieces, a winded mountain peak spilling its pebbles, a broken vase scattering its contents. One woman, Layla Al-Awsat, fell like flecks of spices from a broken used tea bag. Above, behind, and below her in the in between suspended in-flight amenities, stereo headphones, overhead storage bins, cabin lights, fresh passports, trademarked paper cups and blankets, duty-free chocolate, hazard-yellow life vests, and exhausted personal television sets. She hung in the ironic tangle of her seatbelt and oxygen mask, struggling to find air in the clarity of the atmosphere.

There were other immigrants aboard Flight 237 from Rabat. These people dangled an intangible distance from Layla—coalescing with the falling remnants of the plane, unevenly disjointed, unevenly bizarre. In the mix of broken machine and broken people was suspended the debris of the self, fragmented memories, threadbare ghosts, split mother tongues, violated spaces, untranslatable idioms, smothered secrets, ephemeral loves, deceased futures, and the disregarded meanings of empty, vacant, words, *roots, belonging, journey*.

Cushioned by the clouds, Layla plummeted gradually like a heavy suitcase dropped down stairs. After hours of stumbling downward steadily, she tightened her muscles to prepare to hit the water below her. Green and even, the expansive chasm of the Atlantic Ocean opened smoothly to uncover the slippery depths of her rebirth.

Which side of the Atlantic is this? she wondered.

I'm so sorry about that, ma'am. Turbulence. Can I get you anything else? she asked. The flight attendant widened her eyes to smile, as she patted the paper on Layla's tray with a napkin.

No, she said.

Still very much in the throes of a proverbial nightmare, Layla couldn't find the words in English, and her voice sounded waterlogged and brackish. Layla listened to the clicking wheels of the refreshment cart traverse down the cabin, as the echo of the toilet

flushing reverberated from the nearby bathroom while she traced the jagged lines of her wet mark on her letter. She had written poetry on the plane, chronicling her forward journey for the people of her past.

Layla closed her eyes once more, navigating through landing blind. Circling the runway at a slow altitude, the plane veered from the trajectory of her balance and forced her arms against the seat. In a series of loud bangs, she was reborn in the New York, arriving feet first—an improper orientation for entering the world. Beneath her, the cosmos has collided, making one of earth and machine. The friction sparks blazed in the aftermath of exertion. Reality imploded, and the distance between what was and what is collapsed.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to John F. Kennedy Airport. Local time is 5:36 pm, and the temperature is 45 degrees. For your safety and comfort, we ask that you please remain seated with your seat belt fastened until the captain turns off the “Fasten Seat Belt” sign. This will indicate that we have parked at the gate and that it is safe for you to move about.

Belonging

In the absence of movement, Layla grabbed her belongings from the overhead space and walked towards the exit. In the drab and drafty jet bridge, she took her first steps on American soil, on future’s path. Armed with two worn bags, Layla hastened through security towards the exit of the airport.

She had grown accustomed to the stifling of pressurized air and fluorescent lighting. Upon escaping the liminality of the JFK airport, she reclaimed her perceptions. On the side of the New York City highway, she was immediately bombarded with a myriad of sounds, sights, and smells. As she waited, the odor of gas infected her street corner, shifting Layla’s senses from a rural existence to an urban reality. Climbing into the back of a cab, Layla noticed the slickness of the city streets. The roads of her past were paved with cobble and brine, saturated with generations of history.

Hello. 92 Amsterdam Avenue, please, she said. The English words twirled around in her mouth before they escaped. It was as if her speech was dancing in a linguistic game of musical chairs, pirouetting between the harshness of an infant English and the simplicity of a dutiful Arabic. She knew the lilt in her voice had betrayed her.

‘Min Aynah Anti?’ asked the taxi driver.

Stunned to hear Arabic so far from home, Layla paused.

Marrakesh, she said.

For the duration of the twenty-minute drive, Layla and the taxi driver conversed in a familiar and unfamiliar dialect—a merger of his Egyptian Arabic and her Berber colloquialism.

A language neither could claim agency over nor cast off wholeheartedly. It was the hybridized linguistics of rupture, of loss.

The cabdriver refused to take her fare, as if taking her money was to be a betrayal of their fabricated collective experience.

Thank you, she whispered and closed the door behind her.

Turning attention to her worn walkup apartment, she stood outside to observe its city aesthetics. A cigarette butt, a faded flyer, and a soda can littered the steps to her door. She grabbed the key from under the mat—an arrangement she made with the super through a misinterpreted e-mail correspondence. She dropped her bags to stare properly at her new abode.

Exhaling the staleness of the past, she inhaled the new air of her new home. After throwing her body on her new sofa, she sifted through her bags to find her passport, wallet, and the letters. Tomorrow I’ll mail the letter *home*.

Roots

In the following week, Layla pieced together the beginnings of a new future, while clinging to the vestiges of a broken past. One morning, she journeyed uptown to the university, staring wild-eyed at the city people—the actors in her rebirth.

Layla Al-Awsat

There it stood in a sea of forms and papers. Her name stretched enigmatically across the generics of the mundane. Signing her name on the class rosters, she grabbed her books and started off homeward.

On the subway, Layla studied her new milieu; the sea of colorful faces—ranging from the whitest of whites to the blackest of blacks, the buzz of different languages—forming a new and collective buzz.

¿Qué hora es? asked the man sitting next to her. Short and dark, he smelled of sweat and rubber.

I'm Moroccan, she said. Layla buried her eyes in her hands, studying their color for answers. Retreating out of the confines of his seat, the man peered over her shoulder at her watch. Keeping her eyes on the door, Layla tepidly stood up at her stop. On her walk home, Layla thumbed the inside of her jacket, humming the tune of a television jingle of which she couldn't remember any of the related lyrics.

Layla arrived at her stoop, brushed the mist droplets off the mail, and let herself in. Sorting through the mail, she noticed the familiar icon of the Statue of Liberty. Six stamps of Lady Liberty lined the outer rim of a water-stained letter. She stared hard at the green of the statue's face, remembering that green from her plummet to the Atlantic Ocean. Distinguishing the stamps and the curvature of her Arabic penmanship, Layla recognized the letter as her own. It hadn't made its way homeward after all.

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The Spirit of a Thought in a Fictional World: Summoning Ghosts to the Stage

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Works of art are inherently spectral in that they are fictional representations of life and reality, particularly theatre, which brings a nonexistent world to life by creating layers of performance between audience and actors, and even the characters of the play. Through a close reading of both the text and performance of Henrik Ibsen's tragedy *Ghosts*, this paper explores the relationship between theatre and hauntings, unpacking the layers of spectrality of stage props and the employment of silence onstage.

“Theatre, in all of its aspects, uniquely insists on the reality of ghosts,” claims Alice Rayner (Introduction). Though ghosts defy definition and encompass a diverse range of beings and concepts, most share one feature: having a foot in each of two worlds, a liminal existence that hovers between opposites and which is sometimes referred to as “spectral.” Theatre operates in a similar threshold between past and present, reality and illusion, literalism and symbolism. Visual arts such as paintings and sculptures lack the immediacy of live creation that theatre relies upon, and other performance arts such as dance lack the concrete narrative that plays provide. No other art form summons such a tactile, animate story on command. This world is self-contained by the so-called fourth wall that separates audiences from actors. Yet this fourth wall is easily perforated, as theatre provides a uniquely accessible and relatable experience by using human performers as its canvas—it seems to invite audience members to imagine themselves in the place of the characters. These few juxtapositions are just the tip of the iceberg and provide a basic justification for further inquiry into the relationship between theatre and ghosts.

Entire books have been devoted to this subject, so this essay will be focusing on two specific facets of theatre that can be probed for spectrality. One is the employment of props: the way that objects—in and of themselves—embody a tactile link between past and present, and the additional ghostliness that objects take on when they are used in theatrical productions. The second is the unique immediacy of silence onstage. It is utterly unlike silence in cinema, as it is live and present and instantly engages the audience with the performance in a new and spectral manner by demanding that the audience play an active role in determining the meaning and weight of the silence. These two subjects are ideal for a brief but thorough examination of theatre's relationship with ghosts and hauntings, in part because they are easily recognizable to anyone who has ever attended a theatrical event. Little technical knowledge of the theatre's inner workings is necessary for a cursory understanding of props and dramatic pauses onstage. In addition, these two themes dovetail nicely with each other, because they both rely upon audience engagement to form meaning and symbolism within the story of a play. The focus of this paper is the spectrality in an audience's unique interac-

tions with theatrical performances. These two themes, props and silence, provide a familiar foothold to facilitate an in-depth and accessible analysis of this broad and abstract concept.

In order to ground this conceptual discussion in a concrete theatrical example, the aptly named play *Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen will be used as a lens through which to explore the themes of this paper. Though it has been speculated that all plays could bear this title due to their repetition and reliance upon memory, Ibsen's plays in particular deal with the past's intrusion upon the present and the return of people and memories thought dead (Carlson 1). There is no better example of these themes than *Ghosts* itself. The characters of Ibsen's piece are not haunted by corporeal apparitions in their attic; no actor is employed to portray the role of the protagonist's deceased husband. Instead, these are ghosts of lies, suppressed desires, and even concepts such as duty. Actors cast in *Ghosts* must summon to life that which never lived in the first place: the spirit of a thought within a fictional world. Additionally, it is partly through the use of props and carefully timed silences that this theatrical sleight of hand is accomplished.

Before considering the spectrality of a specific prop in *Ghosts*, the question must first be posed: what makes any object ghostly? Objects are, after all, inanimate—lifeless and devoid of meaning in and of themselves. Yet, as Alice Rayner points out, objects often become extensions of the humans who use them (Chapter three). There is nothing intrinsically alive or meaningful about a cane, for example. Yet when it is employed to help a person walk, it takes on the role of a third limb for that individual—a phantom limb of sorts. Does that association not breathe life into that inanimate cane in some way, granting it a spectrality that a cane tucked away in an attic cannot possess? Consider, too, the way that possessions inherited from a deceased relative take on significance that would mean nothing to a stranger. Not only are these objects' sentimental values disconnected from their intended uses, but they seem infused with the presence and very life of their original owners. Spectral and liminal, these objects hover somewhere between their practical everyday function and their newly-endowed spiritual symbolism.

A prop that is employed early in *Ghosts* will provide an ideal starting place to discuss the ghostliness of props. The play begins with the protagonist, Mrs. Alving, entertaining old friend and religious authority Pastor Manders. Her son, Oswald, has recently returned home to take a break from his career as an artist. While Pastor Manders and Mrs. Alving are talking, Oswald appears in the doorway smoking a pipe. The following conversation takes place:

OSWALD. I found my father's pipe in my room—

MANDERS. Aha—then that accounts for it!

MRS. ALVING. For what?

MANDERS. When Oswald appeared there, in the doorway, with the pipe in his mouth, I could have sworn I saw his father, large as life.

OSWALD. No, really?

MRS. ALVING. Oh, how can you say so? Oswald takes after me.

MANDERS. Yes, but there is an expression about the corners of the mouth, something about the lips—that reminds one exactly of Alving: at any rate, now that he is smoking. (*Ghosts* Act 1)

The pipe that belonged to Oswald's father, then, has a double meaning for the characters

within the narrative. The pipe is nothing more than a pipe; there is nothing particularly special or interesting about it. But because of its place in the Alving family history, it is able to evoke the memory of Mrs. Alving's husband so completely that Manders actually mistakes the son for the father. The pipe is also a tactile remnant of a lost family member. It is inscribed with the spiritual memory of its owner, yet it also has a physical presence (both within the world of the play and within the performance). It, like a ghost, hovers between the physical and the spiritual world, unable to singularly inhabit either.

The pipe takes on further spectrality when the subtext of the above excerpt is layered into the performance. Mr. Alving had a reputation as a noble man, but that reputation was a fabrication invented by his wife, in part to protect her son from the knowledge of what his father really was. The Mr. Alving that Oswald and Pastor Manders envision is incongruent with the Mr. Alving that Mrs. Alving knew. No wonder Mrs. Alving protests at the assertion that Oswald looks like his father—she has spent her whole life trying to ensure that Oswald grows up to be nothing like him. Later in the play she specifically mentions to Manders that she “was determined that Oswald, my own boy, should inherit nothing whatever from his father. . . . My son shall have everything from me—everything” (*Ghosts* Act 1). Even something as innocuous as a pipe becomes laden with meaning. For Manders and Oswald, it is a remnant of an upstanding and noble father figure. For Mrs. Alving, it is a reminder of the lies she has told and the sacrifices she has made to protect her son from his own father.

But before the pipe can even make its appearance onstage, it must occupy a peculiar stopping place: the props table, organized carefully backstage so that each performer and crew member knows just where to locate each critical prop night after night. “Especially when they are simply sitting backstage or in the prop room prior to their uses in a performance, bereft of both text and performance, prop objects can seem suspended between both worldly and fictional uses,” says Rayner (Chapter three). In terms of the narrative, the props are indeed suspended between use and neglect, between reality and fiction. But for the performers that will bring the story to life, the props can be infused with a further level of spectral meaning available only to those who might have worked with this particular theatre company before. Most theatres maintain collections of props that they can pull from for multiple productions. Since actors often return to the same theatres again and again to participate in productions, their relationship with props that have been reused can be as complicated and multifaceted as a character's relationship with an object within a play. The actor who will portray Oswald in a production of *Ghosts*, for example, may have been in an earlier production of a stage adaptation of Sherlock Holmes. The pipe that he will soon clamp between his teeth may once have played a role in the story of that famous detective. Indeed, the pipe may have collected stories and meanings from dozens of actors, designers, and directors over the years. “While objects are mastered by (and master) actors in performance, they also function as secret talismans in systems of superstition and familial inheritance on and off the stage,” notes Aoife Monks (150).

Therefore, when an actor steps onstage as Oswald with his pipe in a production of *Ghosts*, he is accompanied by myriad symbols and meanings. The pipe may contain countless stories from other productions, the ghosts of which will follow the actor onstage into an entirely new story, past invading present, memory invading immediacy. Within this new world that he and his prop currently inhabit, the pipe carries the added weight of the dead father his character never knew. It also carries the ghosts of his mother's lies and omissions of truth, embodying her memory of who Mr. Alving truly was and the way that she has erased that truth from her son's life.

Yet we have so far failed to discuss one group of people who have the power to assign meaning to props (or any part of a production): the audience itself. As is the case when viewing any piece of art, every individual's interpretation will be unique and specific, influenced by a host of personal factors that the artist has no control over. But in this case, the audience is in a unique position: viewers have the power to affect the art they are viewing directly. In many ways, the audience is just as responsible for the creation and meaning of the performance as the actors, director, and designers. Erica Fischer-Lichte describes this effect as "atmosphere"—something that cannot be summoned by the presence of any single element on or offstage, but arises from the unique interactions of many individual factors, such as the interaction between the audience and the performers (70-71). And the actors are engaged in an incredible sleight of hand as they actively reveal secrets about their character to the audience that the character is not even aware of yet, implicating the audience in unraveling the meaning behind the dialogue before the story itself does (Whitaker 711). Because of the immediacy of live performance, the audience's interaction with the narrative plays as important a role as any of the performers. Few conditions can affect a production more than the condition of an audience: a restless audience can alter the energy in the performance space so dramatically that it may utterly transform the tone of that night's show. The quality of a performance often hinges on the willingness of an audience to laugh at appropriate moments or maintain silence during others. As Peter Malekin and Ralph Yarrow claim:

Theatre... is potentially a living communion based on the bonds of sympathy, a kind of direct magnetic sensing, a 'being with' other beings and other modes of being. A 'dead' audience receives information and, perhaps, changes its ideas; a 'live' audience potentially transmutes being and consciousness—not merely the content or objects of consciousness (59).

For example, a dead audience might not engage with the multitude of questions that the pipe raises or the layers of meaning it holds for every person on and offstage. Although not everyone has performed in a stage play, almost all of us can relate to the sinking feeling of addressing a crowd that is disengaged from the subject at hand, and how difficult it is to keep that uncomfortable knowledge from impacting your performance. While the performance might not be utterly derailed, the actors in a production of *Ghosts* would almost certainly recognize the symptoms of a disengaged audience, and they might struggle to give a performance identical to one in which the audience is actively taking part in the creation of meaning in the play.

Silence is a key barometer for judging how engaged an audience is with a story being portrayed onstage. Silence is one of the very building blocks of theatre: without it, the audience would be chattering over the actors' lines. In a way, the audience is spectralizing itself for the purposes of the production, silencing its own voice to allow the world of the play to overtake it. This peculiar unspoken agreement between cast and audience can be broken with something as simple as a poorly timed sneeze during a crucial moment in the play. Yet the play goes on, only momentarily wrenched out of the moment. For a moment, the illusion hovers on the cusp of actualization as the audience reconnects with the story and once again willingly forgets that it is an audience and not a part of the play's world. In cinema, too, the audience is expected to break the silence only when appropriate, such as after laugh lines. But there is also a clear difference in the natures of these two silences: in cinema, an inappropriate breach of silence is disruptive only to the audience. In theatre, it is

disruptive to the performance as well. In no other art form can the audience so immediately and so effectively engage with a concrete narrative as it is created before their eyes. Though the audience is not present in the world of the play, its ability to affect the story promotes it to an active player in the way that the story is told. The audience as at once present and absent in the narrative. Malekin and Yarrow explain, “Theatre is a communal event...both performers and receivers are affected; both individual and shared experience occurs; what occurs involves at least a crossing of borders—borders between self and other, life and death, between ‘reality’ (itself largely imagined) and imagination, the entry into different parameters of existence” (62).

To reverse the perspective for a moment, this breakdown of borders is just as crucial to the actors as it is to the audience. As in the case of an audience unwilling to participate in developing the layers of meaning of the pipe, the actors rely on an audience’s engagement with their narrative, even as they must deny this reliance for the purposes of maintaining the conceptual fourth wall. They feed off the audience’s reactions, however microscopic, even though according to the narrative they are telling, the audience does not exist (and in most cases, must not exist for the purposes of storytelling). The performers hover somewhere between acknowledging and ignoring the audience’s presence—putting the audience in a spectral and liminal position of half-existence within the story.

One of the ways that this peculiar relationship between audience and actor is felt is when an actor takes a pause onstage. Silences in cinema exist in an utterly different world, because they are timed to the millisecond and tell the same story every time. Though it is obviously up to each audience member to determine the meaning of the pause, any single interpretation is not going to influence the tone of the film or the length of the silence. In theatre, however, the silence is immediate. The actors onstage are responsible for recreating a specific moment of silence at every performance, though of course that silence will never exist precisely the same way twice. Even if the actor were capable of perfectly recreating an exactly timed pause, the audience’s interpretation and interaction with the performance would render the silence utterly different each night. Speaking of the immediacy of space in the theatre, Malekin and Yarrow note, “I cannot enter this space if I am walled off in habit or in ego. Performers need to cross these boundaries, to interact and interfuse, to be open and available to each other and to the audience. I have to flow. I have to lose ‘myself’” (60). The myriad of meanings that the audience members assign to every pause influences the way they watch the play, which affects the energy between the stage and the audience, which can affect the length, tone, and intensity of the pause. And this creation of meaning can be achieved not only with dialogue, but also with silence—not the presence of spoken words, but the absence of them. Yet that absence has a tangible presence of its own as it draws the audience in and engages them with a fictional world that they do not inhabit.

Once again, the world of Ibsen’s *Ghosts* provides an ideal jumping-off place for discussing the spectrality of theatrical silence. Whether they are pauses written into the stage directions or characters deliberately omitting some portion of the truth, the silences in *Ghosts* are just as important as the dialogue and sometimes even more so. Aristotle posited that attending a play is an act of catharsis. The audience members are not only escaping the reality of their own lives but vicariously experiencing a fictional character’s problems and thus feeling more capable of handling their own. Theatre is meant to help make sense of a chaotic world (Pizzato 176-177). But Ibsen was not in the business of comforting his audiences by providing them with easy answers. Instead, his plays posed questions. His aim was to stage something closer to real life, where answers are not as clear-cut as they often are in

the stories we tell (Durbach 124). This withholding of answers is reflected not only in the ambiguous conclusions that Ibsen's plays are known for, but in the subtext-laden dialogue that often layers more meaning into what isn't said than into what is.

Take, for instance, the following exchange in act two. Oswald has just revealed to Mrs. Alving that he is suffering from syphilis. His doctor has informed him that this disease is generally inherited from a licentious parent, but since Oswald is still submersed in the illusion of his father's morality—the illusion that Mrs. Alving herself has instilled in his mind—he has come to believe that he somehow brought this disease upon himself.

OSWALD. . . . If it had only been something inherited—something one wasn't responsible for! But this! To have thrown away so shamefully, thoughtlessly, recklessly, one's own happiness, one's own health, everything in the world—one's future, one's very life—!

MRS. ALVING. No, no, my dear, darling boy; this is impossible! [Bends over him.] Things are not so desperate as you think. (*Ghosts* Act 2)

Here again, the “ghosts” of the narrative exist in the truths that each character is trying to subvert. The audience is aware by now of Mrs. Alving's secret (the true nature of her departed husband) and so the subtext in her dialogue is distinct and immediately recognizable. Oswald is almost begging for Mrs. Alving to reveal the truth to him, yet Mrs. Alving is still dancing around the truth. She could alleviate his fears with a few words, but she still opts for mollifying platitudes that only hint at the truth. As in the case of the dual meaning of the pipe, the two versions of Mr. Alving that exist in the characters' minds—the saintly father and the degenerate husband—seem to hover over the text, ghosts in their own right. But there is another unspoken truth beginning to insert itself into the narrative. Later in the script, Oswald will reveal that his disease will eventually rob him of his mental acuity, leaving him with the intellect of an infant. The prospect of losing his mind so terrifies Oswald that he will eventually extract a dangerous promise from his mother: that when the time comes, she will help him take his own life rather than living out the rest of his days with the mind of an infant. Long before the disease itself is acknowledged onstage, the audience should feel the presence of something haunting that hides between the lines of Oswald's dialogue—just as it should sense the contradiction between different characters' perceptions of the late Mr. Alving long before Mrs. Alving verbally acknowledges the untruths she has spread about him. This urgent, desperate terror that Oswald refers to as “this killing dread” (*Ghosts* Act 3) is a specter that follows him onstage at his very first entrance and never leaves his side. It should also be noted that though it represents one of the major conflicts of the play, the word syphilis is never used in the dialogue—an intentional omission indicative of the way that Ibsen layers his silences with meaning (Vardoulakis 52).

Beyond the subtext, there are also silences written into Ibsen's script. There is, of course, a great scope for silences to be added in by directors and actors; but when a pause is literally written into the text of a play, it cannot be deviated from because it is just as significant as any line of dialogue. Consider the following excerpt (which takes place just before Mrs. Alving reveals the truth about her husband to Pastor Manders):

MANDERS. . . . verily, Mrs. Alving, you are a guilt-laden mother! This I have thought it my duty to say to you.

[Silence.]

MRS. ALVING. [Slowly and with self-control] You have now spoken out, Pastor Manders; and to-morrow you are to speak publicly in memory of my husband. I shall not speak to-morrow. But now I will speak frankly to you, as you have spoken to me. (*Ghosts* Act 1)

Imagine these lines being spoken without observing the bracketed stage directions. Imagine depriving the audience of the opportunity to engage with that haunting silence. By now it is obvious that Mrs. Alving has been keeping secrets from the pastor, and during the silence the audience is grappling with the same question as Mrs. Alving: is this the moment she will reveal her great secret? Without the pause, this moment would seem flat and predictable because it would seem that Mrs. Alving had already made up her mind to tell Manders, and the audience might disengage from the tension of the scene altogether. This silence is also indicative of another specter that haunts all the characters of the play: the specter of duty. No matter what each character resorts to in the name of personal freedom (such as Oswald pursuing a career in the arts or Mrs. Alving taking her son's upbringing into her own hands), they cannot escape the haunting of society's expectations and restrictions (Tabasum and Khalid 4). Therefore, the silences and subtext become as necessary as Oswald's pipe in act one; without them, the story could not be effectively told.

Silences, like props, are methods of inviting audiences to engage with a performance and take part in ascribing meaning to its story. Both allow audiences' interpretations and layers of meaning to interact with actors' (and characters') in the immediacy of a live performance. Without the pacing of a silence, the story might as well be told in the form of a novel; without the immediacy of the silence onstage and its unique ability to engage with the live audience, the story could be told through the medium of film. It is this in-the-moment engagement between audience, actors, and characters that makes theatre so spectral. Similarly, without a physical pipe in Oswald's hand, the audience might spend more effort on imagining a non-existent object than it would on unpacking the symbolism of the object itself.

The audience (which cannot be acknowledged by the characters within the play) is actively participating in the storytelling by interpreting symbols such as pipes and pauses. They themselves are ghosts that intrude upon the insulated world of the story, yet their presence and engagement with the narrative is crucial to the very telling of that story. "Even the theater's most 'realistic' images are shared illusions," Thomas Whitaker points out (701). And those illusions cannot exist without the participation of the spectators. The actors could be putting on the most riveting performance of their lives, but without an audience to imagine those opposing versions of Mr. Alving, his ghosts would exist only in the minds of the performers. With it, the ghosts become a dynamic intersection of the imaginations of both audience members and actors. Theatre provides a liminal space where fiction is alive and real (if only for the span of a single evening's performance) and the combined efforts of spectator and artist can summon a ghost on command.

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Multilayered Specter, Multifaceted Presence: A Critical Edition of H.P. Lovecraft's "The Tomb"

Edited by Shelby Hatfield, Rebekah Hobbs, & Jared Lynch

This edition examines "The Tomb" in depth, including the historical context in which Lovecraft was writing, as well as the social and technological changes that occurred. It exposes multilayered ghosts housed within the text. It also examines Lovecraft's fascination with the supernatural and the development of the horror genre, which he modeled after Poe's work.

General Introduction

During the time H.P. Lovecraft was writing his essays and short stories ("The Tomb" was written in 1917 and published in 1922), 20th Century America was experiencing changes in the political and social realms, the result of an influx of Old World immigrants and technological changes such as the railroad, telegraph, and telephone. As Robert MacDougall states, "The pace of technological and economic change was indeed violent and wrenching to many Americans. Each advance in the technology of communication and transportation gave new powers to its users, yet it also compounded the ability of distant people and events to affect those users' lives" (717). Things outside Americans' immediate arc of influence—events, peoples, and ideas—from across the country could change their lives at any moment, thanks to these new technologies.

Many Americans found something unnerving in this new ability to travel more quickly than before because it seemed as if there was no transition from place to place. The telephone, whose name means literally "sound over distance," seemed even more ghostly. To talk with someone you could not physically see, especially someone on another continent, would have been barely fathomable to most consumers. Indeed, early AT&T advertisements rarely described in detail what their customers were buying, preferring instead to leave the information as indecipherable as a tangle of wires. Few members of the

public had a working grasp of the technology that was invading their homes. The public's inability to understand the technologies of their everyday life compounded the knowledge gap between the educated few able to develop these new technologies, and those who merely existed around them. This resulting inequality and anxiety about the unknown was a common topic for Gothic writers, whose texts often featured a mysterious object or a system of magic that could be wielded by only a single or select few individuals. The tomb in Lovecraft's story of the same name provides a perfect example of such an object, as it holds a mysterious power over the protagonist, with its allusion to dark histories and rituals that the narrator insists he comprehends. Readers are unable to understand the ghostly technologies presented to them, creating a chilling effect that mirrors the effects of technology they cannot understand. Although the settings might seem to allude to vastly different times, Gothic stories exist to capture the terror of the incomprehensible, and suggest that times can never change enough to alter our perception of what is scary.

These new technologies changed the American landscape in more nuanced ways as well. Because the telephone reached into the home, it affected the "separate spheres" ideology of the Victorian world (MacDougall 717). Men were able to "enter" the home, a woman's domain, with their voices if not their presence. Women's voices were allowed outside the home as well, raising questions about presence and absence and what

was proper in society. New tensions further blurred the boundaries between the male and female worlds, and Gothic fiction reminded readers of the consequences when proper roles were not observed. For example, Lovecraft and Poe’s stories both feature protagonists who are secluded from other male society, often choosing to self-educate and spend a majority of their time indoors reading or wandering fields and forests, behavior very similar to what was expected in the leisure time of wealthy young ladies. Lovecraft’s narrator in “The Tomb,” Jervas Dudley, spends copious amounts of time at the door of the tomb, sleeping alone in the woods and wandering about a charred mansion. His education concerns ancient and obscure texts, no doubt too expensive to be accessible to the masses. Dudley’s function in the story adds little value to regular society, as he does not contribute to the economy or the public sphere through his presence, his time, money, or effort. In fact, Dudley functions as an aristocrat, contributing nothing, believing he has no need of society. Lovecraft uses his story “The Tomb” to comment on the dangers of men stepping outside their traditional gender and economic roles, and ultimately his protagonist is destroyed by this behavior.

America became increasingly concerned with the “politics of masculinity and transformation in child rearing, gender socialization, and the new sciences of human development” (Grant 829) in the late 19th Century, and the majority of this concern was directed towards effeminate or “sissy” boys. When a boy was judged to be too close to his mother or sickly, his masculinity or lack thereof became a problem for society, not merely a concern for the parents. Men like Theodore Roosevelt, who practically “cured” himself of polio and allergies, were heroes, while “sissies bore a clinical and social stigma” (Grant 829). This trend coincided with general upheaval in the roles of adult men and women as a result of feminism, industrialization, and urbanization. It is interesting to note that H.P. Lovecraft himself may have fit the “sissy” mold, as he battled moderate illnesses throughout his adult life, one of the reasons he was able to read and enjoy movies so frequently. He mirrors his protagonist in “The Tomb” who also spends much of his developmental childhood and early adult years reading in seclusion. This story amplifies a common tension of the time, emphasizing the gap between those like Lovecraft in a more aristocratic position—able to create content, and the common members of society who read that content.

There was another reason for change in the late 1800s and early 1900s, as large floods of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe arrived to America. Newcomers had very little power as they mixed with more established immigrants who were already adjusted to American culture and secure in the industrial system and jobs. Scholar John Bukowczyk remarks on this struggle for assimilation and cultural identity. “The struggle between popular belief and orthodoxy nonetheless represents an important moment in immigrant social history as it opens a window on class and power relations within the immigrant world and also between that world and the larger American society” (22). While immigrants were adjusting to an industrial economy, Lovecraft presented a character that held himself completely apart from that system, reviving Old World sentiments of entitlement, classicism, and aristocracy. In addition to class, family name also became a source of contention for immigrants. The workplace forced immigrant communities to interact with other groups and encouraged them to reach outside their own ethnic community for spouses. This allowed names and family lineage to blend, and families were no longer homogeneously Italian or German, for example. Through the archaic presence of Jervas Dudley, Lovecraft internalizes anxieties concerning societal changes resulting from the influx of immigration, and the increasingly blurred lines of familial lineage. His Old World character becomes obsessed with the grand old family of Hyde, holding onto a lineage that is extinct. He reacts with the fresh immigrant attitude to create tension in an America that supposedly no longer subscribed to class ideals.

With all the uncertainty immigrants experienced, religion was a way to explain and control some part of life. Threats of witchcraft and hexes were used to threaten, especially when actions were inconsistent with the values of the immigrant group or the new American culture. Groups such as the Kashubs (from Northern Poland) “used their belief in unnatural beings to single out—and stigmatize—those who seemed out of the ordinary” (Bukowczyk 26), giving rise to legends such as the succubae, dwarves, and vampires. For example, in many European societies, it was common for a widowed woman to cede her house to her children when they married. In America, however, this practice became less common. Tensions ran high between the generations in the struggle for property and rightful ownership, and younger generations often reacted by suggesting that the older women, stubbornly

refusing to make way for them, were involved in witchcraft or other unsavory activities to punish what they did not like or understand. Lovecraft makes a connection between generations and property through his character Jervas Dudley, who is caught in the ancient magic of his books and the old Hyde mansion. The tension his character experiences between his time and that of the ancient Hyde mirrors the tensions Americans experienced as they reconciled customs of the newcomers.

At the same time, however, old religious customs were being challenged by new science and technology. Secularization gained ground, and religion and superstition became less powerful as life events like births and deaths occurred in hospitals instead of the home. With science, human health could be explained, and both religion and superstition were called upon less frequently. As religious divisions between immigrant groups decreased, they were less divided by regional superstitions and became united by American values of class and gender equality and politics.

Cultural upheaval created many opportunities for writers of gothic fiction like H.P. Lovecraft. The culture brought over by immigrants clashed with the culture America was trying to name its own, creating spaces of uncertainty that were ripe fodder for gothic minds like Lovecraft. The narrator of “The Tomb” is retreating from the increasingly complex new America, into anachronism and an unnatural relation to the past, examining the ghostly consequences of not moving with time.

Introduction to “The Tomb”

Born in 1890 in Providence, Rhode Island, H.P. Lovecraft was a prolific writer of supernatural fiction. Aside from his poetry and fiction, Lovecraft was also known for his letter writing, through which he captured in great detail his views on science, history, philosophy or any other subject which intrigued him. These letters are essential in chronicling the persona of the author, and the working force and creative being of the man behind the weird tales. In the introduction to *Lord of a Visible World: An Autobiography in Letters*, a collection of letters written by Lovecraft, editors S.T. Joshi and David E. Schultz reveal that the author inherited several intellectual and artistic interests early in life such as, “a natural sense of meter at the age of two; reading at the age of four; enthusiasm for the Arabian Nights at five, for classical myth at

six, for music at seven, for chemistry at eight, and for astronomy at eleven” (viii). Lovecraft possessed a creative instinct, which led him to write his first stories at the age of six. This inherent creativity continued throughout his life, fueling his poetry, letters, and fiction.

In commenting on the author’s work in his article “A Literary Copernicus,” Fritz Leiber, Jr., a correspondent of Lovecraft’s, writes that he “shifted the focus of supernatural dread from man and his little world and his gods, to the stars and the black and unplumbed gulfs of intergalactic space.... When he completed the body of his writings, he had firmly attached the emotion of spectral dread to such concepts of outer space, the rim of the cosmos, alien beings, unsuspected dimensions, and the conceivable universes lying outside our own space-time continuum” (50). While this overarching theme of otherworldly supernatural terror isn’t explicitly present within “The Tomb” (which was written in 1917, early in Lovecraft’s writing career), there are subtle glimpses of these larger concepts. At the beginning of the story the narrator states, “It is an unfortunate fact that the bulk of humanity is too limited in its mental vision to weigh with patience and intelligence those isolated phenomena, seen and felt only by a psychologically sensitive few, which lie outside its common experience.” In “The Tomb” Lovecraft begins to explore the worlds he believed lay beyond our visible world.

“The Tomb” marked H.P. Lovecraft’s return to fiction after a nine-year absence. It details the story of Jervas Dudley, who discovers a tomb that belonged to the Hydes, an ancient family whose last descendant was buried decades before Jervas’s birth. He becomes fascinated with the tomb, haunting the doors of the vault with a repetitive obsession, even though he finds his admittance barred, the doors chained. Eventually he gains entrance, and he discovers the tomb filled with coffins, all occupied save one with the name “Jervas” written upon its lid. He lingers in the vault night after night, and he slowly begins to exhibit a new demeanor and manner of speech. Jervas tells us, “I suddenly acquired archaism of diction was soon remarked upon.... I unconsciously grew to possess the bearing of a man of the world despite my lifelong seclusion.” Jervas Dudley comes to believe that he has been possessed by Jervas Hyde, the last remaining member of the Hyde family, who perished in the fire that destroyed the Hyde estate. His body was burned to ashes. Unable to lie in the tomb that was prepared for him, his spirit was forced to seek “through the ages for

another corporeal tenement to represent it on that vacant slab in the alcove of the vault.” This possession of Jervas Hyde is the most obvious specter within the story, but the true ghostliness of the “The Tomb” is multilayered and multifaceted, represented in the several doublings present within the “corporeal tenement” of Jervas Dudley.

Through Jervas’s inheritance of the archaic demeanor of Jervas Hyde, Lovecraft was attempting to actualize and symbolize the essence of his own wandering spirit. In a letter to a friend, the author mused:

“I am really a relic left over from Queen Anne’s age... from the time of my earliest recollection, I have seemed to fall into the mental habits of two centuries ago. My constitutional feebleness kept me from regular attendance at school, so that I acquired what little knowledge I possess from a rather indiscriminate perusal of the volumes of the family library... I never felt at home save with the writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries... In this manner my style was formed; not as a conscious archaism, but as though I had actually been born in 1690 instead of 1890” (64).

This short excerpt aids in examining a particular layer of ghostliness and doubling of Jervas Dudley/Hyde by illustrating Lovecraft’s sense of fitting into an older time period. This character duality emphasizes the presence of the author within the story because it can be posited that Lovecraft is modeling Dudley’s character after himself. Just as Lovecraft wishes he had been born centuries earlier, Dudley integrates himself into an ancient family, the Hydes, from many years before.

Lovecraft himself had an upbringing similar to that of his protagonist. Due to high-strung nerves and other ailments, Lovecraft was unable to attend grammar school until he was eight, and even then his attendance was greatly affected by his prevailing illnesses, a consistent pattern throughout the remainder of his school career. Lovecraft led a solitary childhood, housed largely within books from his family library. This solitude is reflected in Jervas who, although not physically ill, remains distant from society, enveloped within volumes from the family library when not haunting the tomb. As Jervas Hyde begins to materialize, the reader is presented with a symbolic entity representing the author’s self-realized archaic presence. Through the creation and metamorphosis of the surface ghost, Lovecraft actualizes his own wandering spirit.

Lovecraft was also fascinated with genealogy, and wanted to discover and chronicle both his paternal

and maternal lines (Joshi and Schultz 3). In a letter to a friend, Lovecraft detailed his disappointment in his genealogical exploration of his paternal line. Although the line was respectable and filled with well-to-do individuals, the author failed to discover “a damn thing to indicate a revolt against commonplace unintelligence or a taste for the weird and the cosmic. No philosophers—no artists—no writers—not a cursed soul I could possibly talk to without getting a pain in the neck” (Joshi and Schultz 4). His maternal line was filled largely with small, rural gentry. A similar fascination with genealogy is present within “The Tomb.” After Jervas encounters the story of Theseus, his drive and longing to enter the tomb dissipate, as he realizes that his time is not yet ripe. His thoughts never drift far from the vault, however, and his desire is rekindled when he stumbles across an “unexpected genealogical discovery that my own maternal ancestry possessed at least a slight link with the supposedly extinct family of the Hydes. Last of my paternal race, I was likewise the last of this older and more mysterious line.” This passage from the story reflects the author’s disappointment in his genealogical lines. Through Jervas he attempts to create an interesting point to counter the dullness of his paternal and maternal lines, and to discover a sense of belonging within the horizontal progression of his familial timeline. Jervas Dudley is thus a representation of the disconnection experienced by the author himself, solidifying Lovecraft’s ghostly presence within “The Tomb.”

Another presence entombed in the story is Edgar Allan Poe, by whom H.P. Lovecraft was conceptually, stylistically, and characteristically influenced. Robert Bloch, another of Lovecraft’s correspondents, commented on the similarities between Poe and Lovecraft, writing that they “deliberately chose to turn their backs on contemporary style and subject-matter and create their own individual worlds of fantasy. In this above all else they were similar” (160). In our contextual documents, we have included an excerpt from Lovecraft’s essay “Supernatural Horror in Fiction,” in which he dedicates an entire section to the analysis and discussion of Edgar Allan Poe and his influence on the world of supernatural fiction. In the essay, Lovecraft analyzes the mold of Poe’s typical protagonists, and it becomes apparent that Jervas Dudley fits perfectly into this mold: “More particular qualities appear to be derived from the psychology of Poe himself, who certainly possessed much of the depression,

sensitiveness, mad aspiration, loneliness, and extravagant freakishness which he attributes to his haughty and solitary victims of Fate.”

Our last contextual document is an excerpt from “Ligeia,” a story by Edgar Allan Poe that Lovecraft discusses in “Supernatural Horror In Fiction.” When he summarizes his perspective on the story, it becomes apparent that he has captured the spirit of Ligeia and reflected her within Jervas Dudley in “The Tomb.” Through Jervas Dudley, Lovecraft embodies his own archaic presence while capturing echoes of Poe’s essence, specifically that of Ligeia. The ghost within “The Tomb” is multifaceted, representing the author and his desire to emulate Poe. Through the juxtaposition of new and old, Lovecraft creates a specter that extends far beyond linear placement of the tomb, and the spatial limits of the page.

“The Tomb”¹

In relating the circumstances, which have led to my confinement within this refuge for the demented, I am aware that my present position will create a natural doubt of the authenticity of my narrative. It is an unfortunate fact that the bulk of humanity is too limited in its mental vision to weigh with patience and intelligence those isolated phenomena, seen and felt only by a psychologically sensitive few, which lie outside its common experience. Men of broader intellect know that there is no sharp distinction betwixt the real and the unreal; that all things appear as they do only by virtue of the delicate individual physical and mental media through which we are made conscious of them; but the prosaic materialism of the majority condemns as madness the flashes of supersite which penetrate the common veil of obvious empiricism.

My name is Jervas Dudley, and from earliest childhood I have been a dreamer and a visionary. Wealthy beyond the necessity of a commercial life, and temperamentally unfitted for the formal studies and social recreation of my acquaintances, I have dwelt ever in realms apart from the visible world; spending my youth and adolescence in ancient and little known books, and in roaming the fields and groves of the region near my ancestral home. I do not think that what I read in these books or saw in these fields and groves was exactly what other boys read and saw

there; but of this I must say little, since detailed speech would but confirm those cruel slanders upon my intellect which I sometimes overhear from the whispers of the stealthy attendants around me. It is sufficient for me to relate events without analyzing causes.

I have said that I dwelt apart from the visible world, but I have not said that I dwelt alone. This no human creature may do; for lacking the fellowship of the living, he inevitably draws upon the companionship of things that are not, or are no longer, living. Close by my home there lies a singular wooded hollow, in whose twilight deeps I spent most of my time; reading, thinking, and dreaming. Down its moss-covered slopes my first steps of infancy were taken, and around its grotesquely gnarled oak trees my first fancies of boyhood were woven. Well did I come to know the presiding dryads² of those trees, and often have I watched their wild dances in the struggling beams of a waning moon but of these things I must not now speak. I will tell only of the lone tomb in the darkest of the hillside thickets; the deserted tomb of the Hydes,³ an old and exalted family whose last direct descendant had been laid within its black recesses many decades before my birth.

The vault to which I refer is of ancient granite, weathered and discolored by the mists and dampness of generations. Excavated back into the hillside, the structure is visible only at the entrance. The door, a ponderous and forbidding slab of stone, hangs upon rusted iron hinges, and is fastened ajar in a queerly sinister way by means of heavy iron chains and padlocks, according to a gruesome fashion of half a century ago. The abode of the race whose scions are here inurned had once crowned the declivity which holds the tomb, but had long since fallen victim to the flames which sprang up from a stroke of lightning. Of the midnight storm which destroyed this gloomy mansion, the older inhabitants of the region sometimes speak in hushed and uneasy voices; alluding to what they call ‘divine wrath’ in a manner that in later years vaguely increased the always strong fascination which I had felt for the forest-darkened sepulcher. One man only had perished in the fire. When the last of the Hydes was buried in this place of shade and stillness, the sad urnful of ashes had come from a distant land, to which the family had repaired when the mansion burned down. No one

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1. This edition of this text was found in *The Vagrant*. The issue of the magazine was published in 1922.
2. A deity or nymph of the woods.
3. Lovecraft chose this name as an allusion to the novel *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Joshi and Schultz 182).

remains to lay flowers before the granite portal, and few care to brave the depressing shadows which seem to linger strangely about the water-worn stones.

I shall never forget the afternoon when first I stumbled upon the half-hidden house of death. It was in midsummer, when the alchemy of nature transmutes the sylvan landscape to one vivid and almost homogeneous mass of green; when the senses are well-nigh intoxicated with the surging seas of moist verdure and the subtly indefinable odors of the soil and the vegetation. In such surroundings the mind loses its perspective; time and space become trivial and unreal, and echoes of a forgotten prehistoric past beat insistently upon the enthralled consciousness.

All day I had been wandering through the mystic groves of the hollow; thinking thoughts I need not discuss, and conversing with things I need not name. In years a child of ten, I had seen and heard many wonders unknown to the throng; and was oddly aged in certain respects. When, upon forcing my way between two savage clumps of briars, I suddenly encountered the entrance of the vault, I had no knowledge of what I had discovered. The dark blocks of granite, the door so curiously ajar, and the funeral carvings above the arch, aroused in me no associations of mournful or terrible character. Of graves and tombs I knew and imagined much, but had on account of my peculiar temperament been kept from all personal contact with churchyards and cemeteries. The strange stone house on the woodland slope was to me only a source of interest and speculation; and its cold, damp interior, into which I vainly peered through the aperture so tantalizingly left, contained for me no hint of death or decay. But in that instant of curiosity was born the madly unreasoning desire which has brought me to this hell of confinement. Spurred on by a voice which must have come from the hideous soul of the forest, I resolved to enter the beckoning gloom in spite of the ponderous chains which barred my passage. In the waning light of day I alternately rattled the rusty impediments with a view to throwing wide the stone door, and essayed to squeeze my slight form through the space already provided; but neither plan met with success. At first curious, I was now frantic; and when in the thickening twilight I returned to my home, I had sworn to the hundred gods of the grove that at any cost I would some day force an

entrance to the black, chilly depths that seemed calling out to me. The physician with the iron-grey beard who comes each day to my room, once told a visitor that this decision marked the beginning of a pitiful monomania;⁴ but I will leave final judgment to my readers when they shall have learnt all.

The months following my discovery were spent in futile attempts to force the complicated padlock of the slightly open vault, and in carefully guarded inquiries regarding the nature and history of the structure. With the traditionally receptive ears of the small boy, I learned much; though a habitual secretiveness caused me to tell no one of my information or my resolve. It is perhaps worth mentioning that I was not at all surprised or terrified on learning of the nature of the vault. My rather original ideas regarding life and death had caused me to associate the cold clay with the breathing body in a vague fashion; and I felt that the great and sinister family of the burned-down mansion was in some way represented within the stone space I sought to explore. Mumbled tales of the weird rites and godless revels of bygone years in the ancient hall gave to me a new and potent interest in the tomb, before whose door I would sit for hours at a time each day. Once I thrust a candle within the nearly closed entrance, but could see nothing save a flight of damp stone steps leading downward. The odor of the place repelled yet bewitched me. I felt I had known it before, in a past remote beyond all recollection; beyond even my tenancy of the body I now possess.

The year after I first beheld the tomb, I stumbled upon a worm-eaten translation of Plutarch's *Lives*⁵ in the book-filled attic of my home. Reading the life of Theseus,⁶ I was much impressed by that passage telling of the great stone beneath which the boyish hero was to find his tokens of destiny whenever he should become old enough to lift its enormous weight. The legend had the effect of dispelling my keenest impatience to enter the vault, for it made me feel that the time was not yet ripe. Later, I told myself, I should grow to a strength and ingenuity which might enable me to unfasten the heavily chained door with ease; but until then I would do better by conforming to what seemed the will of Fate.

Accordingly my watches by the dank portal became less persistent, and much of my time was spent in other

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4. An inordinate or obsessive zeal for or interest in a single thing, idea, or subject.

5. A series of books written in the 1st Century that are biographies of famous Greek and Roman nobles; also called *Parallel Lives*.

6. One of the most famous biographies in Plutarch's *Lives*: Theseus was a Hero of Athens.

though equally strange pursuits. I would sometimes rise very quietly in the night, stealing out to walk in those churchyards and places of burial from which I had been kept by my parents. What I did there I may not say, for I am not now sure of the reality of certain things; but I know that on the day after such a nocturnal ramble I would often astonish those about me with my knowledge of topics almost forgotten for many generations. It was after a night like this that I shocked the community with a queer conceit about the burial of the rich and celebrated Squire Brewster, a maker of local history who was interred in 1711, and whose slate headstone, bearing a graven skull and crossbones, was slowly crumbling to powder. In a moment of childish imagination I vowed not only that the undertaker, Goodman⁷ Simpson, had stolen the silver-buckled shoes, silken hose, and satin small-clothes⁸ of the deceased before burial; but that the Squire himself, not fully inanimate, had turned twice in his mound-covered coffin on the day after interment.

But the idea of entering the tomb never left my thoughts; being indeed stimulated by the unexpected genealogical discovery that my own maternal ancestry possessed at least a slight link with the supposedly extinct family of the Hydes. Last of my paternal race, I was likewise the last of this older and more mysterious line. I began to feel that the tomb was mine, and to look forward with hot eagerness to the time when I might pass within that stone door and down those slimy stone steps in the dark. I now formed the habit of listening very intently at the slightly open portal, choosing my favorite hours of midnight stillness for the odd vigil. By the time I came of age, I had made a small clearing in the thicket before the mold-stained facade of the hillside, allowing the surrounding vegetation to encircle and overhang the space like the walls and roof of a sylvan bower. This bower was my temple, the fastened door my shrine, and here I would lie outstretched on the mossy ground, thinking strange thoughts and dreaming strange dreams.

The night of the first revelation was a sultry one. I must have fallen asleep from fatigue, for it was with a distinct sense of awakening that I heard the voices. Of these tones and accents I hesitate to speak; of their quality I will not speak; but I may say that they presented certain uncanny differences in vocabulary, pronunciation,

and mode of utterance. Every shade of New England dialect, from the uncouth syllables of the Puritan colonists to the precise rhetoric of fifty years ago, seemed represented in that shadowy colloquy, though it was only later that I noticed the fact. At the time, indeed, my attention was distracted from this matter by another phenomenon; a phenomenon so fleeting that I could not take oath upon its reality. I barely fancied that as I awoke, a light had been hurriedly extinguished within the sunken sepulcher. I do not think I was either astounded or panic-stricken, but I know that I was greatly and permanently changed that night. Upon returning home I went with much directness to a rotting chest in the attic, wherein I found the key which next day unlocked with ease the barrier I had so long stormed in vain.

It was in the soft glow of late afternoon that I first entered the vault on the abandoned slope. A spell was upon me, and my heart leaped with an exultation I can but ill describe. As I closed the door behind me and descended the dripping steps by the light of my lone candle, I seemed to know the way; and though the candle sputtered with the stifling reek of the place, I felt singularly at home in the musty, charnel-house air. Looking about me, I beheld many marble slabs bearing coffins, or the remains of coffins. Some of these were sealed and intact, but others had nearly vanished, leaving the silver handles and plates isolated amidst certain curious heaps of whitish dust. Upon one plate I read the name of Sir Geoffrey Hyde, who had come from Sussex⁹ in 1640 and died here a few years later. In a conspicuous alcove was one fairly well preserved and untenanted casket, adorned with a single name which brought me both a smile and a shudder. An odd impulse caused me to climb upon the broad slab, extinguish my candle, and lie down within the vacant box.

In the gray light of dawn I staggered from the vault and locked the chain of the door behind me. I was no longer a young man, though but twenty-one winters had chilled my bodily frame. Early-rising villagers who observed my homeward progress looked at me strangely, and marveled at the signs of ribald revelry which they saw in one whose life was known to be sober and solitary. I did not appear before my parents till after a long and refreshing sleep.

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7. Goodman or Goody refers to Pilgrims and is a way to say Mr. or Mrs.

8. Undergarments.

9. A county in England.

Henceforward I haunted the tomb each night; seeing, hearing, and doing things I must never recall. My speech, always susceptible to environmental influences, was the first thing to succumb to the change; and my suddenly acquired archaism of diction was soon remarked upon. Later a queer boldness and recklessness came into my demeanor, till I unconsciously grew to possess the bearing of a man of the world despite my lifelong seclusion. My formerly silent tongue waxed voluble with the easy grace of a Chesterfield or the godless cynicism

of a Rochester. I displayed a peculiar erudition utterly unlike the fantastic, monkish lore over which I had pored in youth; and covered the fly-leaves of my books with facile impromptu epigrams which brought up suggestions of Gay, Prior,¹⁰ and the sprightliest of the Augustan wits and rimesters.¹¹ One morning at breakfast I came close to disaster by declaiming in palpably liquorish accents an effusion of Eighteenth Century bacchanalian¹² mirth, a bit of Georgian playfulness never recorded in a book, which ran something like this:

Come hither, my lads, with your tankards of ale,
 And drink to the present before it shall fail;
 Pile each on your platter a mountain of beef,
 For 'tis eating and drinking that bring us relief:
 So fill up your glass,
 For life will soon pass;
 When you're dead ye'll ne'er drink to your king or your lass!
 Anacreon¹³ had a red nose, so they say;
 But what's a red nose if ye're happy and gay?
 Gad split me! I'd rather be red whilst I'm here,
 Than white as a lily and dead half a year!
 So Betty, my miss,
 Come give me a kiss;
 In hell there's no innkeeper's daughter like this!
 Young Harry, propp'd up just as straight as he's able,
 Will soon lose his wig and slip under the table,
 But fill up your goblets and pass 'em around
 Better under the table than under the ground!
 So revel and chaff
 As ye thirstily quaff:
 Under six feet of dirt 'tis less easy to laugh!
 The fiend strike me blue! I'm scarce able to walk,
 And damn me if I can stand upright or talk!
 Here, landlord, bid Betty to summon a chair;
 I'll try home for a while, for my wife is not there!
 So lend me a hand;
 I'm not able to stand,
 But I'm gay whilst I linger on top of the land!¹⁴

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10. Philip Stanhope, Lord Chesterfield (1694-1773), John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester (1647-1680), John Gay (1685-1732), and Mathew Prior (1664-1721) are all 18th Century poets who are known for the witty style.

11. Poets.

12. A festival in honor of Bacchus; a drunken feast; an orgy.

13. A famous Greek poet.

14. This is a poem titled “Gaudeamus” that Lovecraft used for a previous story and later added to “The Tomb” (Joshi 127). “Gaudeamus,” also known as “Gaudeamus Igitur,” is a poem that was written in the 13th century and is known as the “student song,” which was commonly sung by college students at their graduations (“Gaudeamus Igitur” n.p.).

About this time I conceived my present fear of fire and thunderstorms. Previously indifferent to such things, I had now an unspeakable horror of them; and would retire to the innermost recesses of the house whenever the heavens threatened an electrical display. A favorite haunt of mine during the day was the ruined cellar of the mansion that had burned down, and in fancy I would picture the structure as it had been in its prime. On one occasion I startled a villager by leading him confidently to a shallow subcellar, of whose existence I seemed to know in spite of the fact that it had been unseen and forgotten for many generations.

At last came that which I had long feared. My parents, alarmed at the altered manner and appearance of their only son, commenced to exert over my movements a kindly espionage which threatened to result in disaster. I had told no one of my visits to the tomb, having guarded my secret purpose with religious zeal since childhood; but now I was forced to exercise care in threading the mazes of the wooded hollow, that I might throw off a possible pursuer. My key to the vault I kept suspended from a cord about my neck, its presence known only to me. I never carried out of the sepulcher any of the things I came upon whilst within its walls.

One morning as I emerged from the damp tomb and fastened the chain of the portal with none too steady hand, I beheld in an adjacent thicket the dreaded face of a watcher. Surely the end was near; for my bower was discovered, and the objective of my nocturnal journeys revealed. The man did not accost me, so I hastened home in an effort to overhear what he might report to my careworn father. Were my sojourns beyond the chained door about to be proclaimed to the world? Imagine my delighted astonishment on hearing the spy inform my parent in a cautious whisper that I had spent the night in the bower outside the tomb; my sleep-filmed eyes fixed upon the crevice where the padlocked portal stood ajar! By what miracle had the watcher been thus deluded? I was now convinced that a supernatural agency protected me. Made bold by this heaven-sent circumstance, I began to resume perfect openness in going to the vault; confident that no one could witness my entrance. For a week I tasted to the full joys of that charnel conviviality which I must not describe, when the thing happened, and I was borne away to this accursed

abode of sorrow and monotony.

I should not have ventured out that night; for the taint of thunder was in the clouds, and a hellish phosphorescence rose from the rank swamp at the bottom of the hollow. The call of the dead, too, was different. Instead of the hillside tomb, it was the charred cellar on the crest of the slope whose presiding demon beckoned to me with unseen fingers. As I emerged from an intervening grove upon the plain before the ruin, I beheld in the misty moonlight a thing I had always vaguely expected. The mansion, gone for a century, once more reared its stately height to the raptured vision; every window ablaze with the splendor of many candles. Up the long drive rolled the coaches of the Boston gentry, whilst on foot came a numerous assemblage of powdered exquisites from the neighboring mansions. With this throng I mingled, though I knew I belonged with the hosts rather than with the guests. Inside the hall were music, laughter, and wine on every hand. Several faces I recognized; though I should have known them better had they been shriveled or eaten away by death and decomposition. Amidst a wild and reckless throng I was the wildest and most abandoned. Gay blasphemy poured in torrents from my lips, and in shocking sallies I heeded no law of God, or nature.

Suddenly a peal of thunder, resonant even above the din of the swinish revelry, clave the very roof and laid a hush of fear upon the boisterous company. Red tongues of flame and searing gusts of heat engulfed the house; and the roysterers,¹⁵ struck with terror at the descent of a calamity, which seemed to transcend the bounds of unguided nature, fled shrieking into the night. I alone remained, riveted to my seat by a groveling fear which I had never felt before. And then a second horror took possession of my soul. Burnt alive to ashes, my body dispersed by the four winds, I might never lie in the tomb of the Hydes! Was not my coffin prepared for me? Had I not a right to rest till eternity amongst the descendants of Sir Geoffrey Hyde? Aye! I would claim my heritage of death, even though my soul go seeking through the ages for another corporeal tenement to represent it on that vacant slab in the alcove of the vault. Jervas Hyde should never share the sad fate of Palinurus!¹⁶

As the phantom of the burning house faded, I found myself screaming and struggling madly in the arms of

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15. One who partakes in merry-making.

16. A person in Roman mythology, in Virgil's Aeneid, who was the Helmsmen of the ship and was to sleep by a God so that he would fall overboard and be sacrificed to Neptune, God of the Sea

two men, one of whom was the spy who had followed me to the tomb. Rain was pouring down in torrents, and upon the southern horizon were flashes of lightning that had so lately passed over our heads. My father, his face lined with sorrow, stood by as I shouted my demands to be laid within the tomb, frequently admonishing my captors to treat me as gently as they could. A blackened circle on the floor of the ruined cellar told of a violent stroke from the heavens; and from this spot a group of curious villagers with lanterns were prying a small box of antique workmanship, which the thunderbolt had brought to light.

Ceasing my futile and now objectless writhing, I watched the spectators as they viewed the treasure-trove, and was permitted to share in their discoveries. The box, whose fastenings were broken by the stroke, which had unearthed it, contained many papers and objects of value, but I had eyes for one thing alone. It was the porcelain miniature of a young man in a smartly curled bag-wig,¹⁷ and bore the initials ‘J. H.’ The face was such that as I gazed, I might well have been studying my mirror.

On the following day I was brought to this room with the barred windows, but I have been kept informed of certain things through an aged and simple-minded servant, for whom I bore a fondness in infancy, and who, like me, loves the churchyard. What I have dared relate of my experiences within the vault has brought me only pitying smiles. My father, who visits me frequently, declares that at no time did I pass the chained portal, and swears that the rusted padlock had not been touched for fifty years when he examined it. He even says that all the village knew of my journeys to the tomb, and that I was often watched as I slept in the bower outside the grim facade, my half-open eyes fixed on the crevice that leads to the interior. Against these assertions I have no tangible proof to offer, since my key to the padlock was lost in the struggle on that night of horrors. The strange things of the past which I have learned during those nocturnal meetings with the dead he dismisses as the fruits of my lifelong and omnivorous browsing amongst the ancient volumes of the family library. Had it not been for my old servant Hiram, I should have by this time become quite convinced of my madness.

But Hiram, loyal to the last, has held faith in me, and

has done that which impels me to make public at least part of my story. A week ago he burst open the lock which chains the door of the tomb perpetually ajar, and descended with a lantern into the murky depths. On a slab in an alcove he found an old but empty coffin whose tarnished plate bears the single word: Jervas. In that coffin and in that vault they have promised me I shall be buried.

Contextual Documents

Excerpt from a letter¹⁸ from H.P. Lovecraft to the Gallomo¹⁹

In this letter addressed to the Gallomo, Lovecraft discusses his inspiration for writing “The Tomb.” The letter sheds light upon some of the layers of ghostliness within the story, specifically Lovecraft’s presence in Jervas Dudley/Jervas Hyde and Poe’s presence within “The Tomb.” The scene depicted in the letter—Lovecraft encountering a gravestone from 1711, through which he discovers a mental doorway to his “favourite era of periwigs” (and ultimately his chosen age)—is reflected eerily within “The Tomb” in the scene in which Jervas recovers an antique porcelain figure from the ruins of the Hyde mansion and, upon examining it, decides he “might well have been studying [his] mirror” (14). When these two scenes are juxtaposed, the latter inherits an uncanny eeriness, and the ghostly presence of Jervas Hyde further serves as a manifestation of Lovecraft’s antiquated spirit. In a separate letter addressed to an unrelated correspondent, Lovecraft explains, “at length I wrote only as a means of re-creating around me the atmosphere of my 18th century favourites... everything succumbed to my one intense purpose of thinking and dreaming myself back into that world of periwigs and long s’s which for some odd reason seemed to me the normal world. Thus was formed a habit of imitativeness which I can never wholly shake off. Even when I break away, it is generally only through imitating something else! There are my ‘Poe’ pieces and my ‘Dunsany’ pieces—but alas—where are any Lovecraft pieces?” (65-66).

When Lovecraft wrote “The Tomb” he fueled the story with his inspiration from Poe, and he filled the tale with his presence. Through channeling this style of the past Lovecraft attempted to inhabit that space in time, which

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17. An 18th-century man’s wig.

18. Lovecraft, H.P. *Lord of a Visible World: An Autobiography in Letters*. Ed. S.T. Joshi and David E. Schultz. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000. 63-67. Print.

19. The Gallomo was a circle of literary correspondents composed of Alfred Galpin, H.P. Lovecraft, and Maurice W. Moe. The name is composed of the first syllable of each last member’s last name (Joshi and Schultz).

is also expressed multiple times throughout “The Tomb” (most notably the inheritance of Jervas Hyde’s demeanor). The archaic language of the letter was commonplace for Lovecraft, an attempt to inherit his chosen age. The dated diction further emphasizes the presence of his wandering, out-of-time spirit.

“Ligeia,” an excerpt from which is also included further on. Lovecraft considered Poe as a literary role model, which is why he dedicated an entire chapter to him in this essay. “Supernatural in Literature” is a first-hand account to Lovecraft’s idea of what horror is.

T’anks fer de remarks on “Dagon,” kid! I rather liked that thing myself. It was written in 1917, and is the second tale I wrote after resuming my fictional pen after a nine years’ lapse. I think I told youse ginks that I quit writing fiction in 1908, despairing of my ability to shape anything with the grace of a Poe...For a long time I was too indolent to do anything, but one June day in 1917 I was walking through Swan Point Cemetery with my aunt and saw a crumbling tombstone with a skull and crossbones dimly traced upon its slaty surface; the date, 1711, still plainly visible. It set me thinking. Here was a link with my favourite aera of periwigs—the body of a man who had worn a full-bottom’d wig and had perhaps read the original sheets of *The Spectator*. Here lay a man who had lived in Mr. Addison’s day, and who might easily have seen Mr. Dryden had he been in the right part of London at the right time! Why could I not talk with him, and enter more intimately into the life of my chosen age? What had left his body, that it could no longer converse with me? I looked long at the grave, and the night after I returned home I began my first story in the new series—“The Tomb.” My narrative pen was very rusty—believe me, boys, very rusty indeed! To drop back into the forms of fiction was exceedingly hard after nine quiescent years, and I feared that the result would be the limit of absurdity. But the spell of the gruesome was upon my, and I finally hammered out the hideous tale of Jervas Dudley. At last—a Poe again!

Certain of Poe’s tales possess an almost absolute perfection of artistic form, which makes them veritable beacon-lights in the province of the short story. Poe could, when he wished, give to his prose a richly poetic cast; employing that archaic and Orientalized style with jeweled phrase, quasi-Biblical repetition, and recurrent burthen so successfully used by later writers like Oscar Wilde and Lord Dunsany; and in the cases where he has done this we have an effect of lyrical phantasy almost narcotic in essence—an opium pageant of dream in the language of dream, with every unnatural colour and grotesque image bodied forth in a symphony of corresponding sound. *The Masque of the Red Death*, *Silence*, *a Fable*, and *Shadow*, *a Parable*, are assuredly poems in every sense of the word save the metrical one, and owe as much of their power to aural cadence as to visual imagery. But it is in two of the less openly poetic tales, *Ligeia* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*—especially the latter—that one finds those very summits of artistry whereby Poe takes his place at the head of fictional miniaturists. Simple and straightforward in plot, both of these tales owe their supreme magic to the cunning development which appears in the selection and collocation of every least incident. *Ligeia* tells of a first wife of lofty and mysterious origin, who after death returns through a preternatural force of will to take possession of the body of a second wife; imposing even her physical appearance on the temporary reanimated corpse of her victim at the last moment. Despite a suspicion of prolixity and top heaviness, the narrative reaches its terrific climax with relentless power. *Usher*, whose superiority in detail and proportion is very marked, hints shudderingly of obscure life in inorganic things, and displays an abnormally linked trinity of entities at the end of a long and isolated family history—a brother, his twin sister, and their incredibly ancient house all sharing a single soul and meeting one common dissolution at the same moment.

These bizarre conceptions, so awkward in unskillful

*Excerpt from “Supernatural Horror in Literature”*²⁰

In the 1920’s, H. P. Lovecraft composed a lengthy essay explaining why we need horror. His book is dedicated to the history of horror stories and why we love them, and to the authors who embodied this genre of literature. In this chapter, titled “Edgar Allan Poe,” Lovecraft argues that Poe is among the principal and most influential horror writers. Specifically, he discusses Poe’s story

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20. This portion of text was taken from the book *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, written by H.P. Lovecraft

hands, become under Poe’s spell living and convincing terrors to haunt our nights; and all because the author understood so perfectly the very mechanics and physiology of fear and strangeness—the essential details to emphasise, the precise incongruities and conceits to select as preliminaries or concomitants to horror, the exact incidents and allusions to throw out innocently in advance as symbols or prefigurings of each major step toward the hideous dénouement to come, the nice adjustments of cumulative force and the unerring accuracy in linkage of parts which make for faultless unity throughout and thunderous effectiveness at the climactic moment, the delicate nuances of scenic and landscape value to select in establishing and sustaining the desired mood and vitalising the desired illusion—principles of this kind, and dozens of obscurer ones too elusive to be described or even fully comprehended by any ordinary commentator. Melodrama and unsophistication there may be—we are told of one fastidious Frenchman who could not bear to read Poe except in Baudelaire’s urbane and Gallically modulated translation—but all traces of such things are wholly overshadowed by a potent and inborn sense of the spectral, the morbid, and the horrible which gushed forth from every cell of the artist’s creative mentality and stamped his macabre work with the ineffaceable mark of supreme genius. Poe’s weird tales are alive in a manner that few others can ever hope to be.

Like most fantasists, Poe excels in incidents and broad narrative effects rather than in character drawing. His typical protagonist is generally a dark, handsome, proud, melancholy, intellectual, highly sensitive, capricious, introspective, isolated, and sometimes slightly mad gentleman of ancient family and opulent circumstances; usually deeply learned in strange lore, and darkly ambitious of penetrating to forbidden secrets of the universe. Aside from a high-sounding name, this character obviously derives little from the early Gothic novel; for he is clearly neither the wooden hero nor the diabolical villain of Radcliffian or Ludovician²¹ romance. Indirectly, however, he does possess a sort of genealogical connection; since his gloomy, ambitious and anti-social qualities savour strongly of the typical Byronic²² hero, who in turn is definitely an offspring of the Gothic Manfreds, Montonis,

and Ambrosios.²³ More particular qualities appear to be derived from the psychology of Poe himself, who certainly possessed much of the depression, sensitiveness, mad aspiration, loneliness, and extravagant freakishness, which he attributes to his haughty and solitary victims of Fate.

Excerpt from “Ligeia” by Edgar Allan Poe²⁴

“Ligeia” was published in 1838, and it details the tragic story of the narrator and his betrothed Ligeia, who died shortly after their marriage. He remarries, but he is enamored with Ligeia, and he is haunted by her presence; he finds no joy in his second marriage to Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine. Shortly after they are married, Rowena becomes terribly ill, and dies, and the narrator is left grieving for both of his lost brides. On the night of her death, the narrator mourns Rowena, and sits by her body, “when a sob, low, gentle, but very distinct, startled me from my reverie... At length it became evident that a...barely noticeable tinge of color had flushed up within the cheeks...[it appeared] that Rowena still lived...In a short period it was certain, however, that a relapse had taken place; the color disappeared from both eyelid and cheek.” The narrator settles again into his mourning, until he notices movement again.

There are definite parallels between “Ligeia” by Edgar Allan Poe and “The Tomb,” and the influence of Poe’s work on Lovecraft’s is evident. When Jervas Dudley exclaims, “I would claim my heritage of death, even though my soul go seeking through the ages for another corporeal tenement to represent it on that vacant slab in the alcove of the vault,” he eerily echoes the conclusion of “Ligeia,” in which the narrator’s deceased first wife inherits her proper representation as his betrothed on the deathbed of his second wife. In both stories the specters become mirrors of their original physical embodiments. Ligeia wanders until she can return to the living, but the spirit of Jervas Hyde wanders until he can properly cross over into death.

Structurally, there is further evidence alluding to the influence of “Ligeia” on “The Tomb.” Shortly before her death, Ligeia asks the narrator to recite a string of verses she has composed, which begins:

Notes

21. Reference to Anne Radcliffe (1764-1823) and Anthony Ludovici (1882-1971), both authors known for their romantic style of writing

22. Lord George Byron (1788-1824), a poet known for romantic plays and writing styles.

23. All characters from plays and poems; “Manfred” is a poem written by aforementioned Lord Byron, Montoni is a character from the play *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, written by aforementioned Anne Radcliffe, and Ambrosios from the play *The Monk*, written by Matthew Lewis.

24. This excerpt came from the anthology of work by Edgar Allan Poe, titled *The Essential Poe: Tales of Horror and Mystery*.

Lo! ‘tis a gala night
 Within the lonesome latter years!
 An angel throng, bewinged, bedight
 In veils, and drowned in tears,
 Sit in a theatre, to see
 A play of hopes and fears,
 While the orchestra breathes fitfully
 The music of the spheres.

Jervas Dudley also channels a fit of verse (“The Gaudeamus”), shortly before he uncovers what he believes to be the actuality of his existence. While both instances deal with the transition from life to death, they each exhibit a very different voice. Ligeia is melancholy, aware of the differing spheres of existence, although unaware of her impending return to the living. Jervas Dudley, unaware that he is a wandering spirit, makes light of his perceived totality of death, reciting, “So fill up your glass /For life will soon pass /When you’re dead ye’ll ne’er drink to your king or your lass!”

.....

An hour thus elapsed when (could it be possible?) I was a second time aware of some vague sound issuing from the region of the bed. I listened—in extremity of horror. The sound came again—it was a sigh. Rushing to the corpse, I saw—distinctly saw—a tremor upon the lips. In a minute afterward they relaxed, disclosing a bright line of the pearly teeth. Amazement now struggled in my bosom with the profound awe which had hitherto reigned there alone. I felt that my vision grew dim, that my reason wandered; and it was only by a violent effort that I at length succeeded in nerving myself to the task which duty thus once more had pointed out. There was now a partial glow upon the forehead and upon the cheek and throat; perceptible warmth pervaded the whole frame; there was even a slight pulsation at the heart. The lady lived; and with redoubled ardor I betook myself to the task of restoration. I chafed and bathed the temples and the hands, and used every exertion which experience, and no little medical reading, could suggest. But in vain. Suddenly, the color fled, the pulsation ceased, the lips resumed the expression of the dead, and, in an instant afterward, the whole body took upon itself the icy chilliness, the livid hue, the intense rigidity, the sunken outline, and all the loathsome peculiarities of that which has been, for

many days, a tenant of the tomb.

And again I sunk into visions of Ligeia—and again, (what marvel that I shudder while I write,) again there reached my ears a low sob from the region of the ebony bed. But why shall I minutely detail the unspeakable horrors of that night? Why shall I pause to relate how, time after time, until near the period of the gray dawn, this hideous drama of revivification was repeated; how each terrific relapse was only into a sterner and apparently more irredeemable death; how each agony wore the aspect of a struggle with some invisible foe; and how each struggle was succeeded by I know not what of wild change in the personal appearance of the corpse? Let me hurry to a conclusion.

The greater part of the fearful night had worn away, and she who had been dead, once again stirred—and now more vigorously than hitherto, although arousing from a dissolution more appalling in its utter hopelessness than any. I had long ceased to struggle or to move, and remained sitting rigidly upon the ottoman, a helpless prey to a whirl of violent emotions, of which extreme awe was perhaps the least terrible, the least consuming. The corpse, I repeat, stirred, and now more vigorously than before. The hues of life flushed up with unwonted energy into the countenance—the limbs relaxed—and, save that the eyelids were yet pressed heavily together, and that the bandages and draperies of the grave still imparted their charnel character to the figure, I might have dreamed that Rowena had indeed shaken off, utterly, the fetters of Death. But if this idea was not, even then, altogether adopted, I could at least doubt no longer, when, arising from the bed, tottering, with feeble steps, with closed eyes, and with the manner of one bewildered in a dream, the thing that was enshrouded advanced boldly and palpably into the middle of the apartment.

I trembled not—I stirred not—for a crowd of unutterable fancies connected with the air, the stature, the demeanor of the figure, rushing hurriedly through my brain, had paralyzed—had chilled me into stone. I stirred not—but gazed upon the apparition. There was a mad disorder in my thoughts—a tumult unappeasable. Could it, indeed, be the living Rowena who confronted me? Could it indeed be Rowena at all—the fair-haired, the blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine? Why, why should I doubt it? The bandage lay heavily about the mouth—but then might it not be the mouth of the breathing Lady of Tremaine? And the cheeks—there were the roses as

in her noon of life—yes, these might indeed be the fair cheeks of the living Lady of Tremaine. And the chin, with its dimples, as in health, might it not be hers?—but had she then grown taller since her malady? What inexpressible madness seized me with that thought? One bound, and I had reached her feet! Shrinking from my touch, she let fall from her head, unloosened, the ghastly cerements which had confined it, and there streamed

forth, into the rushing atmosphere of the chamber, huge masses of long and disheveled hair; it was blacker than the raven wings of the midnight! And now slowly opened the eyes of the figure which stood before me. “Here then, at least,” I shrieked aloud, “can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the lady—of the LADY LIGEIA.”

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Dead End Job: A Critical Edition of “The Transferred Ghost” by Frank Stockton

Edited by Jackson Eflin, Wendy Faunce, & Brittany Means

The following critical edition of Frank R. Stockton’s “The Transferred Ghost” focuses on the ways in which the rise in spiritualism parallels the emergence of the middle class and white-collar positions in the United States in the late 1800s. By analyzing Stockton’s story along with other comedic ghost stories from the period, this edition will show how humor hid deeper anxieties about the era’s economic and social developments.

General Introduction

Francis Richard Stockton, pen name Frank Stockton, was an American author who wrote primarily science-fiction and fantasy for children and eventually adult novels and short stories. In a 1920 edition of the *Sewanee Review*, Edwin Bowen states, “Stockton shows a delightful quality of humor—not boisterous, irreverent, or exaggerated...but spontaneous and sparkling, bubbling up as if from an inexhaustible fountain” (453). The short biography of Stockton in Bobby Ellen Kimbel’s *Dictionary of Literary Biography* states that Stockton worked as the assistant editor for *St. Nicholas Magazine* “so diligently that he was forced to take a recuperative vacation... because he had become temporarily blind” (343). This detail from Stockton’s biography shows that he knew something of the inescapable and debilitating nature of white collar and office work, and it is this perspective that is partially channeled into his writing of “The Transferred Ghost.”

Stockton initially gained popularity for his shorter, comedic stories. Bowen suggests that, “the secret of his success with the short story lies in his droll humor” (Bowen 462). “The Transferred Ghost” certainly conveys his brand of humor as the ghost repeatedly appears in inopportune situations between the protagonist and Madeline, the woman he is pursuing, which leads to amusing misinterpretations. Stockton’s use of humor can

be explained by his alleged genial disposition. In Henry L. Golemba’s study, *Frank R. Stockton*, Stockton’s wife, Marian Stockton, is quoted as saying, “He shed happiness all around him, not from conscious effort but out of his own bountiful and loving nature....He usually looked either upon the best or the humorous side of life” (Golemba 73). This humor is probably what keeps “The Transferred Ghost” from seeming too gloomy, despite its haunting idea that even the dead care about the corporate ladder.

Stockton’s humor, although central to much of his writing, eventually led to a decline in the popularity of his work because, according to Kimbel, “he seem[ed] too amused by life for twentieth-century tastes” (Kimbel 345). Stockton wrote “The Transferred Ghost” in 1881, at the height of the Industrial Revolution, a time when his humor and optimistic style could still be appreciated in a nation on the economic rise. Like “The Transferred Ghost,” both of the contextual documents in this edition use a similar tone and humor to discuss ghosts, class, and capitalism. “A New Business” was written in 1876, and “A Benevolent Ghost” was written in 1884, around the same time as “The Transferred Ghost” and in the same time period in which the decline in popularity of comedy had not yet begun.

During the time that Stockton wrote, two main cultural and economic issues were at the forefront and are key for understanding “The Transferred Ghost”: the Industrial Revolution (along with the rise of the white collar

worker) and Spiritualism. The Industrial Revolution was a time when “scarcely another cultural phenomenon affected as many people or stimulated as much interest as did spiritualism” (Moore 4). This fascination was so widespread that religious philosopher Theodore Parker stated, “[I]t seems more likely that spiritualism would become the religion of America than in 156 that Christianity would be the religion of the Roman Empire” (qtd. in Moore 4). It seemed that everyone from the uneducated to justices of the Supreme Court participated in pursuits associated with spiritualism. Public events such as séances, medium communication, automatic writings, and haunted tours inspired many facets of American imagination, including scientific experiments, attempts to correspond with passed loved ones, religious experiences, and entertainment.

In its treatment of ghosts, Stockton’s “The Transferred Ghost” is social satire that is very fitting of the times. Another prominent issue that he was responding to was the influx of workers and new technological streamlining of labor, which allowed for a new kind of work, commonly referred to as “the desk job.” “In the heyday of the Industrial Revolution, during the nineteenth century, the nation moved from a tool-based to a machine-based system of production” (Gini 34). These radical changes of the industrial process led to greater need for organization and management. This new managerial work created the white-collar class of jobs: “By the early 20th century, white-collar was growing at a faster rate than industrial labor. Whereas in 1870 only 6 percent of the labor force held jobs as managers, salaried professionals, sales-people, and office workers, by 1910 white-collar work encompassed some 13.5 percent of the total workforce” (Greenberg and Watts 56). This doubling of white-collar workers shows how radically the business world had changed.

Stockton’s own view of the business world, as portrayed in his story about the War of 1812 called “The Great War Syndicate,” is that it is devoid of excitement. Kimbel says of this story that it suggests that Stockton thought that “business consortia” could end war because it would “strip war of all glamour and romance. His war is made to be as dull, mechanical, and unheroic as the filling out of insurance forms” (Kimbel 344). Just as Stockton believed that business could make war void of its allure, in “The Transferred Ghost” he shows a mundane, bleak, even humdrum afterlife in which souls are transferred in a business-like manner.

Hinckman’s ghost treats his haunting like a desk job

within a capitalist society. He, like the white-collar workers of the time, must compete with other ghosts for employment. The ghostship he gets stuck with, Hinckman’s, did not work out as the ghost imagined. He complains about his employment’s redundancy and inconvenience as one would complain about a dead end desk job. This terrifying theme—that we can be forced to keep working awful jobs even after we die—in an otherwise lighthearted story is an example of what Henry L. Golemba describes as Stockton’s habit of “[i]ncluding sinister truths but camouflaging them with pleasantries” (Golemba 51). If we follow the idea that the class system is the sinister truth, it is reasonable to assume that Stockton was critical of some aspects of the class system but saw no way out of it, hence forcing his ghost character into a dead-end job.

While Stockton believed in the virtues of business, he saw the worker, not the employer as virtuous. He had a certain distrust of both the upper and lower classes. Golemba cites how “In fantasy stories like his still-popular children’s story ‘The Griffin and the Minor Canon’ the lower and upper classes are equally vilified; only children and those in middle-class positions like the minor canon are kind, truthful, and trustworthy” (52). This comes through in his protagonist, an upper-class man who is generally useless and is untruthful to Madeline about the ghost.

Given his affection for the middle class, it is not surprising that Stockton’s texts mostly appealed to them. Golemba describes “The ‘Middle Brow’ reader who was Stockton’s principal audience” (49). If we ascribe to the ghost in “The Transferred Ghost” a lower class than the narrator, hence the narrator’s derisive comment about “beings of his class” (Stockton 3), it makes sense that it takes his helpful, honest influence to solve the cowardly narrator’s problems. Henry Canby’s *The Age of Confidence* explores this mindset and the idea that the morally upstanding middle class individuals would rise in society, a perspective Stockton clearly shared.

This edition explores Stockton’s as well as wider cultural attitudes towards humor, labor, and capitalism. This edition of “The Transferred Ghost” investigates the ways in which those themes affect the representation of the ghost of John Hinckman and the actions of the story’s protagonist. Furthermore, our analysis of the contextual documents included with this critical edition will illuminate the presence of these themes to show their prevalence in the wider literary culture of the era.

Introduction to “The Transferred Ghost”

“The Transferred Ghost” by Frank R. Stockton is a distinct and amusing piece that presents its characters and situations in a humorous, friendly, and familiar style. Every character, from the nonchalant ghost to the self-conscious protagonist, are relatable to the audience throughout the piece. This story also provides audiences with a new perspective on ghosts’ roles and way of (after)life, and presents the only frightful idea in an otherwise pleasant story: that even dying does not allow one to escape from the constant struggle of capitalism and office jobs. This sinister theme in an otherwise cheerful story overshadows the comedy, and, once realized, haunts the reader long after the laughter dies.

The narrator of Stockton’s story is a young man hopelessly in love with Madeline, the niece of his close friend, Mr. John Hinckman. The narrator states that, “This gentleman was a good friend of mine, but it would have required a bolder man than I was at that time to ask him for the gift of his niece.” When Mr. Hinckman leaves for the far city of Bristol, he leaves the care of his country home and Madeline to the protagonist. The combination of Mr. Hinckman’s temper and Madeline’s seemingly unsure affection intimidate the protagonist, hampering him from addressing either of them about his affection for her. However, he uses his time alone with Madeline talking and eating meals together, gradually growing closer and more familiar with her.

One night, while lying in bed contemplating their relationship, the ghost of Mr. Hinckman enters the room. More frightened of the man than the ghost, the protagonist builds up the courage to question him. The ghost explains that, years before, Mr. Hinckman was intensely ill and, being an older gentleman, doctors assumed he would not survive. This ghost was hired and took on Mr. Hinckman’s form, ready to haunt the country estate. Unexpectedly, Mr. Hinckman achieved a sudden recovery. Since then, the ghost has been trapped in the house, spending his time hiding from Mr. Hinckman and keeping quiet because, as he states in the story, “I am [John Hinckman’s] ghost...and yet I have no right to be. And this is what makes me so uneasy, and so much afraid of him.”

The ghost enjoys talking with the protagonist and promises to speed the pace of his love affair in exchange for assistance in helping him find a new person’s soul to manifest. A series of awkward instances ensue in which

the ghost appears while the protagonist tries and fails to confess his feelings to Madeline. The next day, while trying to build up the courage to confess his love to Madeline, the ghost warns the protagonist when Mr. Hinckman is approaching the house. In the final scene, the ghost announces that he has found a new position as the ghost of a Russian nobleman and will soon leave. The protagonist, despairing that he should ever win Madeline’s affection, shouts at the ghost, “Oh! I would to heaven you were mine!” Madeline, who cannot see or hear the ghost, misunderstands the protagonist’s words to be a declaration of love rather than hopelessness. She finally admits that she cares for the protagonist as well.

Though light-hearted and whimsical compared to traditional ghost stories, “The Transferred Ghost” also contains the deadly serious theme of capitalism’s dominating power, a trend that appears in both serious stories such as Henry James’s “The Turn of the Screw” and more light-hearted stories like “The Intoxicated Ghost” by Arlo Bates. This theme is most commonly seen in the ghost, the only character actively portrayed as participating in an economy in any manner. The scariest aspect of this story is the supposition that the desk job or “situation,” is necessary even in death.

It is made clear that it is essential that the ghost be employed as a means of personal importance and meaning though his insistence that he find a new body to manifest. The ghost states, “Now that I have started on my career I have got to be the ghost of somebody....” This statement implies that his work involves a sort of corporate ladder, insinuating that ghostship is a typical white-collar job. This also ties the ghost to the class system since the white-collar job was typical of the middle class. The narrator states that “[the ghost] was an exceptional case and I could not have objections to him which would usually arise with beings of his class.” The ghost is required, whether it be by circumstance or by nature, to hold a job or “situation.”

However, while the position as the Ghost of Hinkman is socially prominent, it is portrayed as a “dead end job.” The situation the ghost finds himself in is an undesirable one, similar to a job without a good status. In fact, he refers to the position as shameful: “My situation was now one of extreme delicacy and embarrassment.” Though he never states why one is better than the other, the ghost is excited when he obtains the ghostship of a Russian nobleman. He even tells the protagonist that he is “trans-

ferring”—the same term many workers would use for obtaining a promotion: “You can’t imagine how glad I am to be, at last, the real ghost of somebody.” His escape of this oppression is the climax and turning point of his career. The ghost cannot wait to begin his more permanent and promising situation.

The power of the white-collar capitalistic society is also shown in the ghost’s competition for a situation. A sort of independent free-market system is used in which the quickest and most savvy ghosts obtain the best ghostships. When the ghost describes the process to the protagonist, stating, “Whenever a vacancy occurs, if I may express myself in that way, there are crowds of applications for the ghostship,” the savvy and quickness of the ghost’s friends come to be of use in this system, and they help their friend find a new situation. The ghost obtained his desired position when “[m]y friends instantly applied for the situation for me, and obtained my transfer.” Though the ghost inevitably finds his new “assignment” through a friend, his original plea for help from the protagonist is indicative of his desperation to escape his dead end job. As Martin Griffin states in *Frank R. Stockton: A Critical Biography*, “Stockton’s ghosts are always amiable, frequently they require a mere mortal to extricate them from their predicament.” Even in the afterlife, the ghost must overcome the appearance of a ghastly, frightening figure and appear “amiable” in order to impress, essentially, potential employers. And just as employers in real life are mere mortals, often no more and occasionally less qualified or deserving of a job than a potential employee, the ghost must supplicate for a desirable assignment.

This story is important in the history of ghost stories and the literature of haunting because it is so remarkably different from our modern conception of ghost stories as horror. Stockton’s unconventional sense of humor and almost-human ghosts especially make this story unique. His twist on the traditional ghostly displacement theme also ensures the uniqueness of the piece. “The Transferred Ghost” is refreshing and novel in the way that it is told, the situations it presents, and in the concepts it offers, as well as in its ability to subvert expectations of a ghost story.

“The Transferred Ghost”¹

The country residence² of Mr. John Hinckman was a delightful place to me,³ for many reasons. It was the abode of a genial, though somewhat impulsive, hospitality. It had broad, smooth-shaven lawns and towering oaks and elms; there were bosky⁴ shades at several points, and not far from the house there was a little rill⁵ spanned by a rustic bridge with the bark on; there were fruits and flowers, pleasant people, chess, billiards, rides, walks, and fishing. These were great attractions, but none of them, nor all of them together, would have been sufficient to hold me to the place very long. I had been invited for the trout season, but should, probably, have finished my visit early in the summer had it not been that upon fair days, when the grass was dry, and the sun not too hot, and there was but little wind, there strolled beneath the lofty elms, or passed lightly through the bosky shades, the form of my Madeline.

This lady was not, in very truth, my Madeline. She had never given herself to me, nor had I, in any way, acquired possession of her. But as I considered her possession the only sufficient reason for the continuance of my existence, I called her, in my reveries, mine. It may have been that I would not have been obliged to confine the use of this possessive pronoun to my reveries had I confessed the state of my feelings to the lady.

But this was an unusually difficult thing to do. Not only did I dread, as almost all lovers dread, taking the step which would in an instant put an end to that delightful season which may be termed the ante-interrogatory period of love, and which might at the same time terminate all intercourse or connection with the object of my passion; but I was, also, dreadfully afraid of John Hinckman. This gentleman was a good friend of mine, but it would have required a bolder man than I was at that time to ask him for the gift of his niece, who was the head of his household, and, according to his own frequent statement, the main prop of his declining years. Had Madeline acquiesced in my general views on the subject, I might have felt encouraged to open the matter to Mr. Hinckman, but, as I said before, I had never asked her whether

Notes

1. This text is found in Frank Stockton’s *The Lady, or the Tiger? And Other Stories*, pages 11-27.
2. While never specified, it is likely this story takes place in Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia, where it was written.
3. We never learn what, in this story, the narrator is named; however in the sequel “The Spectral Mortgage” his sister-in-law refers to him as George.
4. Wooded.
5. Stream.

or not she would be mine. I thought of these things at all hours of the day and night, particularly the latter.

It was lying awake one night, in the great bed in my spacious chamber, when, by the dim light of the new moon, which partially filled the room, I saw John Hinckman standing by a large chair near the door. I was very much surprised at this for two reasons. In the first place, my host had never before come into my room, and, in the second place, he had gone from home that morning, and had not expected to return for several days. It was for this reason that I had been able that evening to sit much later than usual with Madeline on the moonlit porch. The figure was certainly that of John Hinckman in his ordinary dress, but there was a vagueness, and indistinctness about it which presently assured me that it was a ghost. Had the good old man been murdered? And had his spirit come to tell me of the deed, and to confide to me the protection of his dear? My heart fluttered at what I was about to think, but at this instant the figure spoke.

“Do you know,” he said, with a countenance that indicated anxiety, “if Mr. Hinckman will return to-night?”

I thought it well to maintain a calm exterior, and I answered:

“We do not expect him.”

“I am glad of that,” said he, sinking into the chair by which he stood. “During the two years and a half that I have inhabited this house, that man has never before been away for a single night. You can’t imagine the relief it gives me.”

And as he spoke he stretched out his legs and leaned back in the chair. His form became less vague, and the colors of his garments more distinct and evident, while an expression of gratified relief succeeded to the anxiety of his countenance.

“Two years and a half!” I exclaimed. “I don’t understand you.”

“It is fully that length of time,” said the ghost, “since I first came here. Mine is not an ordinary case. But before I say anything more about it, let me ask you again if you are sure Mr. Hinckman will not return to-night?”

“I am as sure of it as I can be of anything,” I answered. “He left to-day for Bristol, two hundred miles away.”

“Then I will go on,” said the ghost, “for I am glad to have the opportunity of talking to some one who will listen to me; but if John Hinckman should come in and

catch me here, I should be frightened out of my wits.”

“This is all very strange,” I said, greatly puzzled by what I had heard. “Are you the ghost of Mr. Hinckman?”

This was a bold question, but my mind was so full of other emotions that there seemed to be no room for that of fear.

“Yes, I am his ghost,” my companion replied, “and yet I have no right to be. And this is what makes me so uneasy, and so much afraid of him. It is a strange story, and, I truly believe, without precedent. Two years and a half ago, John Hinckman was dangerously ill in this very room. At one time he was so far gone that he was really believed to be dead. It was in consequence of too precipitate⁶ a report in regard to this matter that I was, at that time, appointed to be his ghost. Imagine my surprise and horror, sir, when, after I had accepted the position and assumed its responsibilities, that old man revived, became convalescent, and eventually regained his usual health. My situation was now one of extreme delicacy and embarrassment. I had no power to return to my original unembodiment, and I had no right to be the ghost of a man who was not dead. I was advised by my friends to quietly maintain my position, and was assured that, as John Hinckman was an elderly man, it could not be long before I could rightfully assume the position for which I had been selected. But I tell you, sir,” he continued, with animation, “the old fellow seems as vigorous as ever, and I have no idea how much longer this annoying state of things will continue. I spend my time trying to get out of that old man’s way. I must not leave this house, and he seems to follow me everywhere. I tell you, sir, he haunts me.”

“That is truly a queer state of things,” I remarked. “But why are you afraid of him? He couldn’t hurt you.”

“Of course he couldn’t,” said the ghost. “But his very presence is a shock and terror to me. Imagine, sir, how you would feel if my case were yours.”

I could not imagine such a thing at all. I simply shuddered.

“And if one must be a wrongful ghost at all,” the apparition continued, “it would be much pleasanter to be the ghost of some man other than John Hinckman. There is in him an irascibility of temper, accompanied by a facility of invective⁷, which is seldom met with. And what would happen if he were to see me, and find out, as I am sure he would, how long and why I had inhabited his house, I can scarcely conceive. I have seen him in his

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6. Premature, without careful consideration.

7. Insulting, highly critical.

bursts of passion, and, although he did not hurt the people he stormed at any more than he would hurt me, they seemed to shrink before him.”

All this I knew to be very true. Had it not been for this peculiarity of Mr. Hinckman, I might have been more willing to talk to him about his niece.

“I feel sorry for you,” I said, for I really began to have a sympathetic feeling toward this unfortunate apparition. “Your case is indeed a hard one. It reminds me of those persons who have had doubles, and I suppose a man would often be very angry indeed when he found that there was another being who was personating himself.”

“Oh, the cases are not similar at all,” said the ghost. “A double or doppelganger lives on the earth with a man, and, being exactly like him, he makes all sorts of trouble, of course. It is very different with me. I am not here to live with Mr. Hinckman. I am here to take his place. Now, it would make John Hinckman very angry if he knew that. Don’t you know it would?”

I assented promptly.

“Now that he is away I can be easy for a little while,” continued the ghost, “and I am so glad to have an opportunity of talking to you. I have frequently come into your room, and watched you while you slept, but did not dare to speak to you for fear that if you talked with me Mr. Hinckman would hear you, and come into the room to know why you were talking to yourself.”

“But would he not hear you?” I asked.

“Oh, no,” said the other, “there are times when any one may see me, but no one hears me except the person to whom I address myself.”

“But why did you wish to speak to me?” I asked.

“Because,” replied the ghost, “I like occasionally to talk to people, and especially to some one like yourself, whose mind is so troubled and perturbed that you are not likely to be frightened by a visit from one of us. But I particularly wanted to ask you to do me a favor. There is every probability, so far as I can see, that John Hinckman will live a long time, and my situation is becoming insupportable. My great object at present is to get myself transferred, and I think that you may, perhaps, be of use to me.”

“Transferred!” I exclaimed. “What do you mean by that?”

“What I mean,” said the other, “is this: Now that I have started on my career I have got to be the ghost of somebody; and I want to be the ghost of a man who is really dead.”

“I should think that would be easy enough,” I said.

“Opportunities must continually occur.”

“Not at all! Not at all!” said my companion, quickly. “You have no idea what a rush and pressure there is for situations of this kind. Whenever a vacancy occurs, if I may express myself in that way, there are crowds of applications for the ghostship.”

“I had no idea that such a state of things existed,” I said, becoming quite interested in the matter. “There ought to be some regular system, or order of precedence, by which you could all take your turns like customers in a barber’s shop.”

“Oh dear, that would never do at all!” said the other. “Some of us would have to wait forever. There is always a great rush whenever a good ghostship offers itself—while, as you know, there are some positions that no one would care for. And it was in consequence of my being in too great a hurry on an occasion of the kind that I got myself into my present disagreeable predicament, and I have thought that it might be possible that you would help me out of it. You might know of a case where an opportunity for a ghostship was not generally expected, but which might present itself at any moment. If you would give me a short notice, I know I could arrange for a transfer.”

“What do you mean?” I exclaimed. “Do you want me to commit suicide? Or to undertake a murder for your benefit?”

“Oh, no, no, no!” said the other, with a vapory smile. “I mean nothing of that kind. To be sure, there are lovers who are watched with considerable interest, such persons having been known, in moments of depression, to offer very desirable ghostships, but I did not think of anything of that kind in connection with you. You were the only person I cared to speak to, and I hoped that you might give me some information that would be of use; and, in return, I shall be very glad to help you in your love affair.”

“You seem to know that I have such an affair,” I said.

“Oh, yes,” replied the other, with a little yawn. “I could not be here so much as I have been without knowing all about that.”

There was something horrible in the idea of Madeline and myself having been watched by a ghost, even, perhaps, when we wandered together in the most delightful and bosky places. But, then, this was quite an exceptional ghost, and I could not have the objections to him which would ordinarily arise in regard to beings of his class.

“I must go now,” said the ghost, rising, “but I will see

you somewhere to-morrow night. And remember—you help me, and I’ll help you.”

I had doubts the next morning as to the propriety of telling Madeline anything about this interview, and soon convinced myself that I must keep silent on the subject. If she knew there was a ghost about the house she would probably leave the place instantly.⁸ I did not mention the matter, and so regulated my demeanor that I am quite sure Madeline never suspected what had taken place. For some time I had wished that Mr. Hinckman would absent himself, for a day at least, from the premises. In such case I thought I might more easily nerve myself up to the point of speaking to Madeline on the subject of our future collateral existence, and, now that the opportunity for such speech had really occurred, I did not feel ready to avail myself of it. What would become of me if she refused me?

I had an idea, however, that the lady thought that, if I were going to speak at all, this was the time. She must have known that certain sentiments were afloat within me, and she was not unreasonable in her wish to see the matter settled one way or the other. But I did not feel like taking a bold step in the dark. If she wished me to ask her to give herself to me, she ought to offer me some reason to suppose that she would make the gift. If I saw no probability of such generosity, I would prefer that things should remain as they were.

That evening I was sitting with Madeline in the moonlit porch. It was nearly ten o’clock, and ever since supper-time I had been working myself up to the point of making an avowal of my sentiments. I had not positively determined to do this, but wished gradually to reach the proper point when, if the prospect looked bright, I might speak. My companion appeared to understand the situation—at least, I imagined that the nearer I came to a proposal the more she seemed to expect it. It was certainly a very critical and important epoch⁹ in my life. If I spoke, I should make myself happy or miserable forever, and if I did not speak I had every reason to believe that the lady would not give me another chance to do so.

Sitting thus with Madeline, talking a little, and thinking very hard over these momentous matters, I looked up and saw the ghost, not a dozen feet away from us. He

was sitting on the railing of the porch, one leg thrown up before him, the other dangling down as he leaned against a post. He was behind Madeline, but almost in front of me, as I sat facing the lady. It was fortunate that Madeline was looking out over the landscape, for I must have appeared very much startled. The ghost had told me that he would see me some time this night, but I did not think he would make his appearance when I was in the company of Madeline. If she should see the spirit of her uncle, I could not answer for the consequences. I made no exclamation, but the ghost evidently saw that I was troubled.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said—“I shall not let her see me; and she cannot hear me speak unless I address myself to her, which I do not intend to do.”

I suppose I looked grateful.

“So you need not trouble yourself about that,” the ghost continued; “but it seems to me that you are not getting along very well with your affair. If I were you, I should speak out without waiting any longer. You will never have a better chance. You are not likely to be interrupted; and, so far as I can judge, the lady seems disposed to listen to you favorably; that is, if she ever intends to do so. There is no knowing when John Hinckman will go away again; certainly not this summer. If I were in your place, I should never dare to make love¹⁰ to Hinckman’s niece if he were anywhere about the place. If he should catch any one offering himself to Miss Madeline, he would then be a terrible man to encounter.”

I agreed perfectly to all this.

“I cannot bear to think of him!” I ejaculated aloud.

“Think of whom?” asked Madeline, turning quickly toward me.

Here was an awkward situation. The long speech of the ghost, to which Madeline paid no attention, but which I heard with perfect distinctness, had made me forget myself.

It was necessary to explain quickly. Of course, it would not do to admit that it was of her dear uncle that I was speaking; and so I mentioned hastily the first name I thought of.

“Mr. Vilars,” I said.

This statement was entirely correct, for I never could bear to think of Mr. Vilars, who was a gentleman who had, at various times, paid much attention to Madeline.

“It is wrong for you to speak in that way of Mr.

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8. The narrator comes clean about the spectral presences to Madeline in the sequel, and she takes it in stride. Stockton, a noted feminist, clearly wanted to mock the idea of women being fragile, along with the character for thinking it.

9. Period of history in which significant events take place.

10. ‘Make love’ here being comparable to “flirt,” though the modern use is not impossible.

Vilars,” she said. “He is a remarkably well educated and sensible young man, and has very pleasant manners. He expects to be elected to the legislature this fall, and I should not be surprised if he made his mark. He will do well in a legislative body, for whenever Mr. Vilars has anything to say he knows just how and when to say it.”

This was spoken very quietly, and without any show of resentment, which was all very natural, for if Madeline thought at all favorably of me she could not feel displeased that I should have disagreeable emotions in regard to a possible rival. The concluding words contained a hint which I was not slow to understand. I felt very sure that if Mr. Vilars were in my present position he would speak quickly enough.

“I know it is wrong to have such ideas about a person,” I said, “but I cannot help it.”

The lady did not chide me, and after this she seemed even in a softer mood. As for me, I felt considerably annoyed, for I had not wished to admit that any thought of Mr. Vilars had ever occupied my mind.

“You should not speak aloud that way,” said the ghost, “or you may get yourself into trouble. I want to see everything go well with you, because then you may be disposed to help me, especially if I should chance to be of any assistance to you, which I hope I shall be.”

I longed to tell him that there was no way in which he could help me so much as by taking his instant departure. To make love to a young lady with a ghost sitting on the railing near by, and that ghost the apparition of a much-dreaded uncle, the very idea of whom in such a position and at such a time made me tremble, was a difficult, if not an impossible, thing to do; but I forbore to speak, although I may have looked my mind.

“I suppose,” continued the ghost, “that you have not heard anything that might be of advantage to me. Of course, I am very anxious to hear, but if you have anything to tell me, I can wait until you are alone. I will come to you to-night in your room, or I will stay here until the lady goes away.”

“You need not wait here,” I said; “I have nothing at all to say to you.”

Madeline sprang to her feet, her face flushed and her eyes ablaze.

“Wait here!” she cried. “What do you suppose I am waiting for? Nothing to say to me indeed!—I should think so! What should you have to say to me?”

“Madeline,” I exclaimed, stepping toward her, “let me

explain.”

But she had gone.

Here was the end of the world for me! I turned fiercely to the ghost.

“Wretched existence!” I cried. “You have ruined everything. You have blackened my whole life. Had it not been for you”

But here my voice faltered. I could say no more.

“You wrong me,” said the ghost. “I have not injured you. I have tried only to encourage and assist you, and it is your own folly that has done this mischief. But do not despair. Such mistakes as these can be explained. Keep up a brave heart. Good-by.”

And he vanished from the railing like a bursting soap-bubble.

I went gloomily to bed, but I saw no apparitions that night except those of despair and misery which my wretched thoughts called up. The words I had uttered had sounded to Madeline like the basest insult. Of course, there was only one interpretation she could put upon them.

As to explaining my ejaculations, that was impossible. I thought the matter over and over again as I lay awake that night, and I determined that I would never tell Madeline the facts of the case. It would be better for me to suffer all my life than for her to know that the ghost of her uncle haunted the house. Mr. Hinckman was away, and if she knew of his ghost she could not be made to believe that he was not dead. She might not survive the shock! No, my heart could bleed, but I would never tell her.

The next day was fine, neither too cool nor too warm; the breezes were gentle, and nature smiled. But there were no walks or rides with Madeline. She seemed to be much engaged during the day, and I saw but little of her. When we met at meals she was polite, but very quiet and reserved. She had evidently determined on a course of conduct, and had resolved to assume that, although I had been very rude to her, she did not understand the import of my words. It would be quite proper, of course, for her not to know what I meant by my expressions of the night before.

I was downcast and wretched, and said but little, and the only bright streak across the black horizon of my woe was the fact that she did not appear to be happy, although she affected an air of unconcern. The moonlit porch was deserted that evening, but wandering about the house I found Madeline in the library alone. She was reading, but I went in and sat down near her. I felt that, although I could not do so fully, I must in a measure explain my conduct

of the night before. She listened quietly to a somewhat labored apology I made for the words I had used.

“I have not the slightest idea what you meant,” she said, “but you were very rude.”

I earnestly disclaimed any intention of rudeness, and assured her, with a warmth of speech that must have made some impression upon her, that rudeness to her would be an action impossible to me. I said a great deal upon the subject, and implored her to believe that if it were not for a certain obstacle I could speak to her so plainly that she would understand everything.

She was silent for a time, and then she said, rather more kindly, I thought, than she had spoken before:

“Is that obstacle in any way connected with my uncle?”

“Yes,” I answered, after a little hesitation, “it is, in a measure, connected with him.”

She made no answer to this, and sat looking at her book, but not reading. From the expression of her face, I thought she was somewhat softened toward me. She knew her uncle as well as I did, and she may have been thinking that, if he were the obstacle that prevented my speaking (and there were many ways in which he might be that obstacle), my position would be such a hard one that it would excuse some wildness of speech and eccentricity of manner. I saw, too, that the warmth of my partial explanations had had some effect on her, and I began to believe that it might be a good thing for me to speak my mind without delay. No matter how she should receive my proposition, my relations with her could not be worse than they had been the previous night and day, and there was something in her face which encouraged me to hope that she might forget my foolish exclamations of the evening before if I began to tell her my tale of love.

I drew my chair a little nearer to her, and as I did so the ghost burst into the room from the doorway behind her. I say burst, although no door flew open and he made no noise. He was wildly excited, and waved his arms above his head. The moment I saw him, my heart fell within me. With the entrance of that impertinent apparition, every hope fled from me. I could not speak while he was in the room.

I must have turned pale, and I gazed steadfastly at the ghost, almost without seeing Madeline, who sat between us.

“Do you know,” he cried, “that John Hinckman is coming up the hill? He will be here in fifteen minutes,

and if you are doing anything in the way of love-making, you had better hurry it up. But this is not what I came to tell you. I have glorious news! At last I am transferred! Not forty minutes ago a Russian nobleman was murdered by the Nihilists.¹¹ Nobody ever thought of him in connection with an immediate ghostship. My friends instantly applied for the situation for me, and obtained my transfer. I am off before that horrid Hinckman comes up the hill. The moment I reach my new position, I shall put off this hated semblance. Good-bye. You can’t imagine how glad I am to be, at last, the real ghost of somebody.”

“Oh!” I cried, rising to my feet and stretching out my arms in utter wretchedness, “I would to heaven you were mine!”

“I am yours,” said Madeline, raising to me her tearful eyes.

Contextual Documents

Two related documents cover multiple themes from “The Transferred Ghost,” including the humorous potential of ghosts, the class structure of the era, and capitalism. We use each document to place “The Transferred Ghost” more firmly in its time period by giving examples of the way some of his contemporaries pursued similar themes to Stockton by using a humorous ghost story. These humorous themes were popular during the early 1880s when the country seemed to be on the rise in light of the Industrial Revolution. This so called “Age of Confidence” was one in which hard work would merit just rewards, and everyone was expected to do their part. In the pieces we include in this edition, we demonstrate that this mentality was playfully extended to include ghosts.

“A New Business”¹²

The following article, published in the *New York Times* on April 25, 1884, describes a new business starting in Chicago, in which a medium with control of a congress of ghosts is working them to funnel information from the Other Side and has commercialized this enterprise. It is reasonable to assume this article was satirical, but true or false it still shows a highly capitalistic bent to ghostly phenomena.

This proposal puts ghosts in a very strange liminal

Notes

11. Nihilists: The Nihilists were a Russian political party that advocated the fall of the oppressive government, favoring the people over the rulers.

12. “A New Business” was published in the *New York Times* on 25 April 1884.

space. They are both being worked by the medium in hordes, and thus would seem to be in a lower, working class space, but at the same time they are being treated with great respect, requiring mollification, like an actor. However, most tellingly, the ghosts are much more of a resource than an actual group of people, which in the end is how the upper class would likely have considered many of the workers in their employ. The reducing of ghosts to a series of numbers and ratings based on high-grade and low-grade ghosts resembles the reduction to numbers and ability to produce product experienced by many workers, and sounds remarkably like the de-individualization of servants, possibly even slaves. Note that the article states that a Medium has “control” of ghosts, not “companionship” or “employ.” It is possible to conclude that the medium can force ghosts to do as ordered, and being ghosts, they have no way to argue, fight back, or escape, as there’s nowhere left to go.

This article illustrates the proclivity for a businesslike mind of the times in other ways. It wastes no time wondering about the existence of ghosts. It is of apparently no surprise to the author of the article that ghosts exist, and thus the article spends much more time exploring the lucrative possibilities of a career mining ghostly information. It would apparently be worth a fortune, as a ghost’s messages could sell for \$40-\$100 dollars per ton. The article does not elaborate on how one weighs ghostly messages, or why they would be weighed in tons, and while it may have simply been a handy unit, it also relates back to the mining theme prevalent through the whole article. This focus on conceptualizing the ghostly world as a place to be mined belies a ruthless, business-like mentality ready to take advantage of the new options for upward mobility now available to even those not in the upper-class gentry.

With all of this in mind, some of the oddities in “The Transferred Ghost” become more clear. In “The Transferred Ghost,” the ghost of John Hinckman indicates that there are more desirable ghostships, finally taking a role as the ghost of a Russian nobleman. However, he never expands on why there are benefits to being the ghost of one person or another. This article offers the idea that the ghosts of someone important, a high-grade ghost, might be more likely to be contacted, more likely to be pampered. In a similar way to “The Transferred Ghost,” the article frames the Other Side as a place where ghosts are employed in jobs and are possible targets of labor

exploitation. There is no rest from the labor conditions of modern American capitalism, not even after death.

Our second contextual document is the article “A Benevolent Ghost,” which was published in the *New York Times* in 1876, and it is similar to both “A New Business” and “The Transferred Ghost” in its use of humor. The article is a satirical piece written about the ghost of a woman residing in St. Louis. The author goes on to argue that this ghost stands apart from the average “idle, frivolous, and meddling” specter. Instead of haunting for her own amusement or for selfish reasons, the specter haunts a woman in order to hold her accountable to a promise made many years before. The article ends happily with the family sending for the little boy, the son of the ghost, who the woman has sworn to care for as her own son.

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A stock company for working ghosts has been established in Chicago. An enterprising person obtained, with the aid of a medium, control of three hundred and ten ghosts. He thereupon organized a stock company for the purpose of obtaining and selling ghostly information, and found no difficulty in selling shares. If his scheme proves successful a new business will have been established and we shall have scores of similar companies.

The business of working ghosts by means of stock companies is unlike any other, though in some respects it resembles both mining and theatrical management. The medium who, prospecting for desirable ghosts, finds, let us suppose, a hundred high-grade ghosts each one of which can furnish messages from the other world worth, say, a hundred dollars per ton, cannot develop the whole of his ghostly property for the simple reason that he can “sit” as a medium only a certain number of hours daily, and hence cannot work more than ten or a dozen ghosts to advantage. It is no object to him to hire other mediums to assist him, for that is merely equivalent to giving away his surplus ghosts. If, however, he can induce a number of capitalists to join with him, he can develop all his three hundred and ten ghosts and make for himself and his associates a great deal of money.

The method of organizing a stock spiritual company would be as follows: Capitalizing the 310 ghosts at \$500,000, the medium and his capitalists would sell \$400,000 worth of shares; divide \$300,000 of the proceeds among them; place \$100,000 in the treasury as working capital, and retain for themselves the remaining

\$100,000 of shares. They would then hire a sufficient force of mediums, paying them salaries large enough to secure their exclusive services, and set them at work. Ghosts can be worked day and night, as they require no sleep, and relays of mediums could draw uninterrupted streams of messages from 310 ghosts. The sale of these messages at \$100 a ton—supposing the ghosts to be high-grade ghosts—would yield enormous dividends, and even low-grade ghosts, yielding not more than \$40 per ton of crude information, could be worked at a handsome profit. So far the business closely resembles silver mining, except in the particular that the stockholders would receive dividends instead of being called upon for assessments.

It would, however, be necessary to keep the ghosts in good humor. Otherwise they might at any moment refuse to furnish ghostly information, in which case the spiritual stock company would be compelled to announce that, owing to fault in its ghosts, it would be necessary to make a call upon the stockholders for funds with which to prospect for a new vein of ghosts. In other words, the company would be ruined. Only an experienced theatrical manager would be able to keep the peace among two or three hundred ghosts of all ages, nationalities, and sexes—whatever may be the number of the latter in the other world. George Washington could hardly be expected to work side by side with Benedict Arnold, and what Boston female ghost would feel at ease when working in company with a Western mining ghost? It is this great difficulty of inducing ghosts to dwell together that will stand in the way of spiritual stock companies, and it will require the combined abilities of an experienced opera manager and a successful mining expert to work a vein of miscellaneous ghosts successfully.

*“A Benevolent Ghost”*¹³

Unlike the ghosts in “The Transferred Ghost,” those in “A Benevolent Ghost” are not frivolous workers, and do not participate in any sort of economy. However, the way that the narrator views these ghosts reflects the idea that they are still expected to contribute to the economy and be productive. The article states that, “As a class ghosts are idle, frivolous, meddlesome, and apparently wholly devoid of moral sense.” In this way, both stories rely on

the humorous and terrifying notion that one must continue to be productive even in the afterlife.

The benevolent ghost and the transferred ghost play similar roles within their stories. Their ghostly positions in class and labor systems segregate them from people, but bind them to a productive, capitalist society. While humorous, the prevalence of this idea shows capitalism as foreboding and omnipresent. Stockton, a man who literally worked himself blind, was able to empathize with the white collar workers who helped create an economy that allowed him the ability to channel his resilient spirit into humorous prose. The increase of white-collar jobs made a contribution to the social fabric of America but also partially unsettled an America resistant to change. Stockton used humor as a way to deal with this anxiety and to cope with these transformations in the American economy. All three stories in this edition focus on the ridiculous notion that ghosts must participate in the economic or productive activities of the living world. This stems from the American notion that white-collar workers must always be productive and contribute to the economy. If these stories present the productive or working ghost as a ridiculous and humorous idea, they may speak to a broader anxiety and fear that participation in white-collar work during life is just as ridiculous. In the end, this combination of ghosts and humor relates to issues of the American economy, issues that still haunt us today.

It is not often that a modern ghost displays moral qualities which can be honestly approved. As a class ghosts are idle, frivolous, meddlesome, and apparently wholly devoid of moral sense. Benjamin Franklin, in a ghostly state, does not scruple to tell preposterous lies as to the whereabouts of Charlie Ross; and John Milton, who during his lifetime wrote poetry which even Mr. Taine does not consider wholly devoid of merit, now perpetuates ghostly verse of the most execrable quality. In consequence, ghosts have fallen into general disrepute among sensible people, and before they can expect to be heard with respect and attention, they must thoroughly change their present objectionable habits.

The recent conduct of a St. Louis ghost gives us reason to hope that a ghostly reformation has actually begun, and that at least a few of the swarming millions

Notes

13. “A Benevolent Ghost” was published in the *New York Times* on 29 April 1876.

of hitherto lazy and frivolous ghosts have determined to do something to redeem the damaged reputation of their kind. That a ghost should choose to visit St. Louis is not, of course, creditable to ghostly taste, but the individual ghost just referred to went to St. Louis exclusively in the interests of humanity. A week or two since a St. Louis family were annoyed by the nightly ringing of the front-door bell by invisible hands. The local small boy and the household rats were in turn charged with the offense of malicious bell-ringing, but no proof of their guilt could be obtained. An astute plumber, whose advice was sought, alleged that the bell-ringing was due to electricity, and he accordingly undertook to suppress the nuisance by changing the direction of the bell-wire and putting in new gas-pipes and water-pipes throughout the house. Though his bill was of the most formidable proportions, the mysterious bell-ringing was not checked, and the household gradually accepted it as a necessary evil which no earthly remedy could cure. Of course, the bell was rung by a ghost, and when the latter found that no further good could be accomplished in that direction, she—for the ghost was of the gentler sex—changed her tactics. She adopted the habit of singing songs in the front parlor, accompanying her voice by playing on a closed and locked piano-forte. After thus opening the evening's entertainment, she would move pictures, chairs, and bedsteads all over the house, and execute more noisy carpenter-work with an invisible hammer and saw than any live carpenter with a proper sense of loyalty to his carpenters' union would be willing to do in a week of consecutive labor. Her most remarkable feats, however, were performed in connection with small boys, both actual and ghostly. The family were frequently astonished and delighted by seeing their private small boy suddenly raised by the hair two or three feet above the floor, and thus borne kicking and shrieking from the room. Unfortunately, the ghost always brought him back again, imbued with a sense of injury which led him to lie down on the floor and howl until his disappointed parents pacified him with the bootjack or other convenient sooth-

ing instrument. The ghost's efforts to drive the family to despair were not, however, successful, until she adopted the plan of causing ghostly small boys to emerge from the fire-place and other unexpected localities. When the persecuted residents of the haunted house found that they could not open a closet or unlock a burglar-proof safe or remove the head of a whiskey-barrel without being shocked at the prompt appearance of a shadowy and unnaturally silent small boy, they became utterly demoralized and sent for a spiritual medium to negotiate terms of peace with their tormentor.

Now, what is remarkable and unprecedented in ghostly history is the motive assigned by the ghost for her prolonged disturbance of the household. She asserted, through the medium, that the lady of the house had once promised to treat her dead sister's small boy as her own, and that instead of keeping this promise she had farmed him out to a heartless baby-farmer. The accused woman admitted with tears that such had been her faithless and wicked conduct, and she gladly acceded to the ghostly demand to send for the injured small boy, and to treat him with the utmost kindness. In consideration of this promise the ghost agreed to withdraw from the premises, threatening, however, to return and make things disagreeably lively for the family in case the promise should not be kept. The boy was sent for and the ghost withdrew, and thus the first known philanthropist ghost accomplished her humane purpose.

To say that this exceptional ghost deserves the respect and gratitude of all humane people is hardly necessary. It is to be hoped, however, that she will not content herself with having performed one good action. What she ought to do is form a ghostly society for the prevention of cruelty to children. Such a society could accomplish far more than any merely human society can hope to do, and all honest and kind-hearted ghosts can rest assured that if they will only enter upon a life of active benevolence, by persecuting cruel parents and guardians, they will soon earn the admiration of mankind, and reinstate themselves in the good opinion of the living.

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The Peasant Ghost: A Critical Edition of “The Ghost of Sakura” as Adapted by A. B. Mitford

Edited by Kameron McBride & Jordan Meyer

This edition provides critical insight into the classic Japanese folktale commonly referred to as “The Ghost of Sakura.” Themes include the narrative of the feudal peasant, the cultural importance of the collective good, and the Western view of Japanese culture. We have also included two original essays by Mitford and an article from the *New York Times* in order to contextualize the cultural importance of this narrative on a global scale.

General Introduction

Eighteenth-century Japan was a mystery to most of the Western world since it did not engage in trade with other countries and had a governing system that purposefully distanced itself from the rest of the world. As a result, nobody outside of the country was familiar with Japan’s government practices, folktales, and supernatural stories. To the rest of the world, Japan appeared ghostly, as there were precious few that actually knew anything of Japanese culture. This edition explores one story, “The Ghost of Sakura”—part of a larger collection, *Tales of Old Japan*—which helped unveil some of these mysteries and expose outsiders to Japanese culture.

Algernon Bertram Freeman-Mitford (1837-1916) was a British diplomat and a writer who was responsible for exposing the English-speaking Western world to Japanese culture. Mitford first traveled to Japan in 1858 when he was second secretary to British diplomatic efforts during the Meiji Restoration. During his time in Japan, Mitford met fellow diplomat and Japanese expert Ernest Salow and learned much that would ultimately inform his collection of Japanese folklore, *Tales of Old Japan*, which featured “The Ghost of Sakura” among others.¹ *Tales of Old Japan* was among the first English-language collections of Japanese literature and folklore available

in the West, and thus was a great influence on how Japanese culture was viewed in Europe and North America. As such, Mitford is an important figure in giving Western culture a taste of older Japanese culture.

What is especially crucial is that Mitford managed to publish his anthology at a time when Japan was beginning to open up to the outside world. Mitford was first sent to China as a diplomat, but was transferred to Japan in 1866. At the time, Japan wasn’t viewed as a country of real consequence to Britain but more of an exotic land that offered nothing in terms of trade (Mitford, *Memories*). Initially, Mitford wasn’t even stationed in the capital of Japan, but instead had to wait for British minister Sir Harry Smith Parkes to arrive and force Mitford into the capital to properly represent England. During the time Mitford served as a diplomat, Japan was beginning to undergo the aforementioned Meiji Restoration. This change would essentially restore the Imperial structure of Japan and help thrust it into the modern world. Countries were able to trade with Japan on an unprecedented scale, and the country was hurtling towards the industrial age (Satow). As Mitford and Parkes traveled to the capital, they received an in-depth and intense look at this revolution. Mitford’s life was even put at risk as war and riots raged outside of Kyoto, where Mitford was staying. It was here that he stumbled upon *Tales of Old Japan*

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1. For more information on Mitford’s notes and time in Japan, see Mitford, *Memories*.

and, with nothing else to work on, worked to learn the language and transcribe the stories.

Japanese folklore is rooted in tradition and honor. Most stories impress the idea of karma or some sort of spiritual retribution being realized. Often, traditional Japanese folk stories would be passed around by wandering religious figures that would travel from village to village, spinning their tales. These wandering performers, called “*ukarebito*” and “*hokaibit*,” were sometimes believed to be spirits that had somehow wandered into the physical world. Nearly all of their stories would contain elements of Kami (spirits) and their interactions with the mortal world (Takanori 199). It is this belief in spirits being able to influence the physical world that formed the haunted nature of many Japanese folktales, including “The Ghost of Sakura.”

A particular focus of our edition is the role of peasants within the government structures of Japan. At the time period of “The Ghost of Sakura,” Japan operated on a feudal system that had five levels to it: Peasant, Samurai, Daimyo, Shogun and finally, the Emperor. Obviously the peasants would form the base of this system, and the other levels built upon this base. In this time period, it was common for peasants who experienced some forms of injustice from their government to contact the Shogun in order to resolve the issue. “Their [the peasants’] protests followed a ritualized pattern: the crisis was discovered, action was taken to resolve it; and equilibrium was restored” (Walthall 571). “The Ghost of Sakura” explores this theme, but, in this case, equilibrium is not initially restored. This imbalance helps bring about the spiritual themes of the story, with a ghostly presence acting in order to attempt to bring equilibrium to the situation. Mitford made stories such as “The Ghost of Sakura” a key focus of his edition more than likely due to his close interaction with the conflicts within the structure of Japan going on at the time.

It is our hope that this edition will provide both a context and understanding of “The Ghost of Sakura,” one of Japan’s most popular folk tales. This is a story that has undergone several changes throughout its existence, with some versions even dropping the ghost present in this edition, but overall it has endured as one of the most well-known stories in the Japanese canon. We have included an annotated version of the story with its original wood-cut illustrations as well as three contextual documents. The first of these is Mitford’s introduction to

“The Ghost of Sakura,” and, in that introduction, Mitford discusses the societal roles at play in the story. The second is Mitford’s introduction to his slightly more well-known translation of “47 Ronin,” a folktale about rogue samurai who band together to fight evil. This introduction goes into more detail about the mystery that was pre-modern Japan and why it was puzzling to the Western world. Finally, we have included a late-19th-century *New York Times* article discussing the Feast of Lanterns, a Buddhist tradition honoring the dead. With these documents we hope to provide a compact view of both what made Japan mysterious to the Western world and how haunting fits in to Japanese folklore.

Introduction to “The Ghost of Sakura”

The social inequality experienced by countless peasants during the times of feudal Japan gave rise to many critical narratives that tell the tale of oppression and suffering, often in unique ways. These narratives often placed the peasantry at the center of events and attempted to give credibility to the cause that they were fighting for, lending a voice to a social group that found itself in a constant struggle against the system that kept them down. Narratives of this nature often based themselves loosely upon historical fact while adding in embellishments that aided in furthering the peasants’ plea for social mobility (Walthall 572).

“The Ghost of Sakura” provides an excellent example of the peasant uprising narrative. By retelling the tale of a farmer who stood up for his rights and eventually paid the ultimate price, the story of oppression is passed on to the audience and creates a narrative in which peasants become active players in shaping their own place in society. The ghostly aspect of the story, however, does more than simply give the peasants a voice of their own. The haunting creates a scenario in which one of their own is able to transcend the rules of society, and even humanity, as he takes on a form in the afterlife that allows him to move into the most private spaces in the lives of their oppressors and affect real change.

Walthall suggests that this dissonance between fact and fiction is precisely what creates the powerful effects found in peasant narratives (572). It allows for the discussion of the morals surrounding real historical events within the realm of fiction, helping accentuate particular points that may not have been completely clear in the

true course of events. Framing the discussion within fiction also allows for a much safer discussion of social issues than may have been possible in purely factual historical narratives. The particular use of haunting in retelling the events in “The Ghost of Sakura” lends another interesting facet to the discussion of morality, as the fact that a peasant was able to return as a ghost implies that something on the other side of death is clearly favorable to their cause. This implied support of the supernatural instantly adds a sense of validity to the moral narrative found within the story. It seems to invoke a clear distinction between right and wrong and creates a sense of legitimacy for their rebellion (Scheiner 581).

It is also important to note how the contrast between collectivism and individualism plays out throughout the narrative. Collectivism, typically seen in Eastern cultures, emphasizes the importance of group needs over individual needs. Individualism, on the other hand, is typically seen in Western cultures and places a higher importance on the needs of the individual. Thus, the peasants perceive their collectivist cause as the norm while the individualist attitude of the nobility is presented as deviant. This deviance lends further validity to the cause of the peasants, as they perceive it as something that is wrong and must therefore be corrected.² This tension between ideologies results in an interesting inversion of the power structure once the haunting begins. The peasant is able to return and, as an individual, create havoc in the life of the nobility. This narrative implies that the rise of one individual over another must only take place in the name of the collective good. Furthermore, the nobleman in this narrative is granted good fortune following his atonement, and he prospers along with the villages that he rules. His previous actions against the collective good are overlooked, and society is portrayed as returning to a state of equilibrium. Much of the story concerns the economic system that was present in feudal Japan; as such, it is likely that Mitford may have intended to show his Western audience that the Japanese people were

very organized and could be a viable candidate for future trade. Additionally, the story aids in reaffirming the importance of bureaucracy—something that had become quite common in the Western world at that point.

By mixing historical fact with the embellishments of fiction, “The Ghost of Sakura” presents a compelling narrative that emphasizes equality, the collective good, and the just cause of peasant uprisings. While the original tale was passed through Japanese families as oral legend, the version that follows was written down by A. B. Mitford as a part of his *Tales of Old Japan* anthology in 1871. While a theatrical version was produced that changed the names of individuals, his version emphasizes history by including correspondence and the real names of individuals, also including the aspects of haunting that make the tale so powerful. This creates a sense of authenticity while simultaneously adding a supernatural element. Additionally, the original illustrations from Mitford’s text, adapted from Japanese woodcarvings, have been retained here in order to emphasize the authenticity of this classic folktale.

“The Ghost of Sakura”³

“How true is the principle laid down by Confucius, that the benevolence of princes is reflected in their country, while their wickedness causes sedition and confusion!”⁴

In the province of Shimôsa, and the district of Sôma,⁵ Hotta Kaga no Kami was lord of the castle of Sakura, and chief of a family which had for generations produced famous warriors. When Kaga no Kami,⁶ who had served in the Gorôjiu, the cabinet of the Shogun,⁷ died at the castle of Sakura, his eldest son Kôtsuké no Suké Masanobu inherited his estates and honours, and was appointed to a seat in the Gorôjiu; but he was a different man from the lords who had preceded him. He treated the farmers and peasants unjustly, imposing additional

Notes

2. For a more detailed analysis of the role of collectivism in Japanese history, see Hoston.

3. This text is found in A.B. Mitford’s *Tales of Old Japan*, pages 164-188.

4. This introductory quote was inserted by Mitford during the translation process. The Neo-Confucianism movement popular in Japan was based on the idea that the universe could be understood by human reason. This stood in contrast to the Zen Buddhists of the time, one of Japan’s other popular spiritual beliefs. The Neo-Confucius movement also helped form hierarchy in Japanese society, which would explain why this quote would introduce “The Ghost of Sakura,” which deals with social hierarchy (Craig 552-53).

5. Sôma is in the modern-day Chiba prefecture and just to the west of Tokyo.

6. Family names in Japanese and many other Eastern cultures are placed at the beginning of the name. As such, Hotta Kaga no Kami is from the Hotta clan and his given name is Kaga no Kami. This convention is used frequently throughout the text.

7. The Shogunate were military governors responsible for a given district of Japan. The title was typically passed down within families; the Gorôjiu would be his high council.

8. Peasant farmers in Japan were expected to pay a portion of their crop earnings each year to the nobility that oversaw their particular group of villages.

and grievous taxes, so that the tenants on his estates were driven to the last extremity of poverty; and although year after year, and month after month, they prayed for mercy, and remonstrated against this injustice, no heed was paid to them, and the people throughout the villages were reduced to the utmost distress.⁸ Accordingly, the chiefs of the one hundred and thirty-six villages, producing a total revenue of 40,000 kokus⁹ of rice, assembled together in council and determined unanimously to present a petition to the Government, sealed with their seals, stating that their repeated remonstrances had been taken no notice of by their local authorities. Then they assembled in numbers before the house of one of the councillors of their lord, named Ikéura Kazuyé, in order to show the petition to him first, but even then no notice was taken of them; so they returned home, and resolved, after consulting together, to proceed to their lord's yashiki, or palace, at Yedo,¹⁰ on the seventh day of the tenth month. It was determined, with one accord, that one hundred and forty-three village chiefs should go to Yedo; and the chief of the village of Iwashashi, one Sôgorô, a man forty-eight years of age, distinguished for his ability and judgment, ruling a district which produced a thousand kokus,¹¹ stepped forward, and said—

“This is by no means an easy matter, my masters. It certainly is of great importance that we should forward our complaint to our lord's palace at Yedo; but what are your plans? Have you any fixed intentions?”

“It is, indeed, a most important matter,” rejoined the others; but they had nothing further to say. Then Sôgorô went on to say—

“We have appealed to the public office of our province, but without avail; we have petitioned the Prince's councillors, also in vain. I know that all that remains for us is to lay our case before our lord's palace at Yedo; and if we go there, it is equally certain that we shall not be listened to—on the contrary, we shall be cast into prison. If we are not attended to here, in our own province, how much less will the officials at Yedo care for us. We might hand our petition into the litter of one of the Gorôjiu, in the public streets; but, even in that case, as our lord is a member of the Gorôjiu, none of his peers would care

to examine into the rights and wrongs of our complaint, for fear of offending him, and the man who presented the petition in so desperate a manner would lose his life on a bootless errand. If you have made up your minds to this, and are determined, at all hazards, to start, then go to Yedo by all means, and bid a long farewell to parents, children, wives, and relations. This is my opinion.”



The others all agreeing with what Sôgorô said, they determined that, come what might, they would go to Yedo; and they settled to assemble at the village of Funabashi on the thirteenth day of the eleventh month.

On the appointed day all the village officers met at the place agreed upon,—Sôgorô, the chief of the village of Iwashashi, alone being missing; and as on the following day Sôgorô had not yet arrived, they deputed one of their number, named Rokurobei, to inquire the reason. Rokurobei arrived at Sôgorô's house towards four in the afternoon, and found him warming himself quietly over his charcoal brazier, as if nothing were the matter. The messenger, seeing this, said rather testily—

“The chiefs of the villages are all assembled at Funabashi according to covenant, and as you, Master Sôgorô, have not arrived, I have come to inquire whether it is sickness or some other cause that prevents you.”

“Indeed,” replied Sôgorô, “I am sorry that you should have had so much trouble. My intention was to have set out yesterday; but I was taken with a cholic,¹² with which I am often troubled, and, as you may see, I am taking care of myself; so for a day or two I shall not be able to

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- 8. Peasant farmers in Japan were expected to pay a portion of their crop earnings each year to the nobility that oversaw their particular group of villages.
- 9. A *koku* is a unit of volume equal to approximately 278.3 liters. It is used throughout the text to measure rice and describe the wealth of the various villages and districts. In this case, the villages had a combined rice yield of 11.1 million liters.
- 10. Yedo, also known as Edo, is the modern-day city of Tokyo.
- 11. This is approximately 278,300 liters.
- 12. This is also called colic, a kind of digestive pain that comes and goes due to muscular contraction (Bhat 363).

start. Pray be so good as to let the others know this.”

Rokurobei, seeing that there was no help for it, went back to the village of Funabashi and communicated to the others what had occurred. They were all indignant at what they looked upon as the cowardly defection of a man who had spoken so fairly, but resolved that the conduct of one man should not influence the rest, and talked themselves into the belief that the affair which they had in hand would be easily put through; so they agreed with one accord to start and present the petition, and, having arrived at Yedo, put up in the street called Bakurochô. But although they tried to forward their complaint to the various officers of their lord, no one would listen to them; the doors were all shut in their faces, and they had to go back to their inn, crestfallen and without success.

On the following day, being the 18th of the month, they all met together at a tea-house in an avenue, in front of a shrine of Kwannon Sama; and having held a consultation, they determined that, as they could hit upon no good expedient, they would again send for Sôgorô to see whether he could devise no plan. Accordingly, on the 19th, Rokurobei and one Jiuyémon started for the village of Iwahashi at noon, and arrived the same evening.

Now the village chief Sôgorô, who had made up his mind that the presentation of this memorial was not a matter to be lightly treated, summoned his wife and children and his relations, and said to them—

“I am about to undertake a journey to Yedo, for the following reasons:—Our present lord of the soil has increased the land-tax, in rice and the other imposts, more than tenfold, so that pen and paper would fail to convey an idea of the poverty to which the people are reduced, and the peasants are undergoing the tortures of hell upon earth. Seeing this, the chiefs of the various villages have presented petitions, but with what result is doubtful. My earnest desire, therefore, is to devise some means of escape from this cruel persecution. If my ambitious scheme does not succeed, then shall I return home no more; and even should I gain my end, it is hard to say how I may be treated by those in power. Let us drink a cup of wine together, for it may be that you shall see my face no more. I give my life to allay the misery of the people of this estate. If I die, mourn not over my fate; weep not for me.”

Having spoken thus, he addressed his wife and his four children, instructing them carefully as to what he desired to be done after his death, and minutely stating every wish

of his heart. Then, having drunk a parting cup with them, he cheerfully took leave of all present, and went to a tea-house in the neighbouring village of Funabashi, where the two messengers, Rokurobei and Jiuyémon, were anxiously awaiting his arrival, in order that they might recount to him all that had taken place at Yedo.

“In short,” said they, “it appears to us that we have failed completely; and we have come to meet you in order to hear what you propose. If you have any plan to suggest, we would fain be made acquainted with it.”

“We have tried the officers of the district,” replied Sôgorô, “and we have tried my lord’s palace at Yedo. However often we might assemble before my lord’s gate, no heed would be given to us. There is nothing left for us but to appeal to the Shogun.”

So they sat talking over their plans until the night was far advanced, and then they went to rest. The winter night was long; but when the cawing of the crows was about to announce the morning, the three friends started on their journey for the tea-house at Asakusa, at which, upon their arrival, they found the other village elders already assembled.

“Welcome, Master Sôgorô,” said they. “How is it that you have come so late? We have petitioned all the officers to no purpose, and we have broken our bones in vain. We are at our wits’ end, and can think of no other scheme. If there is any plan which seems good to you, we pray you to act upon it.”

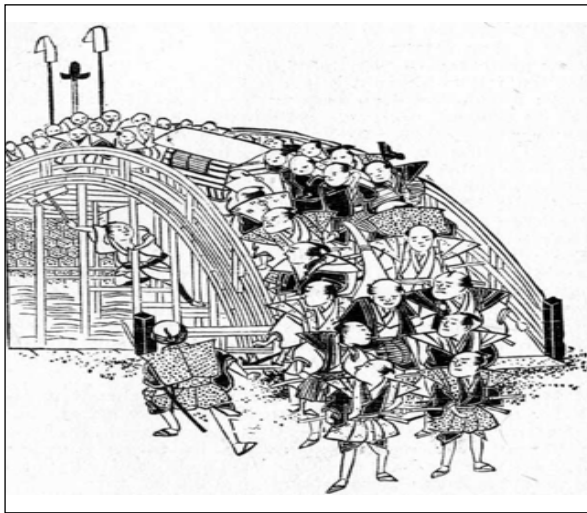
“Sirs,” replied Sôgorô, speaking very quietly, “although we have met with no better success here than in our own place, there is no use in grieving. In a day or two the Gorôjiu will be going to the castle; we must wait for this opportunity, and following one of the litters, thrust in our memorial. This is my opinion: what think you of it, my masters?”

One and all, the assembled elders were agreed as to the excellence of this advice; and having decided to act upon it, they returned to their inn.

Then Sôgorô held a secret consultation with Jiuyémon, Hanzô, Rokurobei, Chinzô, and Kinshirô, five of the elders, and, with their assistance, drew up the memorial; and having heard that on the 26th of the month, when the Gorôjiu should go to the castle, Kuzé Yamato no Kami would proceed to a palace under the western enclosure of the castle, they kept watch in a place hard by. As soon as they saw the litter of the Gorôjiu approach, they drew near to it, and, having humbly stated their grievances, handed

in the petition; and as it was accepted, the six elders were greatly elated, and doubted not that their hearts’ desire would be attained; so they went off to a tea-house at Riyôgoku, and Jiuyémon said—

“We may congratulate ourselves on our success. We have handed in our petition to the Gorôjiu, and now we may set our minds at rest; before many days have passed, we shall hear good news from the rulers. To Master Sôgorô is due great praise for his exertions.”



Sôgorô, stepping forward, answered, “Although we have presented our memorial to the Gorôjiu, the matter will not be so quickly decided; it is therefore useless that so many of us should remain here: let eleven men stay with me, and let the rest return home to their several villages. If we who remain are accused of conspiracy and beheaded, let the others agree to reclaim and bury our corpses. As for the expenses which we shall incur until our suit is concluded, let that be according to our original covenant. For the sake of the hundred and thirty-six villages we will lay down our lives, if needs must, and submit to the disgrace of having our heads exposed as those of common malefactors.”¹³

Then they had a parting feast together, and, after a sad leave-taking, the main body of the elders went home to their own country; while the others, wending their way to their quarters waited patiently to be summoned to the Supreme Court. On the 2d day of the 12th month, Sôgorô, having received a summons from the residence

of the Gorôjiu Kuzé Yamato no Kami, proceeded to obey it, and was ushered to the porch of the house, where two councillors, named Aijima Gidaiyu and Yamaji Yôri, met him, and said—

“Some days since you had the audacity to thrust a memorial into the litter of our lord Yamato no Kami. By an extraordinary exercise of clemency,¹⁴ he is willing to pardon this heinous offence; but should you ever again endeavour to force your petitions upon him, you will be held guilty of riotous conduct;” and with this they gave back the memorial.

“I humbly admit the justice of his lordship’s censure. But oh! my lords, this is no hasty nor ill-considered action. Year after year, affliction upon affliction has been heaped upon us, until at last the people are without even the necessaries of life; and we, seeing no end to the evil, have humbly presented this petition. I pray your lordships of your great mercy to consider our case and deign to receive our memorial. Vouchsafe to take some measures that the people may live, and our gratitude for your great kindness will know no bounds.”

“Your request is a just one,” replied the two councillors after hearing what he said; “but your memorial cannot be received: so you must even take it back.”

With this they gave back the document, and wrote down the names of Sôgorô and six of the elders who had accompanied him. There was no help for it: they must take back their petition, and return to their inn. The seven men, dispirited and sorrowful, sat with folded arms considering what was best to be done, what plan should be devised, until at last, when they were at their wits’ end, Sôgorô said, in a whisper—

“So our petition, which we gave in after so much pains, has been returned after all! With what face can we return to our villages after such a disgrace? I, for one, do not propose to waste my labour for nothing; accordingly, I shall bide my time until some day, when the Shogun shall go forth from the castle, and, lying in wait by the roadside, I shall make known our grievances to him, who is lord over our lord. This is our last chance.”

The others all applauded this speech, and, having with one accord hardened their hearts, waited for their opportunity.

Now it so happened that, on the 20th day of the 12th month, the then Shogun, Prince Iyémitsu, was pleased

Notes

13. Having your head exposed on a pike was considered an ultimate form of disgrace.

14. Mercy.

to worship at the tombs of his ancestors at Uyéno; and Sôgorô and the other elders, hearing this, looked upon it as a special favour from the gods, and felt certain that this time they would not fail. So they drew up a fresh memorial, and at the appointed time Sôgorô hid himself under the Sammayé Bridge, in front of the black gate at Uyéno. When Prince Iyémitu passed in his litter, Sôgorô clambered up from under the bridge, to the great surprise of the Shogun’s attendants, who called out, “Push the fellow on one side”; but, profiting by the confusion, Sôgorô, raising his voice and crying, “I wish to humbly present a petition to his Highness in person,” thrust forward his memorial, which he had tied on to the end of a bamboo stick six feet long, and tried to put it into the litter; and although there were cries to arrest him, and he was buffeted by the escort, he crawled up to the side of the litter, and the Shogun accepted the document. But Sôgorô was arrested by the escort, and thrown into prison. As for the memorial, his Highness ordered that it should be handed in to the Gorôjiu Hotta Kôtsuké no Suké, the lord of the petitioners.

When Hotta Kôtsuké no Suké had returned home and read the memorial, he summoned his councillor, Kojima Shikibu, and said—

“The officials of my estate are mere bunglers. When the peasants assembled and presented a petition, they refused to receive it, and have thus brought this trouble upon me. Their folly has been beyond belief; however, it cannot be helped. We must remit all the new taxes, and you must inquire how much was paid to the former lord of the castle. As for this Sôgorô, he is not the only one who is at the bottom of the conspiracy; however, as this heinous offence of his in going out to lie in wait for the Shogun’s procession is unpardonable, we must manage to get him given up to us by the Government, and, as an example for the rest of my people, he shall be crucified—he and his wife and his children; and, after his death, all that he possesses shall be confiscated. The other six men shall be banished; and that will suffice.”

“My lord,” replied Shikibu, prostrating himself, “your lordship’s intentions are just. Sôgorô, indeed, deserves any punishment for his outrageous crime. But I humbly venture to submit that his wife and children cannot be said to be guilty in the same degree: I implore your lordship mercifully to be pleased to absolve them from

so severe a punishment.”

“Where the sin of the father is great, the wife and children cannot be spared,” replied Kôtsuké no Suké; and his councillor, seeing that his heart was hardened, was forced to obey his orders without further remonstrance.

So Kôtsuké no Suké, having obtained that Sôgorô should be given up to him by the Government, caused him to be brought to his estate of Sakura as a criminal, in a litter covered with nets, and confined him in prison. When his case had been inquired into, a decree was issued by the Lord Kôtsuké no Suké that he should be punished for a heinous crime; and on the 9th day of the 2d month of the second year of the period styled Shôhō (A.D. 1644) he was condemned to be crucified.¹⁵ Accordingly Sôgorô, his wife and children, and the elders of the hundred and thirty-six villages were brought before the Court-house of Sakura, in which were assembled forty-five chief officers. The elders were then told that, yielding to their petition, their lord was graciously pleased to order that the oppressive taxes should be remitted, and that the dues levied should not exceed those of the olden time. As for Sôgorô and his wife, the following sentence was passed upon them:—

“Whereas you have set yourself up as the head of the villagers; whereas, secondly, you have dared to make light of the Government by petitioning his Highness the Shogun directly, thereby offering an insult to your lord; and whereas, thirdly, you have presented a memorial to the Gorôjiu; and, whereas, fourthly, you were privy to a conspiracy: for these four heinous crimes you are sentenced to death by crucifixion. Your wife is sentenced to die in like manner; and your children will be decapitated.

“This sentence is passed upon the following persons:—

“Sôgorô, chief of the village of Iwahashi, aged 48.

“His wife, Man, aged 38.

“His son, Gennosuké, aged 13.

“His son, Sôhei, aged 10.

“His son, Kihachi, aged 7.”

The eldest daughter of Sôgorô, named Hatsu, nineteen years of age, was married to a man named Jiuyémon, in the village of Hakamura, in Shitachi, beyond the river, in the territory of Matsudaira Matsu no Kami (the Prince of Sendai). His second daughter, whose name was Saki, sixteen years of age, was married to one Tôjiurô, chief

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15. It is believed that this practice was introduced to Japan following the introduction of Christianity into the region. It was a common form of capital punishment, as were burning, sawing, and beheading (Okamura 49).

of a village on the property of my lord Naitô Geki. No punishment was decreed against these two women.

The six elders who had accompanied Sôgorô were told that although by good rights they had merited death, yet by the special clemency of their lord their lives would be spared, but that they were condemned to banishment. Their wives and children would not be attainted, and their property would be spared. The six men were banished to Oshima, in the province of Idzu.

Sôgorô heard his sentence with pure courage.

The six men were banished; but three of them lived to be pardoned on the occasion of the death of the Shogun, Prince Genyuin, and returned to their country.

According to the above decision, the taxes were remitted; and men and women, young and old, rejoiced over the advantage that had been gained for them by Sôgorô and by the six elders, and there was not one that did not mourn for their fate.

When the officers of the several villages left the Court-house, one Zembei, the chief of the village of Sakato, told the others that he had some important subjects to speak to them upon, and begged them to meet him in the temple called Fukushôin. Every man having consented, and the hundred and thirty-six men having assembled at the temple, Zembei addressed them as follows:—

“The success of our petition, in obtaining the reduction of our taxes to the same amount as was levied by our former lord, is owing to Master Sôgorô, who has thus thrown away his life for us. He and his wife and children are now to suffer as criminals for the sake of the one hundred and thirty-six villages. That such a thing should take place before our very eyes seems to me not to be borne. What say you, my masters?”

“Ay! ay! what you say is just from top to bottom,” replied the others. Then Hanzayémon, the elder of the village of Katsuta, stepped forward and said—

“As Master Zembei has just said, Sôgorô is condemned to die for a matter in which all the village elders are concerned to a man. We cannot look on unconcerned. Full well I know that it is useless our pleading for Sôgorô; but we may, at least, petition that the lives of his wife and children may be spared.”

The assembled elders having all applauded this speech, they determined to draw up a memorial; and they resolved, should their petition not be accepted by the local authorities, to present it at their lord’s palace in Yedo, and should that fail, to appeal to the Government. Accord-

ingly, before noon on the following day, they all affixed their seals to the memorial, which four of them, including Zembei and Hanzayémon, composed, as follows:—

“With deep fear we humbly venture to present the following petition, which the elders of the one hundred and thirty-six villages of this estate have sealed with their seals. In consequence of the humble petition which we lately offered up, the taxes have graciously been reduced to the rates levied by the former lord of the estate, and new laws have been vouchsafed to us. With reverence and joy the peasants, great and small, have gratefully acknowledged these favours. With regard to Sôgorô, the elder of the village of Iwahashi, who ventured to petition his highness the Shogun in person, thus being guilty of a heinous crime, he has been sentenced to death in the castle-town. With fear and trembling we recognize the justice of his sentence. But in the matter of his wife and children, she is but a woman, and they are so young and innocent that they cannot distinguish the east from the west: we pray that in your great clemency you will remit their sin, and give them up to the representatives of the one hundred and thirty-six villages, for which we shall be ever grateful. We, the elders of the villages, know not to what extent we may be transgressing in presenting this memorial. We were all guilty of affixing our seals to the former petition; but Sôgorô, who was chief of a large district, producing a thousand kokus of revenue, and was therefore a man of experience, acted for the others; and we grieve that he alone should suffer for all. Yet in his case we reverently admit that there can be no reprieve. For his wife and children, however, we humbly implore your gracious mercy and consideration.

“Signed by the elders of the villages of the estate, the 2d year of Shôhô, and the 2d month.”

Having drawn up this memorial, the hundred and thirty-six elders, with Zembei at their head, proceeded to the Court-house to present the petition, and found the various officers seated in solemn conclave. Then the clerk took the petition, and, having opened it, read it aloud; and the councillor, Ikéura Kazuyé, said—

“The petition which you have addressed to us is worthy of all praise. But you must know that this is a matter which is no longer within our control. The affair has been reported to the Government; and although the priests of my lord’s ancestral temple have interceded for Sôgorô, my lord is so angry that he will not listen even to them, saying that, had he not been one of the Gorôjii,

he would have been in danger of being ruined by this man: his high station alone saved him. My lord spoke so severely that the priests themselves dare not recur to the subject. You see, therefore, that it will be no use your attempting to take any steps in the matter, for most certainly your petition will not be received. You had better, then, think no more about it.” And with these words he gave back the memorial.¹⁶

Zembei and the elders, seeing, to their infinite sorrow, that their mission was fruitless, left the Court-house, and most sorrowfully took counsel together, grinding their teeth in their disappointment when they thought over what the councillor had said as to the futility of their attempt. Out of grief for this, Zembei, with Hanzayémon and Heijiurô, on the 11th day of the 2d month (the day on which Sôgorô and his wife and children suffered), left Ewaradai, the place of execution, and went to the temple Zenkôji, in the province of Shinshiu, and from thence they ascended Mount Kôya in Kishiu, and, on the 1st day of the 8th month, shaved their heads and became priests; Zembei changed his name to Kakushin, and Hanzayémon changed his to Zenshô: as for Heijiurô, he fell sick at the end of the 7th month, and on the 11th day of the 8th month died, being forty-seven years old that year. These three men, who had loved Sôgorô as the fishes love water, were true to him to the last. Heijiurô was buried on Mount Kôya. Kakushin wandered through the country as a priest, praying for the entry of Sôgorô and his children into the perfection of paradise; and, after visiting all the shrines and temples, came back at last to his own province of Shimôsa, and took up his abode at the temple Riukakuji, in the village of Kano, and in the district of Imban, praying and making offerings on behalf of the souls of Sôgorô, his wife and children. Hanzayémon, now known as the priest Zenshô, remained at Shinagawa, a suburb of Yedo, and, by the charity of good people, collected enough money to erect six bronze Buddhas, which remain standing to this day. He fell sick and died, at the age of seventy, on the 10th day of the 2d month of the 13th year of the period styled Kam-bun. Zembei, who, as a priest, had changed his name to Kakushin, died, at the age of seventy-six, on the 17th day of the 10th month of the 2d year of the period styled

Empô. Thus did those men, for the sake of Sôgorô and his family, give themselves up to works of devotion; and the other villagers also brought food to soothe the spirits of the dead, and prayed for their entry into paradise; and as litanies were repeated without intermission, there can be no doubt that Sôgorô attained salvation.

“In paradise, where the blessings of God are distributed without favour, the soul learns its faults by the measure of the rewards given. The lusts of the flesh are abandoned; and the soul, purified, attains to the glory of Buddha.”

On the 11th day of the 2d month of the 2d year of Shôhô, Sôgorô having been convicted of a heinous crime, a scaffold was erected at Ewaradai, and the councillor who resided at Yedo and the councillor who resided on the estate, with the other officers, proceeded to the place in all solemnity. Then the priests of Tôkôji, in the village of Sakénaga, followed by coffin-bearers, took their places in front of the councillors, and said—

“We humbly beg leave to present a petition.”

“What have your reverences to say?”

“We are men who have forsaken the world and entered the priesthood,” answered the monks, respectfully; “and we would fain, if it be possible, receive the bodies of those who are to die, that we may bury them decently. It will be a great joy to us if our humble petition be graciously heard and granted.”

“Your request shall be granted; but as the crime of Sôgorô was great, his body must be exposed for three days and three nights, after which the corpse shall be given to you.”

At the hour of the snake (10 A.M.),¹⁷ the hour appointed for the execution, the people from the neighbouring villages and the castle-town, old and young, men and women, flocked to see the sight: numbers there were, too, who came to bid a last farewell to Sôgorô, his wife and children, and to put up a prayer for them. When the hour had arrived, the condemned were dragged forth bound, and made to sit upon coarse mats. Sôgorô and his wife closed their eyes, for the sight was more than they could bear; and the spectators, with heaving breasts and streaming eyes, cried “Cruel!” and “Pitiless!”¹⁸ and taking sweetmeats and cakes from the bosoms of their dresses threw them to the children. At noon precisely

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16. This is an interesting word choice, as it implies that the fate of Sôgorô’s family has already been sealed and that there is now only a “memorial” of their efforts to save them.

17. Time in 17th-19th century Japan was broken up into the 12 symbols of the Zodiac of the Japanese lunar calendar. The snake represents 9-11 p.m., when snakes leave their underground homes (For more on the Chinese Zodiac see Lau.) Mitford has likely inserted this information for his Western readers.

18. Note that, as in many other parts of the narrative, there is no violent resistance and only an exchange of words.

Sôgorô and his wife were bound to the crosses, which were then set upright and fixed in the ground. When this had been done, their eldest son Gennosuké was led forward to the scaffold, in front of the two parents. Then Sôgorô cried out—

“Oh! cruel, cruel! what crime has this poor child committed that he is treated thus? As for me, it matters not what becomes of me.” And the tears trickled down his face.

The spectators prayed aloud, and shut their eyes; and the executioner himself, standing behind the boy, and saying that it was a pitiless thing that the child should suffer for the father’s fault, prayed silently. Then Gennosuké, who had remained with his eyes closed, said to his parents—

“Oh! my father and mother, I am going before you to paradise, that happy country, to wait for you. My little brothers and I will be on the banks of the river Sandzu, and stretch out our hands and help you across. Farewell, all you who have come to see us die; and now please cut off my head at once.”

With this he stretched out his neck, murmuring a last prayer; and not only Sôgorô and his wife, but even the executioner and the spectators could not repress their tears; but the headsman, unnerved as he was, and touched to the very heart, was forced, on account of his office, to cut off the child’s head, and a piteous wail arose from the parents and the spectators.

Then the younger child Sôhei said to the headsman, “Sir, I have a sore on my right shoulder: please, cut my head off from the left shoulder, lest you should hurt me. Alas! I know not how to die, nor what I should do.”

When the headsman and the officers present heard the child’s artless speech, they wept again for very pity; but there was no help for it, and the head fell off more swiftly than water is drunk up by sand. Then little Kihachi, the third son, who, on account of his tender years, should have been spared, was butchered as he was in his simplicity eating the sweetmeats which had been thrown to him by the spectators.

When the execution of the children was over, the priests of Tôkôji took their corpses, and, having placed them in their coffins, carried them away, amidst the lamentations of the bystanders, and buried them with great solemnity.

Then Shigayémon, one of the servants of Dan-

zayémon, the chief of the Etas, who had been engaged for the purpose, was just about to thrust his spear, when O Man, Sôgorô’s wife, raising her voice, said—

“Remember, my husband, that from the first you had made up your mind to this fate. What though our bodies be disgracefully exposed on these crosses?—we have the promises of the gods before us; therefore, mourn not. Let us fix our minds upon death: we are drawing near to paradise, and shall soon be with the saints. Be calm, my husband. Let us cheerfully lay down our single lives for the good of many. Man lives but for one generation; his name, for many. A good name is more to be prized than life.”

So she spoke; and Sôgorô on the cross, laughing gaily, answered—

“Well said, wife! What though we are punished for the many? Our petition was successful, and there is nothing left to wish for. Now I am happy, for I have attained my heart’s desire. The changes and chances of life are manifold. But if I had five hundred lives, and could five hundred times assume this shape of mine, I would die five hundred times to avenge this iniquity. For myself I care not; but that my wife and children should be punished also is too much. Pitiless and cruel! Let my lord fence himself in with iron walls, yet shall my spirit burst through them and crush his bones, as a return for this deed.”

And as he spoke, his eyes became vermilion red, and flashed like the sun or the moon, and he looked like the demon Razetsu.¹⁹

“Come,” shouted he, “make haste and pierce me with the spear.”

“Your wishes shall be obeyed,” said the Eta, Shigayémon, and thrust in a spear at his right side until it came out at his left shoulder, and the blood streamed out like a fountain. Then he pierced the wife from the left side; and she, opening her eyes, said in a dying voice—

“Farewell, all you who are present. May harm keep far from you. Farewell! farewell!” and as her voice waxed faint, the second spear was thrust in from her right side, and she breathed out her spirit. Sôgorô, the colour of his face not even changing, showed no sign of fear, but opening his eyes wide, said—

“Listen, my masters! all you who have come to see this sight. Recollect that I shall pay my thanks to my lord Kôtsuké no Suké for this day’s work. You shall see it for

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19. There is little documentation available to decipher the significance of the reference to this particular demon. It appears to be an obscure reference (or perhaps spelling) by Mitford in his retelling.

20. Ritualized form of suicide that involves disembowelment using a ceremonial knife.

yourselves, so that it shall be talked of for generations to come. As a sign, when I am dead, my head shall turn and face towards the castle. When you see this, doubt not that my words shall come true.”

When he had spoken thus, the officer directing the execution gave a sign to the Eta, Shigayémon, and ordered him to finish the execution, so that Sôgorô should speak no more. So Shigayémon pierced him twelve or thirteen times,



until he died. And when he was dead, his head turned and faced the castle. When the two councillors beheld this miracle, they came down from their raised platform, and knelt down before Sôgorô's dead body and said—

“Although you were but a peasant on this estate, you conceived a noble plan to succour the other farmers in their distress. You bruised your bones, and crushed your heart, for their sakes. Still, in that you appealed to the Shogun in person, you committed a grievous crime, and made light of your superiors; and for this it was impossible not to punish you. Still we admit that to include your wife and children in your crime, and kill them before your eyes, was a cruel deed. What is done, is done, and regret is of no avail. However, honours shall be paid to your spirit: you shall be canonized as the Saint Daimiyô, and you shall be placed among the tutelar deities of my lord's family.”

With these words the two councillors made repeated reverences before the corpse; and in this they showed their faithfulness to their lord. But he, when the matter was reported to him, only laughed scornfully at the idea that the hatred of a peasant could affect his feudal lord;

and said that a vassal who had dared to hatch a plot which, had it not been for his high office, would have been sufficient to ruin him, had only met with his deserts. As for causing him to be canonized, let him be as he was. Seeing their lord's anger, his councillors could only obey. But it was not long before he had cause to know that, though Sôgorô was dead, his vengeance was yet alive.

The relations of Sôgorô and the elders of the villages having been summoned to the Court-house, the following document was issued:—

“Although the property of Sôgorô, the elder of the village of Iwashashi, is confiscated, his household furniture shall be made over to his two married daughters; and the village officials will look to it that these few poor things be not stolen by lawless and unprincipled men.

“His rice-fields and corn-fields, his mountain land and forest land, will be sold by auction. His house and grounds will be given over to the elder of the village. The price fetched by his property will be paid over to the lord of the estate.

“The above decree will be published, in full, to the peasants of the village; and it is strictly forbidden to find fault with this decision.

“The 12th day of the 2d month, of the 2d year of the period Shôhō.”

The peasants, having heard this decree with all humility, left the Court-house. Then the following punishments were awarded to the officers of the castle, who, by rejecting the petition of the peasants in the first instance, had brought trouble upon their lord:—

“Dismissed from their office, the resident councillors at Yedo and at the castle-town.

“Banished from the province, four district governors, and three bailiffs, and nineteen petty officers.

“Dismissed from office, three metsukés, or censors, and seven magistrates.

“Condemned to hara-kiri,²⁰ one district governor and one Yedo bailiff.

“The severity of this sentence is owing to the injustice of the officials in raising new and unprecedented taxes, and bringing affliction upon the people, and in refusing to receive the petitions of the peasants, without consulting their lord, thus driving them to appeal to the Shogun in person. In their avarice they looked not to the future, but laid too heavy a burden on the peasants, so that they made an appeal to a higher power, endangering the

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20. Ritualized form of suicide that involves disembowelment using a ceremonial knife.

honour of their lord’s house. For this bad government the various officials are to be punished as above.”

In this wise was justice carried out at the palace at Yedo and at the Court-house at home. But in the history of the world, from the dark ages down to the present time, there are few instances of one man laying down his life for the many, as Sôgorô did: noble and peasant praise him alike.

As month after month passed away, towards the fourth year of the period Shôhō, the wife of my lord Kôtsuké no Suké, being with child, was seized with violent pains; and retainers were sent to all the different temples and shrines to pray by proxy, but all to no purpose: she continued to suffer as before. Towards the end of the seventh month of the year, there appeared, every night, a preternatural light above the lady’s chamber; this was accompanied by hideous sounds as of many people laughing fiendishly, and sometimes by piteous wailings, as though myriads of persons were lamenting. The profound distress caused by this added to her sufferings; so her own privy councillor, an old man, took his place in the adjoining chamber, and kept watch. All of a sudden, he heard a noise as if a number of people were walking on the boards of the roof of my lady’s room; then there was a sound of men and women weeping; and when, thunderstruck, the councillor was wondering what it could all be, there came a wild burst of laughter, and all was silent. Early the following morning, the old women who had charge of my lady’s household presented themselves before my lord Kôtsuké no Suké, and said—

“Since the middle of last month, the waiting-women have been complaining to us of the ghostly noises by which my lady is nightly disturbed, and they say that they cannot continue to serve her. We have tried to soothe them, by saying that the devils should be exorcised at once, and that there was nothing to be afraid of. Still we feel that their fears are not without reason, and that they really cannot do their work; so we beg that your lordship will take the matter into your consideration.”

“This is a passing strange story of yours; however, I will go myself to-night to my lady’s apartments and keep watch. You can come with me.”

Accordingly, that night my lord Kôtsuké no Suké sat up in person. At the hour of the rat (midnight) a fearful noise of voices was heard, and Sôgorô and his wife, bound to the fatal crosses, suddenly appeared; and the ghosts, seizing the lady by the hand, said—

“We have come to meet you. The pains you are suffering are terrible, but they are nothing in comparison with those of the hell to which we are about to lead you.”

At these words, Kôtsuké no Suké, seizing his sword, tried to sweep the ghosts away with a terrific cut; but a loud peal of laughter was heard, and the visions faded away. Kôtsuké no Suké, terrified, sent his retainers to the temples and shrines to pray that the demons might be cast out; but the noises were heard nightly, as before. When the eleventh month of the year came round, the apparitions of human forms in my lady’s apartments became more and more frequent and terrible, all the spirits railing at her, and howling out that they had come to fetch her. The women would all scream and faint; and then the ghosts would disappear amid yells of laughter. Night after night this happened, and even in the daytime the visions would manifest themselves; and my lady’s sickness grew worse daily, until in the last month of the year she died, of grief and terror. Then the ghost of Sôgorô and his wife crucified would appear day and night in the chamber of Kôtsuké no Suké, floating round the room, and glaring at him with red and flaming eyes. The hair of the attendants would stand on end with terror; and if they tried to cut at the spirits, their limbs would be cramped, and their feet and hands would not obey their bidding. Kôtsuké no Suké would draw the sword that lay by his bedside; but, as often as he did so, the ghosts faded away, only to appear again in a more hideous shape than before, until at last, having exhausted his strength and spirits, even he became terror-stricken. The whole household was thrown into confusion, and day after day mystic rites and incantations were performed by the priests over braziers of charcoal, while prayers were recited without ceasing; but the visions only became more frequent, and there was no sign of their ceasing. After the 5th year of Shôhō, the style of the years was changed to Keian; and during the 1st year of Keian the spirits continued to haunt the palace; and now they appeared in the chamber of Kôtsuké no Suké’s eldest son, surrounding themselves with even more terrors than before; and when Kôtsuké no Suké was about to go to the Shogun’s castle, they were seen howling out their cries of vengeance in the porch of the house. At last the relations of the family and the members of the household took counsel together, and told Kôtsuké no Suké that without doubt no ordinary means would suffice to lay the ghosts; a shrine must be erected to Sôgorô, and

divine honours paid to him, after which the apparitions would assuredly cease. Kôtsuké no Suké having carefully considered the matter and given his consent, Sôgorô was canonized under the name of Sôgo Daimiyô, and a shrine was erected in his honour. After divine honours had been paid to him, the awful visions were no more seen, and the ghost of Sôgorô was laid for ever.

In the 2d year of the period Keian, on the 11th day of the 10th month, on the occasion of the festival of first lighting the fire on the hearth, the various Daimios and Hatamotos of distinction went to the castle of the Shogun, at Yedo, to offer their congratulations on this occasion. During the ceremonies, my lord Hotta Kôtsuké no Suké and Sakai Iwami no Kami, lord of the castle of Matsumoto, in the province of Shinshiu, had a quarrel, the origin of which was not made public; and Sakai Iwami no Kami, although he came of a brave and noble family, received so severe a wound that he died on the following day, at the age of forty-three; and in consequence of this, his family was ruined and disgraced. My lord Kôtsuké no Suké, by great good fortune, contrived to escape from the castle, and took refuge in his own house, whence, mounting a famous horse called Hira-Abumi, he fled to his castle of Sakura, in Shimôsa, accomplishing the distance, which is about sixty miles, in six hours. When he arrived in front of the castle, he called out in a loud voice to the guard within to open the gate, answering, in reply to their challenge, that he was Kôtsuké no Suké, the lord of the castle. The guard, not believing their ears, sent word to the councillor in charge of the castle, who rushed out to see if the person demanding admittance were really their lord. When he saw Kôtsuké no Suké, he caused the gates to be opened, and, thinking it more than strange, said—

“Is this indeed you, my lord? What strange chance brings your lordship hither thus late at night, on horseback and alone, without a single follower?”

With these words he ushered in Kôtsuké no Suké, who, in reply to the anxious inquiries of his people as to the cause of his sudden appearance, said—

“You may well be astonished. I had a quarrel to-day in the castle at Yedo, with Sakai Iwami no Kami, the lord of the castle of Matsumoto, and I cut him down. I shall soon be pursued; so we must strengthen the fortress, and prepare for an attack.”

The household, hearing this, were greatly alarmed, and the whole castle was thrown into confusion. In the

meanwhile the people of Kôtsuké no Suké’s palace at Yedo, not knowing whether their lord had fled, were in the greatest anxiety, until a messenger came from Sakura, and reported his arrival there.

When the quarrel inside the castle of Yedo and Kôtsuké no Suké’s flight had been taken cognizance of, he was attainted of treason, and soldiers were sent to seize him, dead or alive. Midzuno Setsu no Kami and Gotô Yamato no Kami were charged with the execution of the order, and sallied forth, on the 13th day of the 10th month, to carry it out. When they arrived at the town of Sasai, they sent a herald with the following message—

“Whereas Kôtsuké no Suké killed Sakai Iwami no Kami inside the castle of Yedo, and has fled to his own castle without leave, he is attainted of treason; and we, being connected with him by ties of blood and of friendship, have been charged to seize him.”

The herald delivered this message to the councillor of Kôtsuké no Suké, who, pleading as an excuse that his lord was mad, begged the two nobles to intercede for him. Gotô Yamato no Kami upon this called the councillor to him, and spoke privately to him, after which the latter took his leave and returned to the castle of Sakura.

In the meanwhile, after consultation at Yedo, it was decided that, as Gotô Yamato no Kami and Midzuno Setsu no Kami were related to Kôtsuké no Suké, and might meet with difficulties for that very reason, two other nobles, Ogasawara Iki no Kami and Nagai Hida no Kami, should be sent to assist them, with orders that should any trouble arise they should send a report immediately to Yedo. In consequence of this order, the two nobles, with five thousand men, were about to march for Sakura, on the 15th of the month, when a messenger arrived from that place bearing the following despatch for the Gorô-jiu, from the two nobles who had preceded them—

“In obedience to the orders of His Highness the Shogun, we proceeded, on the 13th day of this month, to the castle of Sakura, and conducted a thorough investigation of the affair. It is true that Kôtsuké no Suké has been guilty of treason, but he is out of his mind; his retainers have called in physicians, and he is undergoing treatment by which his senses are being gradually restored, and his mind is being awakened from its sleep. At the time when he slew Sakai Iwami no Kami he was not accountable for his actions, and will be sincerely penitent when he is aware of his crime. We have taken him prisoner, and have the honour to await your instructions; in the mean-

while, we beg by these present to let you know what we have done.

“(Signed)

GOTÔ YAMATO NO KAMI.

MIDZUNO SETSU NO KAMI.

To the Gorôjiu, 2d year of Keian, 2d month, 14th day.”

This despatch reached Yedo on the 16th of the month, and was read by the Gorôjiu after they had left the castle; and in consequence of the report of Kôtsuké no Suké’s madness, the second expedition was put a stop to, and the following instructions were sent to Gotô Yamato no Kami and Midzuno Setsu no Kami—

“With reference to the affair of Hotta Kôtsuké no Suké, lord of the castle of Sakura, in Shimôsa, whose quarrel with Sakai Iwami no Kami within the castle of Yedo ended in bloodshed. For this heinous crime and disregard of the sanctity of the castle, it is ordered that Kôtsuké no Suké be brought as a prisoner to Yedo, in a litter covered with nets, that his case may be judged.

“2d year of Keian, 2d month.

(Signed by the Gorôjiu)

INABA MINO NO KAMI.

INOUE KAWACHI NO KAMI.

KATÔ ECCHIU NO KAMI.”

Upon the receipt of this despatch, Hotta Kôtsuké nô Suké was immediately placed in a litter covered with a net of green silk, and conveyed to Yedo, strictly guarded by the retainers of the two nobles; and, having arrived at the capital, was handed over to the charge of Akimoto Tajima no Kami. All his retainers were quietly dispersed; and his empty castle was ordered to be thrown open, and given in charge to Midzuno Iki no Kami.

At last Kôtsuké no Suké began to feel that the death of his wife and his own present misfortunes were a just retribution for the death of Sôgorô and his wife and children, and he was as one awakened from a dream. Then night and morning, in his repentance, he offered up prayers to the sainted spirit of the dead farmer, and acknowledged and bewailed his crime, vowing that, if his family were spared from ruin and re-established, intercession should be made at the court of the Mikado, at Kiyôto, on behalf of the spirit of Sôgorô, so that, being worshipped with even greater honours than before, his name should be handed down to all generations.

In consequence of this it happened that the spirit of Sôgorô having relaxed in its vindictiveness, and having ceased to persecute the house of Hotta, in the 1st month of the 4th year of Keian, Kôtsuké no Suké received a summons from the Shogun, and, having been forgiven, was made lord of the castle of Matsuyama, in the province of Déwa, with a revenue of twenty thousand kokus. In the same year, on the 20th day of the 4th month, the Shogun, Prince Iyémitsu, was pleased to depart this life, at the age of forty-eight; and whether by the forgiving spirit of the prince, or by the divine interposition of the sainted Sôgorô, Kôtsuké no Suké was promoted to the castle of Utsu no Miya, in the province of Shimotsuké, with a revenue of eighty thousand kokus; and his name was changed to Hotta Hida no Kami. He also received again his original castle of Sakura, with a revenue of twenty thousand kokus: so that there can be no doubt that the saint was befriending him. In return for these favours, the shrine of Sôgorô was made as beautiful as a gem. It is needless to say how many of the peasants of the estate flocked to the shrine: any good luck that might befall the people was ascribed to it, and night and day the devout worshipped at it.

Here follows a copy of the petition which Sôgorô presented to the Shogun—

“We, the elders of the hundred and thirty-six villages of the district of Chiba, in the province of Shimôsa, and of the district of Buji, in the province of Kadzusa, most reverently offer up this our humble petition.

“When our former lord, Doi Shosho, was transferred to another castle, in the 9th year of the period Kanyé, Hotta Kaga no Kami became lord of the castle of Sakura; and in the 17th year of the same period, my lord Kôtsuké no Suké succeeded him. Since that time the taxes laid upon us have been raised in the proportion of one tô and two sho to each koku.

“Item.—At the present time, taxes are raised on nineteen of our articles of produce; whereas our former lord only required that we should furnish him with pulse and sesamum, for which he paid in rice.

“Item.—Not only are we not paid now for our produce, but, if it is not given in to the day, we are driven and goaded by the officials; and if there be any further delay, we are manacled and severely reprimanded; so that if our own crops fail, we have to buy produce from other districts, and are pushed to the utmost extremity of affliction.

“Item.—We have over and over again prayed to be

relieved from these burthens, but our petitions are not received. The people are reduced to poverty, so that it is hard for them to live under such grievous taxation. Often they have tried to sell the land which they till, but none can be found to buy; so they have sometimes given over their land to the village authorities, and fled with their wives to other provinces, and seven hundred and thirty men or more have been reduced to begging, one hundred and eighty-five houses have fallen into ruins; land producing seven thousand kokus has been given up, and remains untilled, and eleven temples have fallen into decay in consequence of the ruin of those upon whom they depended.

“Besides this, the poverty-stricken farmers and women, having been obliged to take refuge in other provinces, and having no abiding-place, have been driven to evil courses and bring men to speak ill of their lord; and the village officials, being unable to keep order, are blamed and reproved. No attention has been paid to our repeated representations upon this point; so we were driven to petition the Gorôjiu Kuzé Yamato no Kami as he was on his way to the castle, but our petition was returned to us. And now, as a last resource, we tremblingly venture to approach his Highness the Shogun in person.

“The 1st year of the period Shôhō, 12th month, 20th day.

“The seals of the elders of the 136 villages.”

The Shogun at that time was Prince Iyémitu, the grandson of Iyéyasu. He received the name of Dai-yu-In after his death.

The Gorôjiu at that time were Hotta Kôtsuké no Suké, Sakai Iwami no Kami, Inaba Mino no Kami, Katô Echiu no Kami, Inouyé Kawachi no Kami.

The Wakadoshiyôri (or 2d council) were Torii Wakasa no Kami, Tsuchiya Dewa no Kami, and Itakura Naizen no Sho.

Contextual Documents

*Author's Original Introduction*²¹

The following is Mitford's original introduction to “The Ghost of Sakura,” published as part of his *Tales of Old Japan*. In it, he emphasizes the historical importance of the story itself, and provides some background on the economic structures that governed the lives of peasants.

His description shows the inequality that was often experienced as a part of feudalism through the enforcement of rents, land-tax, and local government. It tells the tale of a system that was set up to keep its subjects at the bottom while allowing those who developed it to prosper and live lives of luxury.

All of this information came from Mitford's first-hand experiences witnessing something very similar to these revolutions during his time in Japan. With his introduction, Mitford wanted to give the readers as much context to Japan's political and social structures as possible, given how little was known about them at the time. However, Mitford also wished to incite interest in Japanese culture, as that was lacking before his translation of *Tales of Old Japan*.

The misfortunes and death of the farmer Sôgorô, which, although the preternatural appearances by which they are said to have been followed may raise a smile, are matters of historic notoriety with which every Japanese is familiar, furnish a forcible illustration of the relations which exist between the tenant and the lord of the soil, and of the boundless power for good or for evil exercised by the latter. It is rather remarkable that in a country where the peasant—placed as he is next to the soldier, and before the artisan and merchant, in the four classes into which the people are divided—enjoys no small consideration, and where agriculture is protected by law from the inroads of wild vegetation, even to the lopping of overshadowing branches and the cutting down of hedgerow timber, the lord of the manor should be left practically without control in his dealings with his people.

The land-tax, or rather the yearly rent paid by the tenant, is usually assessed at forty per cent. of the produce; but there is no principle clearly defining it, and frequently the landowner and the cultivator divide the proceeds of the harvest in equal shares. Rice land is divided into three classes; and, according to these classes, it is computed that one tan (1,800 square feet) of the best land should yield to the owner a revenue of five bags of rice per annum; each of these bags holds four tô (a tô is rather less than half an imperial bushel), and is worth at present (1868) three riyos, or about sixteen shillings; land of the middle class should yield a revenue of three or four

Notes

21. This introduction is found in A.B. Mitford's *Tales of Old Japan*, pages 160-164.

bags. The rent is paid either in rice or in money, according to the actual price of the grain, which varies considerably. It is due in the eleventh month of the year, when the crops have all been gathered, and their market value fixed.

The rent of land bearing crops other than rice, such as cotton, beans, roots, and so forth, is payable in money during the twelfth month. The choice of the nature of the crops to be grown appears to be left to the tenant.

The Japanese landlord, when pressed by poverty, does not confine himself to the raising of his legitimate rents: he can always enforce from his needy tenantry the advancement of a year's rent, or the loan of so much money as may be required to meet his immediate necessities. Should the lord be just, the peasant is repaid by instalments [sic], with interest, extending over ten or twenty years. But it too often happens that unjust and merciless lords do not repay such loans, but, on the contrary, press for further advances. Then it is that the farmers, dressed in their grass rain-coats, and carrying sickles and bamboo poles in their hands, assemble before the gate of their lord's palace at the capital, and represent their grievances, imploring the intercession of the retainers, and even of the womankind who may chance to go forth. Sometimes they pay for their temerity by their lives; but, at any rate, they have the satisfaction of bringing shame upon their persecutor, in the eyes of his neighbours and of the populace.

The official reports of recent travels in the interior of Japan have fully proved the hard lot with which the peasantry had to put up during the government of the Tycoons, and especially under the Hatamotos, the created nobility of the dynasty. In one province, where the village mayors appear to have seconded the extortions of their lord, they have had to flee before an exasperated population, who, taking advantage of the revolution, laid waste and pillaged their houses, loudly praying for a new and just assessment of the land; while, throughout the country, the farmers have hailed with acclamations the resumption of the sovereign power by the Mikado, and the abolition of the petty nobility who exalted themselves upon the misery of their dependants. Warming themselves in the sunshine of the court at Yedo, the Hatamotos waxed fat and held high revel, and little cared they who groaned or who starved. Money must be found, and it was found.

It is necessary here to add a word respecting the position of the village mayors, who play so important a part

in the tale.

The peasants of Japan are ruled by three classes of officials: the Nanushi, or mayor; the Kumigashira, or chiefs of companies; and the Hiyakushôdai, or farmers' representatives. The village, which is governed by the Nanushi, or mayor, is divided into companies, which, consisting of five families each, are directed by a Kumigashira; these companies, again, are subdivided into groups of five men each, who choose one of their number to represent them in case of their having any petition to present, or any affairs to settle with their superiors. This functionary is the Hiyakushôdai. The mayor, the chief of the company, and the representative keep registers of the families and people under their control, and are responsible for their good and orderly behaviour. They pay taxes like the other farmers, but receive a salary, the amount of which depends upon the size and wealth of the village. Five per cent. of the yearly land tax forms the salary of the mayor, and the other officials each receive five per cent. of the tax paid by the little bodies over which they respectively rule.

The average amount of land for one family to cultivate is about one chô, or 9,000 square yards; but there are farmers who have inherited as much as five or even six chô from their ancestors. There is also a class of farmers called, from their poverty, “water-drinking farmers,” who have no land of their own, but hire that of those who have more than they can keep in their own hands. The rent so paid varies; but good rice land will bring in as high a rent as from £1 18s. to £2 6s. per tan (1,800 square feet).

Farm labourers are paid from six or seven riyos a year to as much as thirty riyos (the ryo being worth about 5s. 4d.); besides this, they are clothed and fed, not daintily indeed, but amply. The rice which they cultivate is to them an almost unknown luxury: millet is their staple food, and on high days and holidays they receive messes of barley or buckwheat. Where the mulberry-tree is grown, and the silkworm is “educated,” there the labourer receives the highest wage.

The rice crop on good land should yield twelve and a half fold, and on ordinary land from six to seven fold only. Ordinary arable land is only half as valuable as rice land, which cannot be purchased for less than forty riyos per tan of 1,800 square feet. Common hill or wood land is cheaper, again, than arable land; but orchards and groves of the Pawlonia are worth from fifty to sixty riyos per tan.

With regard to the punishment of crucifixion, by which Sôgorô was put to death, it is inflicted for the following offences:—parricide (including the murder or striking of parents, uncles, aunts, elder brothers, masters, or teachers) coining counterfeit money, and passing the barriers of the Tycoon’s territory without a permit. The criminal is attached to an upright post with two cross bars, to which his arms and feet are fastened by ropes. He is then transfixed with spears by men belonging to the Eta or Pariah class. I once passed the execution-ground near Yedo, when a body was attached to the cross. The dead man had murdered his employer, and, having been condemned to death by crucifixion, had died in prison before the sentence could be carried out. He was accordingly packed, in a squatting position, in a huge red earthenware jar, which, having been tightly filled up with salt, was hermetically sealed. On the anniversary of the commission of the crime, the jar was carried down to the execution-ground and broken, and the body was taken out and tied to the cross, the joints of the knees and arms having been cut, to allow of the extension of the stiffened and shrunken limbs; it was then transfixed with spears, and allowed to remain exposed for three days. An open grave, the upturned soil of which seemed almost entirely composed of dead men’s remains, waited to receive the dishonoured corpse, over which three or four Etas, squalid and degraded beings, were mounting guard, smoking their pipes by a scanty charcoal fire, and bandying obscene jests. It was a hideous and ghastly warning, had any cared to read the lesson; but the passers-by on the high road took little or no notice of the sight, and a group of chubby and happy children were playing not ten yards from the dead body, as if no strange or uncanny thing were near them.

*Introduction to “47 Ronin”*²²

Here is the author’s original introduction to his translation of “47 Ronin,” possibly Japan’s most notable folktale about 47 master-less samurai who embark to save the land from corruption. Similar to “Sakura,” this story also comments on themes of social structure, class and how justice is distributed in Japan as these samurai are the heroes despite the fact that they lie outside the structure of the samurai. Mitford establishes here the true

purpose of his anthology, giving the audience plenty of information about why Japan was mysterious for so long and why it is now important to read these folktales in order to understand the culture of Japan at the time. As noted above, England at the time didn’t view Japan as a very significant country, so Mitford saw it as his responsibility to bring Japan’s rich culture to the attention of a Western audience.

“47 Ronin” provides a look into how Japan valued samurai as symbols of justice and honor in their social structure. This introduction establishes that Mitford wanted not only to inform the West of these values, but also to explore these values through the allegorical story itself. “47 Ronin” also continues the theme of conflict within the structure of Japan’s governing structures, perhaps because Mitford was able to see the social unrest of Japan up close and thus felt obligated to report upon it. Mitford even goes into some detail about how he was received as a diplomat to Japan, which was critical in his ability to translate and provide this work. This piece is a good companion to “The Ghost of Sakura” because it highlights Mitford’s vision of Japanese culture. It’s important to remember that Mitford initially approached Japan and its culture from a point of total ignorance. As a diplomat he represented Britain, which at the time did not view Japan as a country worthy of much attention. It was only by being a diplomat that Mitford was exposed to Japanese culture and became convinced that it was important to translate all of these stories and present them to a Western audience.

The books which have been written of late years about Japan have either been compiled from official records, or have contained the sketchy impressions of passing travellers. Of the inner life of the Japanese the world at large knows but little: their religion, their superstitions, their ways of thought, the hidden springs by which they move—all these are as yet mysteries. Nor is this to be wondered at. The first Western men who came in contact with Japan—I am speaking not of the old Dutch and Portuguese traders and priests, but of the diplomatists and merchants of eleven years ago—met with a cold reception. Above all things, the native Government threw obstacles in the way of any inquiry into

Notes

22. This introduction is found in A.B. Mitford’s *Tales of Old Japan*, pages 1-3.

their language, literature, and history. The fact was that the Tycoon’s Government—with whom alone, so long as the Mikado remained in seclusion in his sacred capital at Kiôto, any relations were maintained—knew that the Imperial purple with which they sought to invest their chief must quickly fade before the strong sunlight which would be brought upon it so soon as there should be European linguists capable of examining their books and records. No opportunity was lost of throwing dust in the eyes of the new-comers, whom, even in the most trifling details, it was the official policy to lead astray. Now, however, there is no cause for concealment; the Roi Fainéant has shaken off his sloth, and his Maire du Palais, together, and an intelligible Government, which need not fear scrutiny from abroad, is the result: the records of the country being but so many proofs of the Mikado’s title to power, there is no reason for keeping up any show of mystery. The path of inquiry is open to all; and although there is yet much to be learnt, some knowledge has been attained, in which it may interest those who stay at home to share.

The recent revolution in Japan has wrought changes social as well as political; and it may be that when, in addition to the advance which has already been made, railways and telegraphs shall have connected the principal points of the Land of Sunrise, the old Japanese, such as he was and had been for centuries when we found him eleven short years ago, will have become extinct. It has appeared to me that no better means could be chosen of preserving a record of a curious and fast disappearing civilization than the translation of some of the most interesting national legends and histories, together with other specimens of literature bearing upon the same subject. Thus the Japanese may tell their own tale, their translator only adding here and there a few words of heading or tag to a chapter, where an explanation or amplification may seem necessary. I fear that the long and hard names will often make my tales tedious reading, but I believe that those who will bear with the difficulty will learn more of the character of the Japanese people than by skimming over descriptions of travel and adventure, however brilliant. The lord and his retainer, the warrior and the priest, the humble artisan and the despised Eta or pariah, each in his turn will become a leading character in my budget of stories; and it is out of the mouths of these personages that I hope to show forth a tolerably complete picture of Japanese society.

Having said so much by way of preface, I beg my

readers to fancy themselves wafted away to the shores of the Bay of Yedo—a fair, smiling landscape: gentle slopes, crested by a dark fringe of pines and firs, lead down to the sea; the quaint eaves of many a temple and holy shrine peep out here and there from the groves; the bay itself is studded with picturesque fisher-craft, the torches of which shine by night like glow-worms among the outlying forts; far away to the west loom the goblin-haunted heights of Oyama, and beyond the twin hills of the Hakoné Pass—Fuji-Yama, the Peerless Mountain, solitary and grand, stands in the centre of the plain, from which it sprang vomiting flames twenty-one centuries ago. For a hundred and sixty years the huge mountain has been at peace, but the frequent earthquakes still tell of hidden fires, and none can say when the red-hot stones and ashes may once more fall like rain over five provinces.

In the midst of a nest of venerable trees in Takanawa, a suburb of Yedo, is hidden Sengakuji, or the Spring-hill Temple, renowned throughout the length and breadth of the land for its cemetery, which contains the graves of the Forty-seven Rônins, famous in Japanese history, heroes of Japanese drama, the tale of whose deeds I am about to transcribe.

On the left-hand side of the main court of the temple is a chapel, in which, surmounted by a gilt figure of Kwanyin, the goddess of mercy, are enshrined the images of the forty-seven men, and of the master whom they loved so well. The statues are carved in wood, the faces coloured, and the dresses richly lacquered; as works of art they have great merit—the action of the heroes, each armed with his favourite weapon, being wonderfully life-like and spirited. Some are venerable men, with thin, grey hair (one is seventy-seven years old); others are mere boys of sixteen. Close by the chapel, at the side of a path leading up the hill, is a little well of pure water, fenced in and adorned with a tiny fernery, over which is an inscription, setting forth that “This is the well in which the head was washed; you must not wash your hands or your feet here.” A little further on is a stall, at which a poor old man earns a pittance by selling books, pictures, and medals, commemorating the loyalty of the Forty-seven; and higher up yet, shaded by a grove of stately trees, is a neat inclosure, kept up, as a signboard announces, by voluntary contributions, round which are ranged forty-eight little tombstones, each decked with evergreens, each with its tribute of water and incense for the comfort of the departed spirit. There were forty-seven

Rônins; there are forty-eight tombstones, and the story of the forty-eighth is truly characteristic of Japanese ideas of honour. Almost touching the rail of the graveyard is a more imposing monument under which lies buried the lord, whose death his followers piously avenged.

*Feast of Lanterns*²³

Understanding the ways in which a culture treats their deceased is perhaps one of the most important ways of comprehending how haunting fits into that particular culture. The article that follows, first appearing in the *New York Times* in 1883, documents the respect shown for the dead as part of Japan’s Feast of Lanterns. This feast is held every year and typically honors the first, third, and seventh anniversary of a person’s passing.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the Feast of Lanterns is that it appears to be a festival celebrated much more widely among the working class. This builds upon the themes of collectivism by emphasizing the community bonds that are held even beyond death. As such, these types of collectivist beliefs are much more important to those in the lower and middle classes of Japanese culture than it is to those in the individualist upper classes. Friendship and family extend beyond the grave as those who have passed return to greet their loved ones. It is also notable that all of the deceased experiencing their first, third, or seventh anniversary are allowed to return to the living. This implies that ghostliness, like the ideal collectivistic society, is equal opportunity as each person is given the same amount of time to spend with their friends and family. In a sense, it is an ancient Japanese way of saying that we are all equal in death.

This article also offers an excellent opportunity to see the ways in which the Western world viewed such Japanese traditions. The use of words such as *peculiar* and *weird* to describe the Feast of Lanterns provides perhaps the most obvious insight into this viewpoint. The Japanese were viewed as an exotic race of people with a strange culture that was often beyond Western comprehension. While much of Mitford’s retelling of “The Ghost of Sakura” may not use such obviously subjective terms to describe the culture, it is still important to keep in mind that such views may have influenced his writing.

The annual festival called the feast of lanterns is one of the most peculiar of the Buddhist ceremonials among the Japanese, belonging more particularly among the working than among the official classes. Buddhism in Japan is remarkable for the extraordinary veneration of the memory of the dead which it inculcates. Graves are habitually kept clean and decked with flowers, and nearly every grave in that faith has a cup of rice and a jar of tea or water standing by for the use of the departed spirit on its supposed frequent return visits to this world. These graves, among groves of ornamental trees and flowering plants, beautify the hillsides about Nagasaki. Besides this ordinary care, Buddhism also inculcates the celebration by the relatives of deceased persons of distinct commemorative services upon the first, third, and seventh anniversaries. In the case of distinguished personages or the heads of families these are kept up to the fiftieth or even the hundred and fiftieth anniversaries, but as to the vast majority of ordinary deaths all obligations of propitiatory ceremonies are discharged after the seventh anniversary by one common and general feast of lanterns. This is held as a three days’ holiday by all classes about the 1st day of September annually, and the people of the outlying country flock into the city to attend it and enjoy its accompanying visiting dressed in their best attire. On the first of the three days the ghosts particularly honored are believed to leave the spirit-land on a return visit. Accordingly all the house doors are set wide open, and the head of each family in his best clothes sits in his reception-room, bowing at intervals and uttering words of welcome to his invisible guests as they come in, conscientious persons who have a large ghostly acquaintance continuing this ceremony well into the night. By the next day all the spirits are supposed to have arrived, and a small cabinet apartment found in every Buddhist dwelling (called the household temple and set apart for the use of the dead) is decorated with flowers and set out with rice, fruits, wines, and so on. Sitting in the adjoining room, the living members hold their own accompanying feast, which is kept up through the second day and most of the third. In the night of the third day the ghosts have to go back, and at nightfall all the population that can move betake themselves to the

Notes

23. This text is from an untitled article that was published in the *New York Times* on 10 Jan. 1883. There is no listed author.

graves, which they deck with bright paper banners and many-colored lanterns, lighting up the latter as the day fades, so that the departing visitors may have their last hours as pleasant as possible. As midnight approaches the males form into processions, every member carrying aloft a lighted lantern on a bamboo pole about ten feet long, and thus they carry down the hillsides to the sea the boats in which the spirits are to depart. These boats, varying from two to ten and even thirty feet in length, are decorated with flags and streamers, provided with a

stock of provisions and with money to pay for ferriage over the Styx, not omitting a lantern or two to show the way, are then launched and thrust forth together, carrying the spirits to the far West, where good Buddhists are believed to pass their time in happy oblivion. This act, blended with outcries, beating of gongs, chanting by priests, and nearly naked figures rushing to and fro in their excitement, concludes the weird but touching ceremonials.

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Shadows and Specters: A Critical Edition of “The Shadow in the Corner” by M.E. Braddon

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This edition provides a critical examination of M.E. Braddon’s “The Shadow in the Corner.” Specifically, the authors explore the ways in which themes of haunting in the Victorian period and in M.E. Braddon’s work are informed by competing notions of subjectivity and the shadowy presence of female working class figures in both the history and fiction of the time.

General Introduction

In his article “Hauntings,” author Andrew Smith traces the changing trajectory of Gothic fictions from the early eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries, interpreting the Gothic motif of ghosts and haunting in terms of two critical historical and cultural themes, those of subjectivity and labor. The work of M.E. Braddon perfectly embodies both of these themes, and this is particularly true of her short story, “The Shadow in the Corner.” Smith argues that the motif of ghosts and hauntings in the Gothic fiction of the nineteenth century reflected a culture grappling with transforming and increasingly spectral conceptions of subjectivity.

The Victorian period inherited a host of ideas from the rise of the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution, which during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries produced a litany of discoveries and philosophies that contributed to the development of new models for theorizing the self. The transition from a geocentric to a heliocentric model of the universe destabilized subjectivity by disorienting and reordering our understanding of the universe and humanity’s place within it. Within philosophy, one of the most significant contributions was the rise of Materialism. Materialism, in opposition to preceding models of idealism and cosmology, put forth the idea that the self was entirely constructed by material processes and interactions. This philosophy created tension within idealist and cosmological schools of thought,

which put emphasis on consciousness and the origins of the universe to structure concepts of existence and the self. During the Victorian period itself, the development of atomic theory, in which scientists discovered that matter is made up of discrete units that exist separately from one another, literally fragmented the formulation of the self. Thus, scientific advancement contributed to increasingly spectral concepts of subjectivity, and the “whole” of the self became more ghostly.

These models of subjectivity were in tension with other models that, according to Smith, emerged in the Gothic literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and explored the irrational and the supernatural. Because Gothic literature anticipates psychoanalysis, Freud’s models are particularly helpful when analyzing ghost stories from the Victorian period. Freud’s models merge philosophy with scientific practice and reflect a concept of the self moving more fully into the realm of the mind. With Freud’s concept of the unconscious, suddenly, the self was not only immaterial, but unknowable, with parts of it hidden from sight and awareness. Freud’s model allows us to see what was ghostly about subjectivity in the Victorian period. In Freud, the unconscious, the realm of the repressed, was also representative of traumatic memory. In this way, psychoanalysis gives us important tools for analyzing the ways that Victorian subjectivity was further fragmented. Returning to Smith, psychoanalysis introduced a “haunted” conception of

the self (149). We can now see that Victorian science and philosophy continually deferred the concept of the self even as it constantly tried to define and “fix” it. The ghosts of early Victorian fiction, as literally destabilized subjects, represented the destabilization of subjectivity that occurred with the development of contradictory formulations of the self in the Victorian period.

Further, the Gothic fiction of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, according to Smith, referenced the emergence of a new industrial capitalist economy. According to Smith, during the 18th century, capital became increasingly spectral. The emergence of the stock exchange, as well as the use of paper money, made “wealth appear intangible, subject to seemingly occult fluctuations in the market” (150). In addition, the rise of commodity fetishism created a sudden dissonance between labor and production. As Smith points out, we see the commodity of the table, not the labor that produced it (150). In this way, the specter of the ghost in late Victorian fiction represented the spectral, immaterial relationships between money and value, labor and production, that were introduced by an industrial capitalist system.

By pushing on the spectral economies introduced by Smith, we reveal an additional capitalist haunting. During the Industrial Revolution, the emergence of a female working class created an additional space of spectrality and anxiety within an already ghostly capitalist system. Female labor was embodied in a threshold space of capitalist paradox and temporal anachronism, transgressing and disordering boundaries of gender, race, and class.

Perhaps the clearest example of the spectrality of the female working class is the contradiction of its existence within capitalism, and the subsequent politics of its visibility. During the Victorian period, women were not supposed to work, yet made up a large part of the capitalist labor force. As a result of this contradiction, women’s labor, including the work of female miners and domestic servants, was rendered carefully invisible, relegated to underground mineshafts and within the space of the home, where it would not be seen. Female domestic servants were especially subject to this paradoxical politics of invisibility. In her book *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, author Anne McClintock writes (in the aptly titled section, “The Invisible Servant”), “The housewife’s labor of leisure found its counterpart in the servant’s labor of invisibility. Servants were ordered to remain unseen, completing the filthiest

work before dawn or at night, dodging their employers, keeping to the labyrinthine back passages, remaining, at all costs, out of sight” (163). It was this relegation of women’s labor to realms of between and below, the result of its paradoxical existence within the Victorian capitalist market, that made women’s labor “suffer one of the most successful vanishing acts in modern history” (163).

Female labor in the Victorian period was also spectral in its transgression of boundary. Mining women, by performing men’s work in men’s clothing (particularly the phallic work of penetrating the earth), threatened binaries and hierarchies of gender. Female miners, blackened by coal dust, also destabilized racial boundaries, and were often referred to as a “race” or “species” apart, who were also “half savage” (115). In this way, female labor also occupied an alternate, ghostly temporal space, relegated via racialization to a “primitive” or “pre-historic” time. In addition, female domestic servants, by being paid for domestic labor, displaced categories of private, domestic space and the public space of capital and exchange. According to McClintock, by “overtly crossing the thresholds of private and public, home and market, working and middle class, servants brought into the middle class home the whiff of the marketplace, the odor of cash” which “constantly imperiled the ‘natural’ separation of private home and public market” (165).

The spectrality and ghostliness of the female working class is also represented in Gothic fictions. In *The Servant’s Hand*, author Bruce Robbins describes the depiction of servants in literature as “human blanks” and “signs” who “cannot be represented except as displaced or deferred” (23). Robbins also identifies the female laborer as a site of contradiction in literature, as someone who “functions as a sign that carries awareness of the unnaturalness and arbitrariness of signs into a social hierarchy that would like to present itself as natural, rooted, fixed” (23). As in life, the female working class of Victorian fictions embodied a space of paradox, destabilization, and transgression within capitalist economies. As Robbins notes, Victorian fictions commonly referred to servant work as a “situation” or “place,” further emphasizing the spectrality of female labor by making linguistic attempts to “fix” and orient it.

In many ways, Braddon’s own life and authorship embody these spectral movements of subjectivity and female labor within the Victorian period. Braddon, who published an incredibly prolific 80 works in her lifetime,

also authored under a gender-neutral pseudonym. Braddon’s authorship occupies a ghostly space within capitalism, as a female labor that is not supposed to be there, rendered invisible by an ungendered name. Braddon also lived with her long-term partner without marrying him, and bought out his publishing company in order to rescue him from debt. In this way, Braddon’s labor was also ghostly in its destabilization of boundary. By supporting her lover financially, Braddon transgressed hierarchical categories of gender and power.

That the female working class was rendered ghostly within the Victorian capitalist system was also reflected in Braddon’s personal social reform politics, as well as in her choice of genre. According to Eve Lynch, Braddon “agitated to experiment with fiction that considered more pressing social issues, particularly the problems she saw arising out of Victorian reform policies that ignored the private domestic trials of women and the poor” (235). In the use of the ghost story, Braddon found a vehicle for communicating her political criticisms; for Braddon, ghosts serve “as emblems of what Victorian society is unwilling to ‘see’ in its social condition” (238). According to Lynch, Braddon’s tales “are filled with characters culled from the lower orders, especially servants from the regions ‘below stairs’ whose social position in the house was analogous to the spectral apparition that haunted it” (237). Lynch goes on to say that, “like the supernatural influence quietly imposing its own order on the will of the domestic inhabitants, the servant of the house suggested a bilateral, silent estate of discontent and dis-ease cohabiting the same physical space as the family but imagined by the family as immaterial and invisible” (238). In this way, Braddon’s use of ghosts and haunting in her body of work commented on the erasure and invisibility of female labor, likening it to the ghost, in order to “repeatedly expose social inequities” (237).

Braddon’s works are also centrally concerned with issues of subjectivity; as Lynch notes, Braddon continuously satirized the materialist and individualist philosophy of the economic elite (235). Braddon’s works, including “The Shadow in the Corner,” are littered with affluent, intellectually elitist characters whose materialist philosophies are unable to account for the haunting that takes place in the narrative, unlike their “superstitious” working class counterparts. Using these devices, Braddon criticizes the way knowledge and education was centralized, often as a strategy for maintaining stratifications

and divisions of class power. In this way, Braddon’s works also illustrate the ways in which competing notions of subjectivity were intimately bound up in the spectrality of the female working class, informing the structures of class power that contributed to women’s invisibility and erasure.

It is also pertinent to note the historical connections between ghost stories and movements of scientific reasoning and social reform in the Victorian era. According to Lynch, the sudden rise in the popularity of the ghost story form coincided with a period of prolific social reforms, including the Reform Bill of 1867, which included several education reforms as well as reforms for women’s labor (238). Perhaps the most explicit representation of these entangled categories of ghostliness, subjectivity, and capital can be parsed from a popular call to action during the Victorian period, which often referenced the “spirit of reform.” Here, the word “spirit” invokes both ghostliness and constructions of subjectivity and applies to the social structures of capital and economy.

This edition includes several documents that further contextualize these themes in Braddon’s work. A diary entry from Arthur Munby, written in the 1800’s, illustrates the spectrality of the female working class through Munby’s erotic obsession with the transgression of categories of race, class, and gender by working class women. In addition, a diary entry from Munby’s partner Hannah Cullwick, herself a member of the female working class, reveals the spectral visibility of working class women by pairing descriptions of erasure with descriptions of labor. Finally, an excerpt from *Lady Audley’s Secret*, also written by Braddon, explores the ghostliness of women’s labor using the prominent theme of live burial, alluding to working women’s experiences of confinement and erasure.

Reading Braddon’s story, as well as the life of Braddon herself, within these intersections of subjectivity and capital allows us to interpret the cultural “stuff” that makes up “The Shadow in the Corner.”

Introduction to M.E. Braddon’s “The Shadow in the Corner”

What is perhaps most striking about M.E. Braddon’s ghost story “The Shadow in the Corner” is how little of the story’s narrative action is devoted to the haunting itself. Although Braddon’s narrative tells the story of the “shadow in the corner,” descriptions of the “shadow” and its ghostly effects are sparse, scattered and dislocat-

ed throughout the text. Rather, what is foregrounded are competing Victorian models of subjectivity and the spectral presence of women’s labor. One can therefore interpret the “shadow in the corner” both as a motif of competing conceptions of subjectivity, and as the ghostly existence of the female working class.

Braddon’s story begins not with a description of a haunting, but with negotiations between the master of Wildheath and his butler Mr. Skeggs over the problem of employing a “maid-of-all-work.” Mrs. Skeggs, he says, “must have a girl... a girl to trot about and wash up, and help the old lady.” In this opening exchange, Braddon’s text emphasizes not only the existence of women’s domestic wage labor, but also its extreme difficulty. Descriptions of Mrs. Skegg’s labor, including “ruling over the kitchen, pantry, and scullery,” as well as cooking, dusting, sweeping, and scrubbing, are coupled with the sympathetic acknowledgment that she “wore her life out” in these tasks. In many ways, by focusing on representations of female labor, as well as the process of employing a female servant, Braddon moves the specter of the female working class into sudden visibility. However, this visibility is often tenuous and contradictory within the narrative itself. Descriptions of female labor, that which render it visible, are coupled with subtle reinforcements of its invisibility. The female servants are remarked upon for their quietness and status as individuals with whom the master “rarely came in contact.” When the master of the house does encounter a female servant who speaks to him, he “startles” very much as if he had seen a ghost. Similarly, Mrs. Skegg, as the other “maid-of-all-work,” never actually speaks; instead, her speech is mediated and translated by her husband. In this way, Braddon’s narrative does not simply make women’s domestic labor visible. Rather, Braddon’s story constantly moves female servants between the realms of seen and unseen, emphasizing their paradoxical, ghostly status within Victorian society.

This spectral position is further reinforced by the introduction of Maria, who becomes employed at Wildheath and is later the unfortunate victim of the “shadow in the corner.” The text often mentions that Maria was educated “above her station,” emphasizing the potential of the female working class to transgress different forms of boundary. In addition, it is the presence of Maria, who is made to sleep in the haunted attic room, which facilitates the ghostly events of the story. In a fundamental sense, the narrative thrust of Braddon’s story is moved

not by the ghost, but by these negotiations over female labor and the actions of female servants. Just as the female working class acted as a largely invisible force, a “secret pressure” influencing the movement of Victorian capitalist markets, female laborers in “The Shadow in the Corner” are an absent presence that shapes the plot and progression of the narrative, embodying a paradoxical space that is at once central and peripheral.

Braddon’s tale is also threaded with constant references to competing Victorian conceptions of the self. The most prominent of these representations can be found in descriptions of the master of Wildheath, for whom “the universe, with all its inhabitants, was a great machine, governed by inexorable laws.” The master responds to the events of the haunting with an inflexible materialist philosophy: “to such a man, the idea of a ghost was simply absurd- as absurd as the assertion that two and two make S, or that a circle can be formed of a straight line.” The most literal illustration of the master’s formulations of the concept of self are imbedded in the following line describing his reaction to the ghost: “the subject offered an amusing psychological study.” Here, the text subtly engages the historical context of Victorian concepts of subjectivity; the “subject” has moved to the realm of the mind. Similarly, the act of suicide is often referred to as “self-destruction,” implying (in reverse) the psychoanalytic interpretation of “self” as something constructed.

The master’s materialist and psychoanalytic conceptions of subjectivity are contrasted with descriptions of the “folly” and “superstition” of Maria and the “country people,” whose “fancies” must be “conquered by rational treatment.” However, Braddon often satirizes the master’s materialist views, particularly in the portrayal of his speech. In addition, the master’s materialism cannot accommodate the “shadow,” which resists his universal laws and ultimately claims the life of Maria. In this way, Braddon puts competing Victorian conceptions of the self into play with one another.

Along with these direct references, descriptions of ghostly encounters with the “shadow” are often framed using a language of labor and subjectivity. When the master encounters the shadow for the first time, he realizes that “it was not the ghost of the man’s body that returned to the spot where he had suffered and perished, but the ghost of his mind- his very self.” Here, the description of the ghost is situated within a psychoanalytic model of subjectivity via the conflation of “mind” and “self.”

The “shadow” is also explained in relation to the commodity objects around it. The “shadow” is often attributed to “the angle of the wardrobe” or to a coat “flung upon a chair.” In a description of the haunted attic room, a lengthy paragraph is devoted to its objects, in which commodities suddenly take on a sinister cast. A wardrobe’s brass handles “gleamed out of the darkness like a pair of diabolical eyes”; a bed is “misshapen and deformed”; a bureau “smelt of secrets.” Similarly, this anthropomorphic language is also reversed in passages where people are compared to objects. When Mr. Skegg first speaks to the master, his sudden “breaking into speech” is described as “almost as startling as if the bust of Socrates above the bookcase had burst into human language.” This play of anthropomorphic language, rendering people as objects and objects as people, implies the ghostly dissonance between labor and production. In this way, Braddon subtly references the spectral economy of Victorian capitalism.

In many ways, the title of Braddon’s narrative offers the most concise representation of its themes of subjectivity and labor. The “shadow in the corner” echoes with a psychoanalytic motif of repressed trauma and memory, haunting the unconscious “corners” of the mind. “Shadows” also symbolically evoke the dirt of labor, and corners resonate with economic context. Corners themselves are an important part of economic architectures as the place of exchange where two points meet. Corners are also the spaces of “dirty” capital and labor that is meant to be hidden in shadows. Such is the case of prostitution, the “dirty” invisible women’s labor, which often takes place on the street corner. In these ways, Braddon’s title points to spectral and conflicted subjectivity in the Victorian period, and also to an interpretation of the female working class as the “shadow in the corner” of 1800’s capitalism.

M.E. Braddon’s “The Shadow in the Corner”¹

Wildheath Grange stood a little way back from the road, with a barren stretch of heath behind it, and a few tall fir-trees, with straggling wind-tossed heads, for its only shelter. It was a lonely house on a lonely road, little better than a lane, leading across a desolate waste of san-

dy fields to the sea-shore; and it was a house that bore a bad name among the natives of the village of Holcroft, which was the nearest place where humanity might be found.

It was a good old house, nevertheless, substantially built in the days when there was no stint of stone and timber—a good old grey stone house with many gables, deep window-seats, and a wide staircase, long dark passages, hidden doors in queer corners, closets as large as some modern rooms, and cellars in which a company of soldiers might have lain perdu.²

This spacious old mansion was given over to rats and mice, loneliness, echoes, and the occupation of three elderly people: Michael Bascom, whose forebears had been landowners of importance in the neighbourhood, and his two servants, Daniel Skegg and his wife, who had served the owner of that grim old house ever since he left the university, where he had lived fifteen years of his life—five as student, and ten as professor of natural science.

At three-and-thirty Michael Bascom had seemed a middle-aged man; at fifty-six he looked and moved and spoke like an old man. During that interval of twenty-three years he had lived alone in Wildheath Grange, and the country people told each other that the house had made him what he was. This was a fanciful and superstitious notion on their part, doubtless, yet it would not have been difficult to have traced a certain affinity between the dull grey building and the man who lived in it. Both seemed alike remote from the common cares and interests of humanity; both had an air of settled melancholy, engendered by perpetual solitude; both had the same faded complexion, the same look of slow decay.

Yet lonely as Michael Bascom’s life was at Wildheath Grange, he would not on any account have altered its tenor. He had been glad to exchange the comparative seclusion of college rooms for the unbroken solitude of Wildheath. He was a fanatic in his love of scientific research, and his quiet days were filled to the brim with labours that seldom failed to interest and satisfy him. There were periods of depression, occasional moments of doubt, when the goal towards which he strove seemed unattainable, and his spirit fainted within him. Happily such times were rare with him. He had a dogged power of continuity which ought to have carried him to the highest pinnacle of achievement, and which perhaps

Notes

1. M.E. Braddon. “The Shadow in the Corner.” *All the Year Round*. Vol. 23. Extra Summer Number. (London, 1879) 1-11.

2. Perdu, meaning hidden or concealed. In Latin, perdere means to lose. Although it is important to note the now obsolete use of the word as a military phrase that referred to a soldier set on an especially hazardous mission.

might ultimately have won for him a grand name and a world-wide renown, but for a catastrophe which burdened the declining years of his harmless life with an unconquerable remorse.

One autumn morning—when he had lived just three-and-twenty years at Wildheath, and had only lately begun to perceive that his faithful butler and body servant, who was middle-aged when he first employed him, was actually getting old—Mr. Bascom’s breakfast meditations over the latest treatise on the atomic theory³ were interrupted by an abrupt demand from that very Daniel Skegg. The man was accustomed to wait upon his master in the most absolute silence, and his sudden breaking out into speech was almost as startling as if the bust of Socrates above the bookcase had burst into human language.

“It’s no use,” said Daniel; “my missus must have a girl!”

“A what?” demanded Mr. Bascom, without taking his eyes from the line he had been reading.

“A girl—a girl to trot about and wash up, and help the old lady. She’s getting weak on her legs, poor soul. We’ve none of us grown younger in the last twenty years.”

“Twenty years!” echoed Michael Bascom scornfully. “What is twenty years in the formation of a strata—what even in the growth of an oak—the cooling of a volcano!”

“Not much, perhaps, but it’s apt to tell upon the bones of a human being.”

“The manganese⁴ staining to be seen upon some skulls would certainly indicate—” began the scientist dreamily.

“I wish my bones were only as free from rheumatics as they were twenty years ago,” pursued Daniel testily; “and then, perhaps, I should make light of twenty years. Howsoever, the long and the short of it is, my missus must have a girl. She can’t go on trotting up and down these everlasting passages, and standing in that stone scullery year after year, just as if she was a young woman. She must have a girl to help.”

“Let her have twenty girls,” said Mr. Bascom, going back to his book.

“What’s the use of talking like that, sir. Twenty girls, indeed! We shall have rare work to get one.”

“Because the neighbourhood is sparsely populated?” interrogated Mr. Bascom, still reading.

“No, sir. Because this house is known to be haunted.”

Michael Bascom laid down his book, and turned a look of grave reproach upon his servant.

“Skegg,” he said in a severe voice, “I thought you had lived long enough with me to be superior to any folly of that kind.”

“I don’t say that I believe in ghosts,” answered Daniel with a semi-apologetic air; “but the country people do. There’s not a mortal among ‘em that will venture across our threshold after nightfall.”

“Merely because Anthony Bascom, who led a wild life in London, and lost his money and land, came home here broken-hearted, and is supposed to have destroyed himself in this house—the only remnant of property that was left him out of a fine estate.”

“Supposed to have destroyed himself!” cried Skegg; “why the fact is as well known as the death of Queen Elizabeth, or the great fire of London. Why, wasn’t he buried at the cross-roads⁵ between here and Holcroft?”

“An idle tradition, for which you could produce no substantial proof,” retorted Mr. Bascom.

“I don’t know about proof; but the country people believe it as firmly as they believe their Gospel.”

“If their faith in the Gospel was a little stronger they need not trouble themselves about Anthony Bascom.”

“Well,” grumbled Daniel, as he began to clear the table, “a girl of some kind we must get, but she’ll have to be a foreigner, or a girl that’s hard driven for a place.”

When Daniel Skegg said a foreigner, he did not mean the native of some distant clime, but a girl who had not been born and bred at Holcroft. Daniel had been raised and reared in that insignificant hamlet, and, small and dull as it was, he considered the world beyond it only margin.

Michael Bascom was too deep in the atomic theory to give a second thought to the necessities of an old servant. Mrs. Skegg was an individual with whom he rarely came in contact. She lived for the most part in a gloomy region at the north end of the house, where she ruled over the solitude of a kitchen, that looked like a cathedral, and numerous offices of the sculler, larder, and pantry class, where she carried on a perpetual warfare with spiders and beetles, and wore her old life out in the labour of sweeping and scrubbing. She was a woman of severe aspect, dogmatic piety, and a bitter tongue. She

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3. Atomic theory at this time had advanced only so far as discovering the properties of cathode rays. Only ten years earlier, Dmitri Mendeleev had arranged the elements into seven groups based on their similar properties, a discovery which became known as Periodic Law.

4. Manganese is a natural element discovered in 1774. It is used for industrial alloys, and its ions are used for pigmentation.

5. Historically, criminals and those who committed suicide were buried at cross-roads as the “cross” was seen as the next best burial site to consecrated ground.

was a good plain cook, and ministered diligently to her master’s wants. He was not an epicure, but liked his life to be smooth and easy, and the equilibrium of his mental power would have been disturbed by a bad dinner.

He heard no more about the proposed addition to his household for a space of ten days, when Daniel Skegg again startled him amidst his studious repose by the abrupt announcement:

“I’ve got a girl!”

“Oh,” said Michael Bascom; “have you?” and he went on with his book.

This time he was reading an essay on phosphorus and its functions in relation to the human brain.

“Yes,” pursued Daniel in his usual grumbling tone; “she was a waif and stray, or I shouldn’t have got her. If she’d been a native she’d never have come to us.”

“I hope she’s respectable,” said Michael.

“Respectable! That’s the only fault she has, poor thing. She’s too good for the place. She’s never been in service before, but she says she’s willing to work, and I daresay my old woman will be able to break her in. Her father was a small tradesman at Yarmouth. He died a month ago, and left this poor thing homeless. Mrs. Midge, at Holcroft, is her aunt, and she said to the girl, Come and stay with me till you get a place; and the girl has been staying with Mrs. Midge for the last three weeks, trying to hear of a place. When Mrs. Midge heard that my missus wanted a girl to help, she thought it would be the very thing for her niece Maria. Luckily Maria had heard nothing about this house, so the poor innocent dropped me a curtsy, and said she’d be thankful to come, and would do her best to learn her duty. She’d had an easy time of it with her father, who had educated her above her station, like a fool as he was,” growled Daniel.

“By your own account I’m afraid you’ve made a bad bargain,” said Michael. “You don’t want a young lady to clean kettles and pans.”

“If she was a young duchess my old woman would make her work,” retorted Skegg decisively.

“And pray where are you going to put this girl?” asked Mr. Bascom, rather irritably; “I can’t have a strange young woman tramping up and down the passages outside my room. You know what a wretched sleeper I am, Skegg. A mouse behind the wainscot is enough to wake me.”

“I’ve thought of that,” answered the butler, with his

look of ineffable wisdom. “I’m not going to put her on your floor. She’s to sleep in the attics.”

“Which room?”

“The big one at the north end of the house. That’s the only ceiling that doesn’t let water. She might as well sleep in a shower-bath as in any of the other attics.”

“The room at the north end,” repeated Mr. Bascom thoughtfully; “isn’t that—?”

“Of course it is,” snapped Skegg; “but she doesn’t know anything about it.”

Mr. Bascom went back to his books, and forgot all about the orphan from Yarmouth, until one morning on entering his study he was startled by the appearance of a strange girl, in a neat black and white cotton gown, busy dusting the volumes which were stacked in blocks upon his spacious writing-table—and doing it with such deft and careful hands that he had no inclination to be angry at this unwonted liberty. Old Mrs. Skegg had religiously refrained from all such dusting, on the plea that she did not wish to interfere with the master’s ways. One of the master’s ways, therefore, had been to inhale a good deal of dust in the course of his studies.

The girl was a slim little thing, with a pale and somewhat old-fashioned face, flaxen hair, braided under a neat muslin cap, a very fair complexion, and light blue eyes. They were the lightest blue eyes Michael Bascom had ever seen, but there was a sweetness and gentleness in their expression which atoned for their insipid colour.

“I hope you do not object to my dusting your books, sir,” she said, dropping a curtsy.

She spoke with a quaint precision which struck Michael Bascom as a pretty thing in its way.

“No; I don’t object to cleanliness, so long as my books and papers are not disturbed. If you take a volume off my desk, replace it on the spot you took it from. That’s all I ask.”

“I will be very careful, sir.”

“When did you come here?”

“Only this morning, sir.”

The student seated himself at his desk, and the girl withdrew, drifting out of the room as noiselessly as a flower blown across the threshold.⁶ Michael Bascom looked after her curiously. He had seen very little of youthful womanhood in his dry-as-dust career, and he wondered at this girl as at a creature of a species hitherto unknown to him. How fairly and delicately she was

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6. Servants at the time were expected to be both silent and unseen. This idea even helped mold the construction of houses so that they were built with secret passageways and corridors for the servants to use for the purpose of remaining out of sight.

fashioned; what a translucent skin; what soft and pleasing accents issued from those rose-tinted lips. A pretty thing, assuredly, this kitchen wench! A pity that in all this busy world there could be no better work found for her than the scouring of pots and pans.

Absorbed in considerations about dry bones, Mr. Bascom thought no more of the pale-faced handmaiden. He saw her no more about his rooms. Whatever work she did there was done early in the morning, before the scholar’s breakfast.

She had been a week in the house, when he met her one day in the hall. He was struck by the change in her appearance.

The girlish lips had lost their rose-bud hue; the pale blue eyes had a frightened look, and there were dark rings round them, as in one whose nights had been sleepless, or troubled by evil dreams.

Michael Bascom was so startled by an undefinable look in the girl’s face that, reserved as he was by habit and nature, he expanded so far as to ask her what ailed her.

“There is something amiss, I am sure,” he said. “What is it?”

“Nothing, sir,” she faltered, looking still more scared at his question. “Indeed, it is nothing; or nothing worth troubling you about.”

“Nonsense. Do you suppose, because I live among books, I have no sympathy with my fellow-creatures? Tell me what is wrong with you, child. You have been grieving about the father you have lately lost, I suppose.”

“No, sir; it is not that. I shall never leave off being sorry for that. It is a grief which will last me all my life.”

“What, there is something else then?” asked Michael impatiently. “I see; you are not happy here. Hard work does not suit you. I thought as much.”

“Oh, sir, please don’t think that,” cried the girl, very earnestly. “Indeed, I am glad to work—glad to be in service; it is only—”

She faltered and broke down, the tears rolling slowly from her sorrowful eyes, despite her effort to keep them back.

“Only what?” cried Michael, growing angry. “The girl is full of secrets and mysteries. What do you mean, wench?”

“I—I know it is very foolish, sir; but I am afraid of the room where I sleep.”

“Afraid! Why?”

“Shall I tell you the truth, sir? Will you promise not to be angry?”

“I will not be angry if you will only speak plainly; but you provoke me by these hesitations and suppressions.”

“And please, sir, do not tell Mrs. Skegg that I have told you. She would scold me; or perhaps even send me away.”

“Mrs. Skegg shall not scold you. Go on, child.”

“You may not know the room where I sleep, sir; it is a large room at one end of the house, looking towards the sea. I can see the dark line of water from the window, and I wonder sometimes to think that it is the same ocean I used to see when I was a child at Yarmouth. It is very lonely, sir, at the top of the house. Mr. and Mrs. Skegg sleep in a little room near the kitchen, you know, sir, and I am quite alone on the top floor.”

“Skegg told me you had been educated in advance of your position in life, Maria. I should have thought the first effect of a good education would have been to make you superior to any foolish fancies about empty rooms.”

“Oh, pray, sir, do not think it is any fault in my education. Father took such pains with me; he spared no expense in giving me as good an education as a tradesman’s daughter need wish for. And he was a religious man, sir. He did not believe”—here she paused, with a suppressed shudder—“in the spirits of the dead appearing to the living, since the days of miracles, when the ghost of Samuel appeared to Saul.”⁷

He never put any foolish ideas into my head, sir. I hadn’t a thought of fear when I first lay down to rest in the big lonely room upstairs.”

“Well, what then?”

“But on the very first night,” the girl went on breathlessly, “I felt weighed down in my sleep as if there were some heavy burden laid upon my chest. It was not a bad dream, but it was a sense of trouble that followed me all through my sleep; and just at daybreak—it begins to be light a little after six—I woke suddenly, with the cold perspiration pouring down my face, and knew that there was something dreadful in the room.”

“What do you mean by something dreadful? Did you see anything?”

“Not much, sir; but it froze the blood in my veins, and I knew it was this that had been following me and weighing upon me all through my sleep. In the corner, between

Notes

7. In the 1 Samuel 28, King Saul seeks out a woman who can speak to the spirits of the dead. The woman allows him to speak with Samuel, who warns him that the Lord will allow Saul’s army to be defeated and that he and his sons will die.

the fire-place and the wardrobe, I saw a shadow—a dim, shapeless shadow—”

“Produced by an angle of the wardrobe, I daresay.”

“No, sir; I could see the shadow of the wardrobe, distinct and sharp, as if it had been painted on the wall. This shadow was in the corner—a strange, shapeless mass; or, if it had any shape at all, it seemed—”

“What?” asked Michael eagerly.

“The shape of a dead body hanging against the wall!”

Michael Bascom grew strangely pale, yet he affected utter incredulity.

“Poor child,” he said kindly; “you have been fretting about your father until your nerves are in a weak state, and you are full of fancies. A shadow in the corner, indeed; why, at daybreak, every corner is full of shadows. My old coat, flung upon a chair, will make you as good a ghost as you need care to see.”

“Oh, sir, I have tried to think it is my fancy. But I have had the same burden weighing me down every night. I have seen the same shadow every morning.”

“But when broad daylight comes, can you not see what stuff your shadow is made of?”

“No, sir: the shadow goes before it is broad daylight.”

“Of course, just like other shadows. Come, come, get these silly notions out of your head, or you will never do for the work-a-day world. I could easily speak to Mrs. Skegg, and make her give you another room, if I wanted to encourage you in your folly. But that would be about the worst thing I could do for you. Besides, she tells me that all the other rooms on that floor are damp; and, no doubt, if she shifted you into one of them, you would discover another shadow in another corner, and get rheumatism into the bargain. No, my good girl, you must try to prove yourself the better for a superior education.”

“I will do my best, sir,” Maria answered meekly, dropping a curtsy.

Maria went back to the kitchen sorely depressed. It was a dreary life she led at Wildheath Grange—dreary by day, awful by night; for the vague burden and the shapeless shadow, which seemed so slight a matter to the elderly scholar, were unspeakably terrible to her. Nobody had told her that the house was haunted, yet she walked about those echoing passages wrapped round with a cloud of fear. She had no pity from Daniel Skegg and his wife. Those two pious souls had made up their minds

that the character of the house should be upheld, so far as Maria went. To her, as a foreigner, the Grange should be maintained to be an immaculate dwelling, tainted by no sulphurous blast⁸ from the under world. A willing, biddable girl had become a necessary element in the existence of Mrs. Skegg. That girl had been found, and that girl must be kept. Any fancies of a supernatural character must be put down with a high hand.

“Ghosts, indeed!” cried the amiable Skegg. “Read your Bible, Maria, and don’t talk no more about ghosts.”

“There are ghosts in the Bible,” said Maria, with a shiver at the recollection of certain awful passages in the Scripture she knew so well.

“Ah, they was in their right place, or they wouldn’t ha’ been there,” retorted Mrs. Skegg. “You ain’t agoin’ to pick holes in your Bible, I hope, Maria, at your time of life.”

Maria sat down quietly in her corner by the kitchen fire, and turned over the leaves of her dead father’s Bible till she came to the chapters they two had loved best and oftenest read together. He had been a simple-minded, straightforward man, the Yarmouth cabinet-maker—a man full of aspirations after good, innately refined, instinctively religious. He and his motherless girl had spent their lives alone together, in the neat little home which Maria had so soon learnt to cherish and beautify; and they had loved each other with an almost romantic love. They had had the same tastes, the same ideas. Very little had sufficed to make them happy. But inexorable death parted father and daughter, in one of those sharp, sudden partings which are like the shock of an earthquake—instantaneous ruin, desolation, and despair.

Maria’s fragile form had bent before the tempest. She had lived through a trouble that might have crushed a stronger nature. Her deep religious convictions, and her belief that this cruel parting would not be for ever, had sustained her. She faced life, and its cares and duties, with a gentle patience which was the noblest form of courage.

Michael Bascom told himself that the servant-girl’s foolish fancy about the room that had been given her was not a matter of serious consideration. Yet the idea dwelt in his mind unpleasantly, and disturbed him at his labours. The exact sciences require the complete power of a man’s brain, his utmost attention; and on this particular evening Michael found that he was only giving his work a part of his attention. The girl’s pale face, the girl’s tremulous tones,

Notes

8. In Revelation 21:8, Hell is described as a lake of fire and burning sulfur or brimstone which will be the “second death” for those who are cowards or disbelievers, murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars.

thrust themselves into the foreground of his thoughts.

He closed his book with a fretful sigh, wheeled his large arm-chair round to the fire, and gave himself up to contemplation. To attempt study with so disturbed a mind was useless. It was a dull grey evening, early in November; the student's reading-lamp was lighted, but the shutters were not yet shut, nor the curtains drawn. He could see the leaden sky outside his windows, the fir-tree tops tossing in the angry wind. He could hear the wintry blast whistling amidst the gables, before it rushed off seaward with a savage howl that sounded like a war-whoop.

Michael Bascom shivered, and drew nearer the fire.

“It's childish, foolish nonsense,” he said to himself, “yet it's strange she should have that fancy about the shadow, for they say Anthony Bascom destroyed himself in that room. I remember hearing it when I was a boy, from an old servant whose mother was housekeeper at the great house in Anthony's time. I never heard how he died, poor fellow—whether he poisoned himself, or shot himself, or cut his throat; but I've been told that was the room. Old Skegg has heard it too. I could see that by his manner when he told me the girl was to sleep there.”

He sat for a long time, till the grey of evening outside his study windows changed to the black of night, and the war-whoop of the wind died away to a low complaining murmur. He sat looking into the fire, and letting his thoughts wander back to the past and the traditions he had heard in his boyhood.

That was a sad, foolish story of his great-uncle, Anthony Bascom: the pitiful story of a wasted fortune and a wasted life. A riotous collegiate career at Cambridge, a racing-stable at Newmarket, an imprudent marriage, a dissipated life in London, a runaway wife; an estate forfeited to Jew money-lenders,⁹ and then the fatal end.

Michael had often heard that dismal story: how, when Anthony Bascom's fair false wife had left him, when his credit was exhausted, and his friends had grown tired of him, and all was gone except Wildheath Grange, Anthony, the broken-down man of fashion, had come to that lonely house unexpectedly one night, and had ordered his bed to be got ready for him in the room where he used to sleep when he came to the place for the wild duck shooting, in his boyhood. His old blunderbuss was still hanging over the mantelpiece, where he had left it when he came into the property, and could afford to buy

the newest thing in fowling-pieces. He had not been to Wildheath for fifteen years; nay, for a good many of those years he had almost forgotten that the dreary old house belonged to him.

The woman who had been housekeeper at Bascom Park, till house and lands had passed into the hands of the Jews, was at this time the sole occupant of Wildheath. She cooked some supper for her master, and made him as comfortable as she could in the long untenanted dining-room; but she was distressed to find, when she cleared the table after he had gone upstairs to bed, that he had eaten hardly anything.

Next morning she got his breakfast ready in the same room, which she managed to make brighter and cheerier than it had looked overnight. Brooms, dusting-brushes, and a good fire did much to improve the aspect of things. But the morning wore on to noon, and the old housekeeper listened in vain for her master's footfall on the stairs. Noon waned to late afternoon. She had made no attempt to disturb him, thinking that he had worn himself out by a tedious journey on horseback, and that he was sleeping the sleep of exhaustion. But when the brief November day clouded with the first shadows of twilight, the old woman grew seriously alarmed, and went upstairs to her master's door, where she waited in vain for any reply to her repeated calls and knockings.

The door was locked on the inside, and the housekeeper was not strong enough to break it open. She rushed downstairs again full of fear, and ran bare-headed out into the lonely road. There was no habitation nearer than the turnpike on the old coach road, from which this side road branched off to the sea. There was scanty hope of a chance passer-by. The old woman ran along the road, hardly knowing whither she was going or what she was going to do, but with a vague idea that she must get somebody to help her.

Chance favoured her. A cart, laden with sea-weed, came lumbering slowly along from the level line of sands yonder where the land melted into water. A heavy lumbering farm-labourer walked beside the cart.

“For God's sake, come in and burst open my master's door!” she entreated, seizing the man by the arm. “He's lying dead, or in a fit, and I can't get to help him.”

“All right, missus,” answered the man, as if such an invitation were a matter of daily occurrence. “Whoa,

Notes

9. Author M. E. Braddon held anti-Semitic prejudices, like much of Europe at that time. Many Jewish people experienced prejudice in both secular and religious arenas.

Dobbin; stond still, horse, and be donged to thee.”

Dobbin was glad enough to be brought to anchor on the patch of waste grass in front of the Grange garden. His master followed the housekeeper upstairs, and shattered the old-fashioned box-lock with one blow of his ponderous fist.

The old woman’s worst fear was realised. Anthony Bascom was dead. But the mode and manner of his death Michael had never been able to learn. The housekeeper’s daughter, who told him the story, was an old woman when he was a boy. She had only shaken her head, and looked unutterable things, when he questioned her too closely. She had never even admitted that the old squire had committed suicide. Yet the tradition of his self-destruction was rooted in the minds of the natives of Holcroft: and there was a settled belief that his ghost, at certain times and seasons, haunted Wildheath Grange.

Now Michael Bascom was a stern materialist. For him the universe with all its inhabitants, was a great machine, governed by inexorable laws. To such a man the idea of a ghost was simply absurd--as absurd as the assertion that two and two make five, or that a circle can be formed of a straight line. Yet he had a kind of dilettante interest in the idea of a mind which could believe in ghosts. The subject offered an amusing psychological study. This poor little pale girl, now, had evidently got some supernatural terror into her head, which could only be conquered by rational treatment.

“I know what I ought to do,” Michael Bascom said to himself suddenly. “I’ll occupy that room myself tonight, and demonstrate to this foolish girl that her notion about the shadow is nothing more than a silly fancy, bred of timidity and low spirits. An ounce of proof is better than a pound of argument. If I can prove to her that I have spent a night in the room, and seen no such shadow, she will understand what an idle thing superstition is.”

Daniel came in presently to shut the shutters.

“Tell your wife to make up my bed in the room where Maria has been sleeping, and to put her into one of the rooms on the first floor for to-night, Skegg,” said Mr. Bascom.

“Sir?”

Mr. Bascom repeated his order.

“That silly wench has been complaining to you about her room,” Skegg exclaimed indignantly. “She doesn’t deserve to be well fed and cared for in a comfortable home. She ought to go to the workhouse.”

“Don’t be angry with the poor girl, Skegg. She has taken a foolish fancy into her head, and I want to show her how silly she is,” said Mr. Bascom.

“And you want to sleep in his—in that room yourself,” said the butler.

“Precisely.”

“Well,” mused Skegg, “if he does walk—which I don’t believe—he was your own flesh and blood; and I don’t suppose he’ll do you any hurt.”

When Daniel Skegg went back to the kitchen he railed mercilessly at poor Maria, who sat pale and silent in her corner by the hearth, darning old Mrs. Skegg’s grey worsted stockings, which were the roughest and harshest armour that ever human foot clothed itself withal. “Was there ever such a whimsical, fine, lady-like miss,” demanded Daniel, “to come into a gentleman’s house, and drive him out of his own bedroom to sleep in an attic, with her nonsenses and vagaries.” If this was the result of being educated above one’s station, Daniel declared that he was thankful he had never got so far in his schooling as to read words of two syllables without spelling. Education might be hanged for him, if this was all it led to.

“I am very sorry,” faltered Maria, weeping silently over her work. “Indeed, Mr. Skegg, I made no complaint. My master questioned me, and I told him the truth. That was all”

“All!” exclaimed Mr. Skegg irately; “all, indeed! I should think it was enough.”

Poor Maria held her peace. Her mind, fluttered by Daniel’s unkindness, had wandered away from that bleak big kitchen to the lost home of the past—the snug little parlour where she and her father had sat beside the cosy hearth on such a night as this; she with her smart work-box and her plain sewing, he with the newspaper he loved to read; the petted cat purring on the rug, the kettle singing on the bright brass trivet, the tea-tray pleasantly suggestive of the most comfortable meal in the day.

Oh, those happy nights, that dear companionship! Were they really gone for ever, leaving nothing behind them but unkindness and servitude?

Michael Bascom retired later than usual that night. He was in the habit of sitting at his books long after every other lamp but his own had been extinguished. The Skeggs had subsided into silence and darkness in their drear ground-floor bed-chamber. Tonight his studies were of a peculiarly interesting kind, and belonged to the order of recreative reading rather than of hard work. He was deep in the history of that mysterious people

who had their dwelling-place in the Swiss lakes, and was much exercised by certain speculations and theories about them.

The old eight-day clock¹⁰ on the stairs was striking two as Michael slowly ascended, candle in hand, to the hitherto unknown region of the attics. At the top of the staircase he found himself facing a dark narrow passage which led northwards, a passage that was in itself sufficient to strike terror to a superstitious mind, so black and uncanny did it look.

“Poor child,” mused Mr. Bascom, thinking of Maria; “this attic floor is rather dreary, and for a young mind prone to fancies—”

He had opened the door of the north room by this time, and stood looking about him.

It was a large room, with a ceiling that sloped on one side, but was fairly lofty upon the other; an old-fashioned room, full of old-fashioned furniture—big, ponderous, clumsy—associated with a day that was gone and people that were dead. A walnut-wood wardrobe stared him in the face—a wardrobe with brass handles, which gleamed out of the darkness like diabolical eyes. There was a tall four-post bedstead, which had been cut down on one side to accommodate the slope of the ceiling, and which had a misshapen and deformed aspect in consequence. There was an old mahogany bureau, that smelt of secrets. There were some heavy old chairs with rush bottoms, mouldy with age, and much worn. There was a corner washstand, with a big basin and a small jug—the odds and ends of past years. Carpet there was none, save a narrow strip beside the bed.

“It is a dismal room,” mused Michael, with the same touch of pity for Maria’s weakness which he had felt on the landing just now.

To him it mattered nothing where he slept; but having let himself down to a lower level by his interest in the Swiss lake-people, he was in a manner humanised by the lightness of his evening’s reading, and was even inclined to compassionate the weaknesses of a foolish girl.

He went to bed, determined to sleep his soundest. The bed was comfortable, well supplied with blankets, rather luxurious than otherwise, and the scholar had that agreeable sense of fatigue which promises profound and restful slumber.

He dropped off to sleep quickly, but woke with a start

ten minutes afterwards. What was this consciousness of a burden of care that had awakened him—this sense of all-pervading trouble that weighed upon his spirits and oppressed his heart—this icy horror of some terrible crisis in life through which he must inevitably pass? To him these feelings were as novel as they were painful. His life had flowed on with smooth and sluggish tide, unbroken by so much as a ripple of sorrow. Yet to-night he felt all the pangs of unavailing remorse; the agonising memory of a life wasted; the stings of humiliation and disgrace, shame, ruin; a hideous death, which he had doomed himself to die by his own hand. These were the horrors that pressed him round and weighed him down as he lay in Anthony Bascom’s room.

Yes, even he, the man who could recognise nothing in nature, or in nature’s God, better or higher than an irresponsible and invariable machine governed by mechanical laws, was fain to admit that here he found himself face to face with a psychological mystery. This trouble, which came between him and sleep, was the trouble that had pursued Anthony Bascom on the last night of his life. So had the suicide felt as he lay in that lonely room, perhaps striving to rest his wearied brain with one last earthly sleep before he passed to the unknown intermediate land where all is darkness and slumber. And that troubled mind had haunted the room ever since. It was not the ghost of the man’s body that returned to the spot where he had suffered and perished, but the ghost of his mind—his very self; no meaningless simulacrum of the clothes he wore, and the figure that filled them.

Michael Bascom was not the man to abandon his high ground of sceptical philosophy without a struggle. He tried his hardest to conquer this oppression that weighed upon mind and sense. Again and again he succeeded in composing himself to sleep, but only to wake again and again to the same torturing thoughts, the same remorse, the same despair. So the night passed in unutterable weariness; for though he told himself that the trouble was not his trouble, that there was no reality in the burden, no reason for the remorse, these vivid fancies were as painful as realities, and took as strong a hold upon him.

The first streak of light crept in at the window—dim, and cold, and grey; then came twilight, and he looked at the corner between the wardrobe and the door.

Yes; there was the shadow: not the shadow of the

Notes

10. To work properly, most clocks had to be wound by hand before electricity was available. Eight-day clocks only had to be wound every eight days.

wardrobe only—that was clear enough, but a vague and shapeless something which darkened the dull brown wall; so faint, so shadow, that he could form no conjecture as to its nature, or the thing it represented. He determined to watch this shadow till broad daylight; but the weariness of the night had exhausted him, and before the first dimness of dawn had passed away he had fallen fast asleep, and was tasting the blessed balm of undisturbed slumber. When he woke the winter sun was shining in at the lattice, and the room had lost its gloomy aspect. It looked old-fashioned, and grey, and brown, and shabby; but the depth of its gloom had fled with the shadows and the darkness of night.

Mr. Bascom rose refreshed by a sound sleep, which had lasted nearly three hours. He remembered the wretched feelings which had gone before that renovating slumber; but he recalled his strange sensations only to despise them, and he despised himself for having attached any importance to them.

“Indigestion very likely,” he told himself; “or perhaps mere fancy, engendered of that foolish girl’s story. The wisest of us is more under the dominion of imagination than he would care to confess. Well, Maria shall not sleep in this room any more. There is no particular reason why she should, and she shall not be made unhappy to please old Skegg and his wife.”

When he had dressed himself in his usual leisurely way, Mr. Bascom walked up to the corner where he had seen or imagined the shadow, and examined the spot carefully.

At first sight he could discover nothing of a mysterious character. There was no door in the papered wall, no trace of a door that had been there in the past. There was no trap-door in the worm-eaten boards. There was no dark ineradicable stain to hint at murder. There was not the faintest suggestion of a secret or a mystery.

He looked up at the ceiling. That was sound enough, save for a dirty patch here and there where the rain had blistered it.

Yes; there was something--an insignificant thing, yet with a suggestion of grimness which startled him.

About a foot below the ceiling he saw a large iron hook projecting from the wall, just above the spot where he had seen the shadow of a vaguely defined form. He mounted on a chair the better to examine this hook, and to understand, if he could, the purpose for which it had been put there.

It was old and rusty. It must have been there for many years. Who could have placed it there, and why? It was not the kind of hook upon which one would hang a picture or one’s garments. It was placed in an obscure corner. Had Anthony Bascom put it there on the night he died; or did he find it there ready for a fatal use?

“If I were a superstitious man,” thought Michael, “I should be inclined to believe that Anthony Bascom hung himself from that rusty old hook.”

“Sleep well, sir?” asked Daniel, as he waited upon his master at breakfast.

“Admirably,” answered Michael, determined not to gratify the man’s curiosity.

He had always resented the idea that Wildheath Grange was haunted.

“Oh, indeed, sir. You were so late that I fancied—”

“Late, yes! I slept so well that I overshot my usual hour for waking. But, by-the-way, Skegg, as that poor girl objects to the room, let her sleep somewhere else. It can’t make any difference to us, and it may make some difference to her.”

“Humph!” muttered Daniel in his grumpy way; “you didn’t see anything queer up there, did you?”

“See anything? Of course not.”

“Well, then, why should she see things? It’s all her silly fiddle-faddle.”

“Never mind, let her sleep in another room.”

“There ain’t another room on the top floor that’s dry.”

“Then let her sleep on the floor below. She creeps about quietly enough, poor little timid thing. She won’t disturb me.”

Daniel grunted, and his master understood the grunt to mean obedient assent; but here Mr. Bascom was unhappily mistaken. The proverbial obstinacy of the pig family is as nothing compared with the obstinacy of a cross-grained old man, whose narrow mind has never been illuminated by education. Daniel was beginning to feel jealous of his master’s compassionate interest in the orphan girl. She was a sort of gentle clinging thing that might creep into an elderly bachelor’s heart unawares, and make herself a comfortable nest there.

“We shall have fine carryings-on, and me and my old woman will be nowhere, if I don’t put down my heel pretty strong upon this nonsense,” Daniel muttered to himself, as he carried the breakfast-tray to the pantry.

Maria met him in the passage.

“Well, Mr. Skegg, what did my master say?” she asked

breathlessly.

“Did he see anything strange in the room?”

“No, girl. What should he see? He said you were a fool.”

“Nothing disturbed him? And he slept there peacefully?” faltered Maria.

“Never slept better in his life. Now don’t you begin to feel ashamed of yourself?”

“Yes,” she answered meekly; “I am ashamed of being so full of fancies. I will go back to my room tonight, Mr. Skegg, if you like, and I will never complain of it again.”

“I hope you won’t,” snapped Skegg; “you’ve given us trouble enough already.”

Maria sighed, and went about her work in saddest silence. The day wore slowly on, like all other days in that lifeless old house. The scholar sat in his study; Maria moved softly from room to room, sweeping and dusting in the cheerless solitude. The mid-day sun faded into the grey of afternoon, and evening came down like a blight upon the dull old house.

Throughout that day Maria and her master never met. Anyone who had been so far interested in the girl as to observe her appearance would have seen that she was unusually pale, and that her eyes had a resolute look, as of one who was resolved to face a painful ordeal. She ate hardly anything all day. She was curiously silent. Skegg and his wife put down both these symptoms to temper.

“She won’t eat and she won’t talk,” said Daniel to the partner of his joys. “That means sulkiness, and I never allowed sulkiness to master me when I was a young man, and you tried it on as a young woman, and I’m not going to be conquered by sulkiness in my old age.”

Bed-time came, and Maria bade the Skeggs a civil good-night, and went up to her lonely garret without a murmur.

The next morning came, and Mrs. Skegg looked in vain for her patient hand-maiden, when she wanted Maria’s services in preparing the breakfast.

“The wench sleeps sound enough this morning,” said the old woman. “Go and call her, Daniel. My poor legs can’t stand them stairs.”

“Your poor legs are getting uncommon useless,” muttered Daniel testily, as he went to do his wife’s behest.

He knocked at the door, and called Maria—once, twice, thrice, many times; but there was no reply. He tried the door, and found it locked. He shook the door violently, cold with fear.

Then he told himself that the girl had played him a

trick. She had stolen away before daybreak, and left the door locked to frighten him. But, no; this could not be, for he could see the key in the lock when he knelt down and put his eye to the keyhole. The key prevented his seeing into the room.

“She’s in there, laughing in her sleeve at me,” he told himself; “but I’ll soon be even with her.”

There was a heavy bar on the staircase, which was intended to secure the shutters of the window that lighted the stairs. It was a detached bar, and always stood in a corner near the window, which it was but rarely employed to fasten. Daniel ran down to the landing, and seized upon this massive iron bar, and then ran back to the garret door.

One blow from the heavy bar shattered the old lock, which was the same lock the carter had broken with his strong fist seventy years before. The door flew open, and Daniel went into the attic which he had chosen for the stranger’s bed-chamber.

Maria was hanging from the hook in the wall. She had contrived to cover her face decently with her handkerchief. She had hanged herself deliberately about an hour before Daniel found her, in the early grey of morning. The doctor, who was summoned from Holcroft, was able to declare the time at which she had slain herself, but there was no one who could say what sudden access of terror had impelled her to the desperate act, or under what slow torture of nervous apprehension her mind had given way. The coroner’s jury returned the customary merciful verdict of “temporary insanity.”

The girl’s melancholy fate darkened the rest of Michael Bascom’s life. He fled from Wildheath Grange as from an accursed spot, and from the Skeggs as from the murderers of a harmless innocent girl. He ended his days at Oxford, where he found the society of congenial minds, and the books he loved. But the memory of Maria’s sad face, and sadder death, was his abiding sorrow. Out of that deep shadow his soul was never lifted.

Contextual Documents

*A Journal Entry from Arthur Munby*¹¹

Arthur Munby was born in York in 1828. He was educated at Trinity College, in Cambridge, graduating with a

Notes

11. Hudson, Derek. *Munby: Man of Two Worlds; The Life and Diaries of Arthur J. Munby*. (Boston: Gambit, 1972) 99.

Bachelor’s of the Arts in 1851. He worked as a lawyer, like his father, for some years before becoming a civil servant for the Ecclesiastical Commissioner’s office from 1858–1888. During this time, Munby was known for his poetry *Benoni* and *Verses New and Old*. In 1854, he met his future wife while wandering the streets, Hannah Cullwick. In 1873, Munby wed Cullwick, though their relationship was anything but normal. With her working class status in society, she remained a domestic servant while at the same time being married to Munby. Even though they’d been married for many years, she was still kept in the shadows. No one knew of this intricate relationship until his will was released to his family. In 1877, Munby and Cullwick separated, but didn’t stop seeing one another until Cullwick’s death in 1909.

Arthur Munby became known for his fetishistic obsession with working-class women, particularly those who did hard physical labor. Munby’s favorite pastime was to wander the streets, looking for working women to interview and photograph. He asked them about their lives and the details of their work, all the while noting their appearance, such as clothing and dialects. He entered these observations into his journals, in which he was known to describe the women and then draw them. He often depicted them as big, black blobs with coats and trousers, along with large hands (referenced in this entry) and large feet.

In this journal entry, we read about Munby’s eye for detail as he describes a young milkwoman that is in the market square. He describes her with large hands and glowing red skin. Is this Munby’s way of saying that these women who do the work of a man are more sexual than those of a woman who stays at home? His obsession with fetishism and dirt carried over into his relationship with Cullwick, with whom he had a love affair—but a slightly different love affair for the time. Munby is known to have had Cullwick as a “domestic servant,” rather than a wife, once they finally married in secret. The two became known for their age-play and infantilism (the sexual role play of a person who acts or is treated like an infant). This entry goes on to speak about a woman that Munby is observing, wondering about the reason that she takes such pride in the work she does. He firstly refers to the woman as a wench, who is a woman of the “dirty” working class. The word “wench” refers to the fact that this woman might be doing other work such as sexual favors, besides going to the market for groceries. This references

Munby’s life because at that same time Munby was having Cullwick serve him sexually. Thus, Munby’s use of the word “wench” reflects his sexualization of women’s labor. This obsession with the working class drove Munby to study and, thus, to assert power in multiple ways over the working class women that he sought out and coerced. We see in “A Shadow in the Corner,” a young woman working as a maid in the house of the Master. By referencing this journal entry, we see Munby’s sexualization of working class women helps us contextualize Braddon because his sexualization is fixated on the ghostliness of the female working class—his journal entry is obsessed with the way working class women transgress different forms of category and boundary-like race, class, and gender.

.....

Tuesday, 11 June . . . in Trafalgar Square, I noticed a young milkwoman who was just commencing her career under the auspices of an old one, probably her mother. The débutante was standing by the railings of the Union Club. She was a ruddy blooming wench of eighteen or so, scarcely formed yet, but clean-limbed and muscular. Her large hands were in colour a glowing red; the skin coarse and rugged without, showing no vein or dimple, and tough & leathery in the palms, hardening into yellow callosities—*corns*, she would call them—at the roots of the fingers. Can a girl of eighteen possess such hands and have a lover? I should think so! She wore the usual plain straw bonnet, woolen shawl, and clean cotton frock: but her bonnet wanted the thick white cap, her boots were effeminately thin—hardly so strong as a shooting boot—and her frock came down to her ankles! Can it be that fashion is infecting the London milkwomen, noblest of conservative caryatides? So she stood, awkward and happy, a picture of ungainly strength. A lady came mincing past at the moment, with tiny hands cased in lavender kid: the contrast was delicious. Then her mother returned, and the daughter, with her help, adjusted the yoke upon her own square shoulders. It was a brand-new yoke, with her master’s name in large letters upon it; whereby as she walks all the world may know that she belongs to ‘Sims, 122 Jermyn St.’ She walked thus away between her heavy cans, the old mentor keeping at her side and guiding her to the next customer’s on the milk walk. Doubtless, when she first walked along the streets this afternoon, she felt proud of wearing a new yoke with big letters on it, and clean brown straps and bright

hooks and buckles; as proud as a cart horse in his May-day harness. Long may she feel such pride! She will work in that year out of doors six hours a day, in all weathers, with never a holiday from year’s end to year’s end: she will nevertheless be as merry as a lark, yet stronger and healthier every year, and marry and breed us sons strong and fullblooded like herself.

*A Journal Entry from Hannah Cullwick*¹²

The following contextual document helps provide insight into the true nature of domestic servitude and the many tasks one was expected to accomplish in a day’s work. While Braddon’s narrative does not give much insight into the specific activities Maria would have been working on each day in the story itself, this diary entry allows us to understand the nature of the daily chores of a woman in her position. Hannah Cullwick wrote this entry on her birthday; she details her daily activities, which would be similar to those that Maria, the girl in “The Shadow in the Corner,” would have been expected to complete as well.

Hannah Cullwick was born and raised into a life of domestic servitude. From an early age, she contributed to the family’s income. Orphaned by the age of fourteen, along with her four siblings, Cullwick had no choice but to carry on in her duties as a housemaid for well-known families of the time. Through her service to such a family, she came in contact with Arthur Munby in 1854, a meeting that would impact her life and aid her in finding her own place in history. Their meeting would later lead not only to a relationship but a secret marriage between the two.

This relationship was chronicled through her diary, in which she calls him her “Massa” and states that she is able to carry him “as if he was a child,” a strength we are told he admired in working-class women. She, though his wife, acted as housemaid of their home, often writing him letters about the details of the work she had done throughout the day. Such a letter is provided below. The nature of their relationship also brings to light that Cullwick’s position in life kept her in the shadows. Though the two married, they did so in secret, and they divorced in 1877 but remained in contact while she continued working as a domestic servant until shortly before Hannah’s death in 1909 at the age of 71.

.....
Friday 26 May My birthday, & it was a fine morning. I got up early & lighted the fire after I’d brush’d the grate. Swept the kitchen floor & shook the carpets. Did the dining room grate up & laid the fire. Swept the carpet. Clean’d the front steps on my knees. Shook the mats. Wash’d me & got our breakfast. Receiv’d letters from my two sisters, & two little books as presents. I was just a little disappointed at getting no letter from Massa as he’d promised me one, but I thought it’d come early in the day so I wasn’t vex’d & I made myself quite happy – wi’ giving the kitchen an extra scrub on my knees, after I’d clean’d the tables & dresser down, & clean’d the cupboards out. Got the dinner by ½ pas 1 & clear’d away after.

Wash’d up in the scullery, & had our tea at 5 with some seedcake I’d made for my birthday – not so much for myself, but the other servants like cake & puddings so much. They wish’d me the usual wish of many happy returns o’ the day. There was no letter from M, & I couldn’t rest to write or sew, for I was afraid he’d gone to the Derby & perhaps something had happend. If he’d not promised me a lter I shd just o’ thought he’d forgot the day, so as I couldn’t sit down I set on & clean’d the kitchen win-down outside & in. I had my striped apron & cap on & my cotton frock, & while I was standing up outside I’ the window cleaning it, a lad went by & says, ‘Come down, you young hussy.’ I was rather pleas’d at him saying it tho’ he was rude, & I thought, ‘Ah, lad, you wouldn’t say that if you knew I’m 38 years old today.’ I was enjoying the work & it was pleasnt out in the air, but a bit draughty being in the ear & one’s apt to catch cold. Still I liked it, & I’d no better way to enjoy myself.

When the window was done I wash’d my red stuff frock after I picked the body from the skirt, & then it was supper time. I got the beer from the corner public house & laid the cloth. At 9 o’clock a letter came from M., kind but short. It was such a relief, for I’d nearly made my mind up to set off by the train, just there & back in a hurry to see if M. was in or no. After prayers I wrote a short letter to him & posted it by twelve o’clock & to bed soon after.

I am 38 years old today, but I don’t *feel* so old, nor look it – folks generally take me for 28 or 9 – and I’m as strong as ever. I can heave my Master easy & carry him as if he was a child nearly, & he’s 11 stone7 lbs. I am thankful to God for my health & strength & the rest of the bless-

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12. Stanley, Liz. *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick, Victorian Maidservant*. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984) 166-67.

ings I have. I feel that I am better servant now nor ever I was, 'cause I've had more experience, & seem to have more sense to see what one is born for, & to be satisfied, & thankful for a home, & *pleas'd* to have work to do for a living, & of more patience to bear with the different tempers & little things one continually has in life to try one. So when I went to bed I knelt down & prayed that I might go on improving till I was perfect, as far as it's possible to be perfect, & especially that I may be a comfort to Massa, & love him always as I do now, with all my heart - & in loving him I should the more love God who made me for him. So I laid me down at rest & felt quite happy.

*An Excerpt From the “Buried Alive” Chapter of “Lady Audley’s Secret”*¹³

Mary Elizabeth Braddon was a praised writer in the mid-to-late 1800’s in England. As her writing career grew, Braddon met publisher and editor John Maxwell. Though Maxwell was married, Braddon and he had a more than professional relationship. With his wife in an asylum, Maxwell allowed his relationship with Braddon to grow. After Maxwell’s wife died, he and Braddon married (Tromp, Gilber, Haynie xxiii). It was through her skills and publications that Braddon helped her husband save his floundering publishing company. Together, Maxwell and Braddon published many works, including *Lady Audley’s Secret*, which was released in parts in Maxwell’s *Sixpenny Magazine* (Tromp, Gilber, Haynie xxv).

Much of Braddon’s work explored her feminist ideas—specifically the oppression of domestic labor females and married women, sometimes veiled by supernatural themes, as seen in “The Shadow in the Corner.” One subject Braddon was drawn to in particular was that of live burial. According to Holly Furneaux, Braddon was inspired by Walter Scott, Charlotte Brontë, and Wilkie Collins who wrote of live burial before her (426). The social obsession with live burial stemmed from the burial reforms in the 1850s, laws that were “intended not only to protect the living from the unhealthy effects of exposure to dead bodies, but also to protect the dead from desecration” (Thorsheim 42). This fear of premature burial resulted in petitions for “waiting mortuaries” who some called “an asylum for doubtful life” (Furneaux 426-27). Consequently, the fears manifested in multiple

literary works of the era. In 1850, Edgar Allen Poe even wrote a short story titled “The Premature Burial.”

While many live burial works were literal, Braddon often used the idea and fear in a more metaphorical sense to illustrate the confining and sometimes traumatizing aspects of becoming an invisible specter of a woman in the domestic and working class of the Victorian Era. In her novel, *Lady Audley’s Secret*, Braddon has an entire chapter titled “Buried Alive,” yet no burial actually occurs. Furneaux argues, “Braddon recruits resonant images of live burial to explore and realign relations of gender and power in her society...[S]he draws upon and subverts a long cultural genealogy of live burial narratives in which the victim is invariably gendered female” (427). In many instances in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, Braddon utilizes horrific live burial images to describe the legal coffin of marriage and women’s domestic labor. Through this imagery, “Braddon rejects the institutionalized expectation that a married woman should suffer the complete obliteration of her individual identity” (Furneaux 431). Braddon’s writing throughout *Lady Audley’s Secret* acts as a feminist commentary on marriage and divorce in 19th century England. Marriage stripped a woman of her identity and placed blame on her for adultery, and there was no escape from her matrimonial coffin unless she could prove physical harm.

Braddon’s attraction to the buried alive motif often played a role in other works. In a more abstract, metaphorical sense, “The Shadow in the Corner” can arguably be labeled as a buried alive story. Throughout the story, we see Mr. and Mrs. Skeggs stuck in a home that they have been maintaining for years. Mrs. Skeggs has spent the last twenty years in her premature grave. When Mr. Skeggs asks Michael for help in maintain the house, he says, they need “a girl to trot about and wash up, and help the old lady. She’s getting weak on her legs, poor soul. We’ve none of us grown younger in the last twenty years... my missus must have a girl. She can’t go on trotting up and down these everlasting passages, and standing in that stone scullery year after year, just as if she was a young woman.” Clearly, within the last two decades, Mrs. Skeggs has become too old to take the stairs of her coffin—the walls of the mansion confining her to her “grave” of domestic duties.

In the chapter excerpt from *Lady Audley’s Secret* that

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13. Braddon, *Lady Audley’s Secret*. (London: Tinsley Bros., 1862).

follows, Braddon equates the institutionalization of Lady Audley to a live burial punishment for her crimes. In the earlier events of the novel, Lady Audley is discovered to actually be a woman named Helen Talboys—the supposed dead wife of Sir Audley’s friend George who, upon visiting England and meeting Lady Audley, mysteriously disappears. Lady Audley, when she was still known as Helen, had previously been “buried alive” under the domestic duties and anxiety of debt when George left her for three years in hopes of returning with gold. A captive in her coffin of life as Helen Talboys, she felt her only escape was to fake her death and find a new husband who could financially support her. The feminist themes and fear of premature burial provide a prime example of Braddon’s personal ideals and beliefs. Throughout all of her writing, Braddon’s commentary is prevalent, and through the veil of horror and supernatural, readers can undeniably see Braddon herself.

My lady had not spoken during the journey, except to decline some refreshments which Robert had offered her at a halting place upon the road. Her heart sunk when they left Brussels behind, for she had hoped that city might have been the end of her journey, and she had turned with a feeling of sickness and despair from the dull Belgian landscape.

She looked up at last as the vehicle jolted into a great stony quadrangle, which had been the approach to a monastery once, but which was now the court yard of a dismal hotel, in whose cellars legions of rats skirmished and squeaked even while the broad sunshine was bright in the chambers above.

Lady Audley shuddered as she alighted from the diligence, and found herself in that dreary court yard. Robert was surrounded by chattering porters, who clamored for his “baggages,” and disputed among themselves as to the hotel at which he was to rest. One of these men ran away to fetch a hackney-coach at Mr. Audley’s behest, and reappeared presently, urging on a pair of horses—which were so small as to suggest the idea that they had been made out of one ordinary-sized animal—with wild shrieks and whoops that had a demoniac sound in the darkness.

Mr. Audley left my lady in a dreary coffee-room in the care of a drowsy attendant while he drove away to some distant part of the quiet city. There was official business to be gone through before Sir Michael’s wife could be

quietly put away in the place suggested by Dr. Mosgrave. Robert had to see all manner of important personages; and to take numerous oaths; and to exhibit the English physician’s letter; and to go through much ceremony of signing and countersigning before he could take his lost friend’s cruel wife to the home which was to be her last upon earth. Upward of two hours elapsed before all this was arranged, and the young man was free to return to the hotel, where he found his charge staring absently at a pair of wax-candles, with a cup of untasted coffee standing cold and stagnant before her.

Robert handed my lady into the hired vehicle, and took his seat opposite to her once more.

“Where are you going to take me?” she asked, at last. “I am tired of being treated like some naughty child, who is put into a dark cellar as a punishment for its offenses. Where are you taking me?”

“To a place in which you will have ample leisure to repent the past, Mrs. Talboys,” Robert answered, gravely.

They had left the paved streets behind them, and had emerged out of a great gaunt square, in which there appeared to be about half a dozen cathedrals, into a small boulevard, a broad lamp-lit road, on which the shadows of the leafless branches went and came tremblingly, like the shadows of a paralytic skeleton. There were houses here and there upon this boulevard; stately houses, *entre cour et jardin*, and with plaster vases of geraniums on the stone pillars of the ponderous gateways. The rumbling hackney-carriage drove upward of three-quarters of a mile along this smooth roadway before it drew up against a gateway, older and more ponderous than any of those they had passed.

My lady gave a little scream as she looked out of the coach-window. The gaunt gateway was lighted by an enormous lamp; a great structure of iron and glass, in which one poor little shivering flame struggled with the March wind.

The coachman rang the bell, and a little wooden door at the side of the gate was opened by a gray-haired man, who looked out at the carriage, and then retired. He reappeared three minutes afterward behind the folding iron gates, which he unlocked and threw back to their full extent, revealing a dreary desert of stone-paved courtyard.

The coachman led his wretched horses into the courtyard, and piloted the vehicle to the principal doorway of the house, a great mansion of gray stone, with several long ranges of windows, many of which were dimly light-

ed, and looked out like the pale eyes of weary watchers upon the darkness of the night.

My lady, watchful and quiet as the cold stars in the wintry sky, looked up at these casements with an earnest and scrutinizing gaze. One of the windows was shrouded by a scanty curtain of faded red; and upon this curtain there went and came a dark shadow, the shadow of a woman with a fantastic head dress, the shadow of a restless creature, who paced perpetually backward and forward before the window.

Sir Michael Audley’s wicked wife laid her hand suddenly upon Robert’s arm, and pointed with the other hand to this curtained window.

“I know where you have brought me,” she said. “This is a MAD-HOUSE.”

Mr. Audley did not answer her. He had been standing at the door of the coach when she addressed him, and he quietly assisted her to alight, and led her up a couple of shallow stone steps, and into the entrance-hall of the mansion. He handed Dr. Mosgrave’s letter to a neatly-dressed, cheerful-looking, middle-aged woman, who came tripping out of a little chamber which opened out of the hall, and was very much like the bureau of an hotel. This person smilingly welcome Robert and his charge: and after dispatching a servant with the letter, invited them into her pleasant little apartment, which was gayly furnished with bright amber curtains and heated by a tiny stove.

“Madam finds herself very much fatigued?” the Frenchwoman said, interrogatively, with a look of intense sympathy, as she placed an arm-chair for my lady.

“Madam” shrugged her shoulders wearily, and looked round the little chamber with a sharp glance of scrutiny that betokened no very great favor.

“WHAT is this place, Robert Audley?” she cried fiercely. “Do you think I am a baby, that you may juggle with and deceive me—what is it? It is what I said just now, is it not?”

“It is a *maison de santé*, my lady,” the young man answered, gravely. “I have no wish to juggle with or to deceive you.”

My lady paused for a few moments, looking reflectively at Robert.

“A *maison de santé*,” she repeated. “Yes, they manage these things better in France. In England we should call it a madhouse. This is a house for mad people, this, is it not, madam?” she said in French, turning upon the woman, and tapping the polished floor with her foot.

“Ah, but no, madam,” the woman answered with a shrill scream of protest. “It is an establishment of the most agreeable, where one amuses one’s self—”

She was interrupted by the entrance of the principal of this agreeable establishment, who came beaming into the room with a radiant smile illuminating his countenance, and with Dr. Mosgrave’s letter open in his hand.

It was impossible to say how enchanted he was to make the acquaintance of M’sieu. There was nothing upon earth which he was not ready to do for M’sieu in his own person, and nothing under heaven which he would not strive to accomplish for him, as the friend of his acquaintance, so very much distinguished, the English doctor. Dr. Mosgrave’s letter had given him a brief synopsis of the case, he informed Robert, in an undertone, and he was quite prepared to undertake the care of the charming and very interesting “Madam—Madam—”

He rubbed his hands politely, and looked at Robert. Mr. Audley remembered, for the first time, that he had been recommended to introduce his wretched charge under a feigned name.

He affected not to hear the proprietor’s question. It might seem a very easy matter to have hit upon a heap of names, any one of which would have answered his purpose; but Mr. Audley appeared suddenly to have forgotten that he had ever heard any mortal appellation except that of himself and of his lost friend.

Perhaps the proprietor perceived and understood his embarrassment. He at any rate relieved it by turning to the woman who had received them, and muttering something about No. 14, Bis. The woman took a key from a long range of others, that hung over the mantel-piece, and a wax candle from a bracket in a corner of the room, and having lighted the candle, led the way across the stone-paved hall, and up a broad, slippery staircase of polished wood.

The English physician had informed his Belgian colleague that money would be of minor consequence in any arrangements made for the comfort of the English lady who was to be committed to his care. Acting upon this hint, Monsieur Val opened the outer door of a stately suite of apartments, which included a lobby, paved with alternate diamonds of black and white marble, but of a dismal and cellar-like darkness; a saloon furnished with gloomy velvet draperies, and with a certain funereal splendor which is not peculiarly conducive to the elevation of the spirits; and a bed-chamber, containing a bed

so wondrously made, as to appear to have no opening whatever in its coverings, unless the counterpane had been split asunder with a pen-knife.

My lady stared dismally round at the range of rooms, which looked dreary enough in the wan light of a single wax-candle. This solitary flame, pale and ghost-like in itself, was multiplied by paler phantoms of its ghostliness, which glimmered everywhere about the rooms; in the shadowy depths of the polished floors and wainscot, or the window-panes, in the looking-glasses, or in those great expanses of glimmering something which adorned the rooms, and which my lady mistook for costly mirrors, but which were in reality wretched mockeries of burnished tin.

Amid all the faded splendor of shabby velvet, and tarnished gilding, and polished wood, the woman dropped into an arm-chair, and covered her face with her hands. The whiteness of them, and the starry light of diamonds trembling about them, glittered in the dimly-lighted chamber. She sat silent, motionless, despairing, sullen, and angry, while Robert and the French doctor retired to an outer chamber, and talked together in undertones. Mr. Audley had very little to say that had not been already said for him, with a far better grace than he himself could have expressed it, by the English physician. He had, after great trouble of mind, hit upon the name of Taylor, as a safe and simple substitute for that other name, to which alone my lady had a right. He told the Frenchman that this Mrs. Taylor was distantly related to him—that she had inherited the seeds of madness from her mother, as indeed Dr. Mosgrave had informed Monsieur Val; and that she had shown some fearful tokens of the lurking taint that was latent in her mind; but that she was not to be called “mad.” He begged that she might be treated with all tenderness and compassion; that she might receive all reasonable indulgences; but he impressed upon Monsieur Val, that under no circumstances was she to be permitted to leave the house and grounds without the protection of some reliable person, who should be answerable for her safe-keeping. He had only one other point to urge, and that was, that Monsieur Val, who, as he had understood, was himself a Protestant—the doctor bowed—would make arrangements with some kind and benevolent Protestant clergyman, through whom spiritual advice and consolation might be secured for the invalid lady; who had especial need, Robert added, gravely, of such advantages.

This—with all necessary arrangements as to pecuniary matters, which were to be settled from time to time between Mr. Audley and the doctor, unassisted by any agents whatever—was the extent of the conversation between the two men, and occupied about a quarter of an hour.

My lady sat in the same attitude when they re-entered the bedchamber in which they had left her, with her ringed hands still clasped over her face.

Robert bent over to whisper in her ear.

“Your name is Madam Taylor here,” he said. “I do not think you would wish to be known by your real name.”

She only shook her head in answer to him, and did not even remove her hands from over her face.

“Madam will have an attendant entirely devoted to her service,” said Monsieur Val. “Madam will have all her wishes obeyed; her reasonable wishes, but that goes without saying,” monsieur adds, with a quaint shrug. “Every effort will be made to render madam’s sojourn at Villebrumeuse agreeable. The inmates dine together when it is wished. I dine with the inmates sometimes; my subordinate, a clever and a worthy man always. I reside with my wife and children in a little pavilion in the grounds; my subordinate resides in the establishment. Madam may rely upon our utmost efforts being exerted to insure her comfort.”

Monsieur is saying a great deal more to the same effect, rubbing his hands and beaming radiantly upon Robert and his charge, when madam rises suddenly, erect and furious, and dropping her jeweled fingers from before her face, tells him to hold his tongue.

“Leave me alone with the man who has brought me here,” she cried, between her set teeth. “Leave me!”

She points to the door with a sharp, imperious gesture; so rapid that the silken drapery about her arm makes a swooping sound as she lifts her hand. The sibilant French syllables hiss through her teeth as she utters them, and seem better fitted to her mood and to herself than the familiar English she has spoken hitherto.

The French doctor shrugs his shoulders as he goes out into the lobby, and mutters something about a “beautiful devil,” and a gesture worthy of “the Mars.” My lady walked with a rapid footstep to the door between the bed-chamber and the saloon; closed it, and with the handle of the door still in her hand, turned and looked at Robert Audley.

“You have brought me to my grave, Mr. Audley,” she cried; “you have used your power basely and cruelly, and have brought me to a living grave.”

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Ghostly Hands: A Critical Edition of Henry James's "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes"

Edited by Morgan Aprill and Lauren Lutz

This edition critically analyzes "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" by Henry James. It is put in context with three other Victorian ghost stories that use the similar trope of ghostly hands. The theme of these ghostly hands is used to explore Victorian era issues concerning class, property exchange, and the roles of women.

General Introduction

There are many well-known authors, like Poe and Dickens, who contributed to the wide array of ghost stories that emerged from the Victorian era. One intriguing motif used by a diverse body of authors involved representing ghosts as hands. Henry James's "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," the story in focus within this edition, is a prime example of a famous author who utilized ghostly hands within his stories. Also included are collected excerpts from other short stories employing the ghostly hand motif by the Victorian-era authors A. T. Quiller-Couch, Mary E. Braddon, and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. In each of these tales the ghosts are portrayed as hands without bodies, and most of them are violent except for the complacent hands in Quiller-Couch's story. When looking at the way the hands are represented throughout the narratives and what drives them to haunt and act, we can see how ghostly hands are used to represent social issues and limitations within the Victorian era.

In her article about W.E. Gladstone and spiritualism, Ruth Clayton Windscheffel mentions how spiritualism, the "belief centered on the possibility of contact between the living and the dead," rose in popularity in all classes during this era while strong religious beliefs waned (3). New attitudes about the dead began to emerge, such as the idea that those who are dead are not controlled by the rules of the living. In Victorian literature, death became a way for authors to imagine freedom from

societal constraints, and the trope of the ghostly hand allowed for exploration of a more potent, compelling ghost. Jennifer Bann elaborates on this notion in her article about the change in the portrayal of ghosts in the nineteenth century, explaining that the power given to the dead through spiritualism influenced the authors within literature to give ghosts more "controlling, guiding, or demonstrative" behaviors, which surfaced in part through the ghostly hand motif (664). Instead of a ghost, Bann continues, that was impotent in compliance with the "tradition of the limited dead," stories began to feature one who had more power, exercised through the use of its hands within the stories (663). Tales with ghostly hands that took property and subverted economic and gender roles became popular as authors critiqued the society around them.

The Victorian era was a time in which capitalism was truly flourishing. This expansion, in turn, caused many to begin questioning and fearing the capitalist system (Nunokawa 3-4). Katherine Rowe explains that many stories that included the motif of a ghostly hand were seen as Marxist critiques in that they looked at the "presence of labor behind the 'invisible hand' of the market ... in order to probe the uncanny, alienating conditions of labor at home and in the factory" (112). This trope was tied up in class struggles as the Victorian era economic system relied on a clear division between the lower, laboring classes and the upper class. Another scholar, Arlene Young, builds on this idea and elaborates that what began to change during this time was the

prevalence of the middle class and its attempts to counter the dominance of the upper class (2). Indeed, in her book *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction*, Jenni Calder states that authors during this time “were both critical of those institutions and, in varying ways and degrees, trapped in them” (9). Bound within these institutions was an anxiety towards property. The products the upper classes consumed were created by the hands of the lower classes. This added a ghostly aspect to class relations and property as the items the upper classes consumed were put together by hands that were not visible, being far removed from the consumer. With the development of a voice for the lower-middle and laboring classes, many upper-class people feared the overthrowing of their power. This anxiety could be seen in some of the stories of the day that related all these ideas together. Citing George Eliot, Katherine Rowe explains that servants, as low-class citizens, were seen as unintelligent and difficult to hold a rational conversation with as they were prone to flights of imagination and paranoia (147). This classism within the domestic sphere was probably related to a fear of the lower classes reversing or perverting the order of property distribution.

As demonstrated by Calder, the class separation allowed for authors of the time to examine marriage and domestic relationships within their work (9). According to Ellen Plante in her book *Women at Home in Victorian America: A Social History*, in Victorian society there were strict roles that each gender was to perform. A woman was not allowed to express her feelings towards a potential suitor until the man professed his own sentiments and proposed, putting her in a distinctly passive position. The man would give her an engagement ring, which was a newly popular gift in this era, then seek family approval, and quickly the couple would become betrothed (21-23). Married life became a world divided into two separate spheres of the home and the world outside of it. Plante describes guidebooks that advised women that it was their duty to provide a safe, comfortable home for their husbands to retreat to upon leaving the stressful business world in fear of him becoming a “barbarian if left to himself without woman’s influence” (32). Apart from the pressure of maintaining a safe haven for their families, women were expected to adhere to a set of behaviors that left them subverted by the authoritative male figure. In other words, a woman was supposed to be the epitome of good

grace and dignity as well as to avoid any disagreements (Plante 29). Acting like a lady entailed, in part, not discussing topics that meddled in the man’s public sphere, but occupying conversation with subjects that had to do with their own roles in the private sphere like crafts and fashion (Plante 110). As we examine these stringent aspects of a woman’s life in the Victorian era, the inclusion of the subject within literary texts of the period is understandable.

With the Industrial Revolution came a way for power to be obtained by earning money through the capitalist system, which threatened the situation among classes. Upper-class people were threatened by the ability of middle-class members to encroach upon their power. They also feared the power the new economic system gave lower-class citizens, who provided goods and services the upper classes used or took for granted. This economic world was seen as harsh and for men only, at least for the middle and upper classes (working-class women often had no choice but to work outside the home). Victorian ideology dictated that it was the woman’s role to create a peaceful haven at home for her husband. But, according to Young, this establishment was being questioned as lower-middle-class men built alliances with women in order to try and advance themselves (2-3).

Victorian literature provided a way for some authors to show how skewed the dynamics were between men and women, and among socioeconomic classes. Calder explains, “The egocentric, authoritarian male point of view dominated Victorian life[;] what Victorian literature demonstrates is both its power and its destructiveness, and the fascinating process of reaction against it” (210). This understanding of how gender relations operated explains why authors often depicted families as perfect on the outside, but full of corrupt members and situations within (Calder 95). When put into a spectral context, authors can represent these reactions by giving females more power through their hands, which tie them to the social constructs they belong in. Their hands perform domestic work, complete crafts like sewing, and wear the rings that bind them to the husbands who expect those activities from them. The hands are a synecdoche for the women themselves, representing the necessity for women to know the correct role of their hands in the domestic sphere. While their hands directly tie women to the uncompromising private sphere, their hands often

exert more control in death as represented in the popular ghostly hand motif of the time.

The Victorian era was full of rules and traditions, but it was also a time of change and questioning, especially when it came to the belief in ghosts. Spiritualism allowed people to envision a relationship with the dead as they contemplated how to communicate with them. Ghosts were often represented as more powerful beings with human thoughts upon which they acted. This representation in turn created a movement towards more powerful, expressive ghosts in literary texts. Ghosts and ghost stories were a means of escaping from the shackles of the Victorian era, and the ghostly hands motif was a common theme of the day, representing all of these anxieties and giving power to ghosts who reacted against societal constraints.

Introduction to Henry James’s “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes”

Known for another ghost story—his novel *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)—Henry James was the second son born to a family of Irish Americans. Born on April 15, 1843, James published his first work, “A Tragedy of Error,” in 1864 (Beidler 5). “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” published four years later, was Henry James’s first work of supernatural fiction. According to T.J. Lustig, seeing the critiques of other ghost stories of his day, James wished to write something that connected ghosts with the everyday and ordinary objects (52). John Carlos Rowe believes most of what James wrote represented the struggles facing “intelligent young women in predominantly patriarchal societies on both sides of the Atlantic...” (11). However, it could be argued that his work, including “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” reveals James’s conservative views about women, portraying them as not quite so intelligent after all. This story reflects social issues in the Victorian era both by describing hands in scenes between the living, and by ending with ghostly hands killing the main female character. A close analysis of the scenes where hands are involved reveals the themes represented that were present in many texts of the time period: commentary on Victorian-era gender roles, rules of engagement and marriage, anxiety over the acquisition of property and social classes, and the jealousy and greed each of these evokes.

The story begins with a focus on social and class struggles as we are introduced to an eligible, wealthy bachelor, Mr. Lloyd, who must choose to marry one of a pair of sisters, Perdita and Rosalind. Having come back from Europe with their brother, Bernard, Mr. Lloyd tells him “that his sisters were fully a match for the most genteel young women in the old country.” This relieves the women, especially their mother, who is very eager to keep up connections with the English class system. Mrs. Wingrave is also eager to get them married off. The sisters then begin a competition for Mr. Lloyd’s affections. This competition is hardly mentioned directly between the sisters and is really rather passive as women were not allowed to show their affections or encourage the opposite sex. However, the women fight over possession of traditional gender roles and belongings throughout the entire story, suggesting that the women channel their aggression through materialistic, familial, and intra-gender competition.

The actions of the men and women in the story provide an interesting commentary on the expectations of each sex during this time. Mr. Lloyd appears to be the model gentleman following decorum by asking for Perdita’s hand in marriage. However, he later errs in his propriety when he spends excess time with Rosalind as his wife is dying. In fact, he ends up marrying Rosalind after Perdita’s death. Although the marriages between Mr. Lloyd and Perdita and then Mr. Lloyd and Rosalind seem to be proper, they are based upon an odd web of love, in which two sisters fall in love with the same man and each have a turn as his object of affection, suggesting the status of “marriage” matters more than the identity of the groom. Furthermore, this story includes a less than traditional process of engagement and marriage, especially when one sister marries the widower of her sister in a swift and covert manner. In response to Rosalind’s manipulation of Mr. Lloyd in her attempt to win him over, the narrator slyly states, “It is enough to say that she found means to appear to the very best advantage.” The sisters show the proper restraint of ladies during the time, but we see how this restraint builds up a deadly jealousy between them.

Additionally, how the sisters fit within the expected female roles of the time period are referenced at the beginning of the story. According to John Carlos Rowe, James was an author “concerned with the problems facing modern women,” and he chose to write about the

issues surrounding women’s lives such as the necessity to obtain a prestigious marriage to ensure their own security (10). James’s portrayal of the women in this story is fairly old-fashioned, however, as he shows them fighting each other over who will fulfill their gendered role as Mr. Lloyd’s wife and caretaker. This competition is apparent as the narrator references Rosalind’s superior domestic skills and modest, subdued personality, her masterful sewing abilities, and demureness in conversation. Therefore, she seems to be the superior choice since she exhibits superior femininity. In contrast, Perdita is described as a less serious young woman who is not as concerned with domestic duties and who “gave you your choice of a dozen answers before you had uttered half your thought.” Their fighting seems to revolve around which sister would be better suited to meet Mr. Lloyd’s domestic needs in the private sphere as well as more worthy of the possession of clothes and other petty things associated with women gaining property through marriage.

Rosalind’s desire for the property acquired by becoming a wife plays a huge part in motivating her actions. As Perdita is dying from the stress of childbirth, we see hands representing the jealousy between the sisters in the scene where “she lowered her eyes on her white hands, which her husband’s liberality had covered with rings” and holds her husband’s hands tightly within her own. On her deathbed, Perdita decides her sister’s intentions are not based on love, and she says, “He’ll [Mr. Lloyd] never forget me. Nor does Rosalind truly care for him; she cares only for vanities and finery and jewels.” After Perdita dies, Rosalind manipulatively works her way into her sister’s old family unit, proving that Perdita’s suspicions were correct. At first it seems Rosalind is jealous of Mr. Lloyd’s affection for her sister, but it later seems to be that she was jealous of all Perdita possessed through her marriage. This tension shows that the women—especially Rosalind—were really more concerned about possessions than love, characterizing the women as superficial and within gender stereotypes. The fact that James portrays women who attack each other over clothes and belongings brings to light his conservative beliefs and shows he was not as forward-thinking as some might claim.

The first time Rosalind finds out about Perdita and Mr.

Lloyd’s relationship is by seeing that Perdita has a ring. Jealousy between the sisters, then, becomes immediately intertwined with hands, a connection sustained throughout the narrative. When Rosalind initially notices the ring, she stares hard at Perdita’s hands, grasps the one with the ring, and demands to know who gave her such a nice gift. Her jealousy surfaces as she questions Perdita’s position as a proper Victorian lady upon accepting Mr. Lloyd’s gift: “‘It means that you are not a modest girl!’ cried Rosalind. ‘Pray, does your mother know of your intrigue? does Bernard?’” Later, when she is watching Perdita prepare her new bridal wardrobe, James focuses on how Rosalind takes the perfectly blue silk in her hands and then, “her fancy [being] stirred,” sets to working on helping Perdita sew. Instead of Rosalind being saddened by not being Mr. Lloyd’s choice, she focuses on what Perdita is gaining through her marriage and seems to mourn what she cannot have: silk clothing.

When Rosalind and Mr. Lloyd marry, she is plagued by a yearning to open a chest full of clothes and other nice things Perdita had saved for her daughter. Mr. Lloyd had promised Perdita on her deathbed that he would never let anybody open the chest, but after Rosalind constantly pressures him to allow her to open it, she gets her way and he gives her the key. However, Perdita’s ghost was waiting for Rosalind to acquire access to the chest full of possessions she had been jealous of since Perdita gained Mr. Lloyd’s hand in marriage. It is in the story’s final scene that we see the work of the envious hands one last time as Rosalind’s “lips were parted in entreaty, in dismay, in agony; and on her blanched brow and cheeks there glowed the marks of ten hideous wounds from two vengeful ghostly hands.” These were Perdita’s vengeful hands, seeking to protect her precious clothing from entering the hands of her jealous sister.

“The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” By Henry James, 1885¹

Part I

Towards the middle of the eighteenth century there lived in the Province of Massachusetts a widowed gentlewoman, the mother of three children, by name

Notes

1. This edition was originally printed in 1868 and comes from an anthology of Victorian ghost stories, *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, which was published in 1991.

Mrs Veronica Wingrave. She had lost her husband early in life, and had devoted herself to the care of her progeny. These young persons grew up in a manner to reward her tenderness and to gratify her highest hopes. The first-born was a son, whom she had called Bernard, in remembrance of his father. The others were daughters—born at an interval of three years apart. Good looks were traditional in the family, and this youthful trio were not likely to allow the tradition to perish. The boy was of that fair and ruddy complexion and that athletic structure which in those days (as in these) were the sign of good English descent—a frank, affectionate young fellow, a deferential son, a patronising brother, a steadfast friend. Clever, however, he was not; the wit of the family had been apportioned chiefly to his sisters. The late Mr William Wingrave had been a great reader of Shakespeare, at a time when this pursuit implied more freedom of thought than at the present day, and in a community where it required much courage to patronise the drama even in the closet; and he had wished to call attention to his admiration of the great poet by calling his daughters out of his favourite plays. Upon the elder he had bestowed the romantic name of Rosalind, and the younger he had called Perdita, in memory of a little girl born between them, who had lived but a few weeks.

When Bernard Wingrave came to his sixteenth year his mother put a brave face upon it and prepared to execute her husband’s last injunction. This had been a formal command that, at the proper age, his son should be sent out to England, to complete his education at the university of Oxford, where he himself had acquired his taste for elegant literature. It was Mrs Wingrave’s belief that the lad’s equal was not to be found in the two hemispheres, but she had the old traditions of literal obedience. She swallowed her sobs, and made up her boy’s trunk and his simple provincial outfit, and sent him on his way across the seas. Bernard presented himself at his father’s college, and spent five years in England, without great honour, indeed, but with a vast deal of pleasure and no discredit. On leaving the university he made the journey to France. In his twenty-fourth year he took ship for home, prepared to find poor little New England (New England was very small in those days) a very dull, unfashionable residence. But there had been

changes at home, as well as in Mr Bernard’s opinions. He found his mother’s house quite habitable, and his sisters grown into two very charming young ladies, with all the accomplishments and graces of the young women of Britain, and a certain native-grown originality and wildness, which, if it was not an accomplishment, was certainly a grace the more. Bernard privately assured his mother that his sisters were fully a match for the most genteel young women in the old country; whereupon poor Mrs Wingrave, you may be sure, bade them hold up their heads. Such was Bernard’s opinion, and such, in a tenfold higher degree, was the opinion of Mr Arthur Lloyd. This gentleman was a college-mate of Mr Bernard, a young man of reputable family, of a good person and a handsome inheritance; which latter appurtenance he proposed to invest in trade in the flourishing colony. He and Bernard were sworn friends; they had crossed the ocean together, and the young American had lost no time in presenting him at his mother’s house, where he had made quite as good an impression as that which he had received and of which I have just given a hint.

The two sisters were at this time in all the freshness of their youthful bloom; each wearing, of course, this natural brilliancy in the manner that became her best. They were equally dissimilar in appearance and character. Rosalind, the elder—now in her twenty-second year—was tall and white, with calm gray eyes and auburn tresses; a very faint likeness to the Rosalind² of Shakespeare’s comedy, whom I imagine a brunette (if you will), but a slender, airy creature, full of the softest, quickest impulses. Miss Wingrave, with her slightly lymphatic fairness, her fine arms, her majestic height, her slow utterance, was not cut out for adventures. She would never have put on a man’s jacket and hose; and, indeed, being a very plump beauty, she may have had reasons apart from her natural dignity. Perdita, too, might very well have exchanged the sweet melancholy of her name against something more in consonance with her aspect and disposition. She had the cheek of a gipsy³ and the eye of an eager child, as well as the smallest waist and lightest foot in all the country of the Puritans. When you spoke to her she never made you wait, as her handsome sister was wont to do (while she looked at

Notes

2. Rosalind is the main character within Shakespeare’s play *As You Like It*. She is banished from her father’s court and lives in the Forest of Arden, disguised as a shepherd named Ganymede.
3. Since gipsies were known to be wanderers, James could be juxtaposing this comparison with Rosalind being “not cut out for adventures” in the same paragraph.

you with a cold fine eye), but gave you your choice of a dozen answers before you had uttered half your thought.

The young girls were very glad to see their brother once more; but they found themselves quite able to spare part of their attention for their brother’s friend. Among the young men their friends and neighbours, the *belle jeunesse*⁴ of the Colony, there were many excellent fellows, several devoted swains, and some two or three who enjoyed the reputation of universal charmers and conquerors. But the homebred arts and somewhat boisterous gallantry of these honest colonists were completely eclipsed by the good looks, the fine clothes, the punctilious courtesy, the perfect elegance, the immense information, of Mr Arthur Lloyd. He was in reality no paragon; he was a capable, honourable, civil youth, rich in pounds sterling, in his health and complacency and his little capital of uninvested affections. But he was a gentleman; he had a handsome person; he had studied and travelled; he spoke French, he played on the flute, and he read verses aloud with very great taste. There were a dozen reasons why Miss Wingrave and her sister should have thought their other male acquaintance made but a poor figure before such a perfect man of the world. Mr Lloyd’s anecdotes told our little New England maidens a great deal more of the ways and means of people of fashion in European capitals than he had any idea of doing. It was delightful to sit by and hear him and Bernard talk about the fine people and fine things they had seen. They would all gather round the fire after tea, in the little wainscoted⁵ parlour, and the two young men would remind each other, across the rug, of this, that and the other adventure. Rosalind and Perdita would often have given their ears to know exactly what adventure it was, and where it happened, and who was there, and what the ladies had on; but in those days a well-bred young woman was not expected to break into the conversation of her elders, or to ask too many questions; and the poor girls used therefore to sit fluttering behind the more languid—or more discreet—curiosity of their mother.

Part II

That they were both very fine girls Arthur Lloyd was not slow to discover; but it took him some time to make

up his mind whether he liked the big sister or the little sister best. He had a strong presentiment—an emotion of a nature entirely too cheerful to be called a foreboding—that he was destined to stand up before the parson with one of them; yet he was unable to arrive at a preference, and for such a consummation a preference was certainly necessary, for Lloyd had too much young blood in his veins to make a choice by lot and be cheated of the satisfaction of falling in love. He resolved to take things as they came—to let his heart speak. Meanwhile he was on a very pleasant footing. Mrs Wingrave showed a dignified indifference to his ‘intentions’, equally remote from a carelessness of her daughter’s honour and from that sharp alacrity to make him come to the point, which, in his quality of a young man of property, he had too often encountered in the worldly matrons of his native islands. As for Bernard, all that he asked was that his friend should treat his sisters as his own; and as for the poor girls themselves, however each may have secretly longed that their visitor should do or say something ‘marked,’ they kept a very modest and contented demeanour.

Towards each other, however, they were somewhat more on the offensive. They were good friends enough, and accommodating bedfellows (they shared the same four-poster), betwixt whom it would take more than a day for the seeds of jealousy to sprout and bear fruit; but they felt that the seeds had been sown on the day that Mr Lloyd came into the house. Each made up her mind that, if she should be slighted, she would bear her grief in silence, and that no one should be any the wiser; for if they had a great deal of ambition, they had also a large share of pride. But each prayed in secret, nevertheless, that upon her the selection, the distinction, might fall. They had need of a vast deal of patience, of self-control, of dissimulation. In those days a young girl of decent breeding could make no advances whatever, and barely respond, indeed, to those that were made. She was expected to sit still in her chair, with her eyes on the carpet, watching the spot where the mystic handkerchief should fall. Poor Arthur Lloyd was obliged to carry on his wooing in the little wainscoted parlour, before the eyes of Mrs Wingrave, her son, and his prospective sister-in-law. But youth and love are so cunning that a hundred signs and tokens might travel to and fro, and

Notes

4. This phrase translates to “beautiful youth” in French.

5. Wainscoted here refers to wood paneling lining the lower half of the walls.

not one of these three pairs of eyes detect them in their passage. The two maidens were almost always together, and had plenty of chances to betray themselves. That each knew she was being watched, however, made not a grain of difference in the little offices they mutually rendered, or in the various household tasks they performed in common. Neither flinched nor fluttered beneath the silent battery of her sister’s eyes. The only apparent change in their habits was that they had less to say to each other. It was impossible to talk about Mr Lloyd, and it was ridiculous to talk about anything else. By tacit agreement they began to wear all their choice finery, and to devise such little implements of conquest, in the way of ribbons and top-knots and kerchiefs, as were sanctioned by indubitable modesty. They executed in the same inarticulate fashion a contract of fair play in this exciting game. “Is it better so?” Rosalind would ask, tying a bunch of ribbons on her bosom, and turning about from her glass to her sister. Perdita would look up gravely from her work and examine the decoration. “I think you had better give it another loop,” she would say, with great solemnity, looking hard at her sister with eyes that added, ‘upon my honour!’ So they were for ever stitching and trimming their petticoats, and pressing out their muslins, and contriving washes and ointments and cosmetics, like the ladies in the household of the vicar of Wakefield.⁶ Some three or four months went by; it grew to be midwinter, and as yet Rosalind knew that if Perdita had nothing more to boast of than she, there was not much to be feared from her rivalry. But Perdita by this time—the charming Perdita—felt that her secret had grown to be tenfold more precious than her sister’s.

One afternoon Miss Wingrave sat alone—that was a rare accident—before her toilet-glass, combing out her long hair. It was getting too dark to see; she lit the two candles in their sockets, on the frame of her mirror, and then went to the window to draw her curtains. It was a gray December evening; the landscape was bare and bleak, and the sky heavy with snow-clouds. At the end of the large garden into which her window looked was a wall with a little postern door, opening into a lane. The door stood ajar, as she could vaguely see in the gathering darkness, and moved slowly to and fro, as if someone were swaying it from the lane without. It was doubtless a servant-maid who had been having a tryst with her sweetheart. But as she was about to drop her curtain

Rosalind saw her sister step into the garden and hurry along the path which led to the house. She dropped the curtain, all save a little crevice for her eyes. As Perdita came up the path she seemed to be examining something in her hand, holding it close to her eyes. When she reached the house she stopped a moment, looked intently at the object, and pressed it to her lips.

Poor Rosalind slowly came back to her chair and sat down before her glass, where, if she had looked at it less abstractedly, she would have seen her handsome features sadly disfigured by jealousy. A moment afterwards the door opened behind her and her sister came into the room, out of breath, and her cheeks aglow with the chilly air.

Perdita started. “Ah,” said she, “I thought you were with our mother.” The ladies were to go to a tea-party, and on such occasions it was the habit of one of the young girls to help their mother to dress. Instead of coming in, Perdita lingered at the door.

“Come in, come in,” said Rosalind. “We have more than an hour yet. I should like you very much to give a few strokes to my hair.” She knew that her sister wished to retreat, and that she could see in the glass all her movements in the room. “Nay, just help me with my hair,” she said, “and I will go to mamma.”

Perdita came reluctantly, and took the brush. She saw her sister’s eyes, in the glass, fastened hard upon her hands. She had not made three passes when Rosalind clapped her own right hand upon her sister’s left, and started out of her chair. “Whose ring is that?” she cried, passionately, drawing her towards the light.

On the young girl’s third finger glistened a little gold ring, adorned with a very small sapphire. Perdita felt that she need no longer keep her secret, yet that she must put a bold face on her avowal. “It’s mine,” she said proudly.

“Who gave it to you?” cried the other.

Perdita hesitated a moment. “Mr Lloyd.”

“Mr Lloyd is generous, all of a sudden.”

“Ah no,” cried Perdita, with spirit, “not all of a sudden! He offered it to me a month ago.”

“And you needed a month’s begging to take it?” said Rosalind, looking at the little trinket, which indeed was not especially elegant, although it was the best that the jeweller of the Province could furnish. “I wouldn’t have taken it in less than two.”

“It isn’t the ring,” Perdita answered, “it’s what it means!”

“It means that you are not a modest girl!” cried

Notes

6. “Wakefield” is a character in the 18th-century novel by Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

Rosalind. “Pray, does your mother know of your intrigue? does Bernard?”

“My mother has approved my ‘intrigue’, as you call it. Mr Lloyd has asked for my hand, and mamma has given it. Would you have had him apply to you, dearest sister?”

Rosalind gave her companion a long look, full of passionate envy and sorrow. Then she dropped her lashes on her pale cheeks and turned away. Perdita felt that it had not been a pretty scene; but it was her sister’s fault. However, the elder girl rapidly called back her pride, and turned herself about again. “You have my very best wishes,” she said, with a low curtsy. “I wish you every happiness, and a very long life.”

Perdita gave a bitter laugh. “Don’t speak in that tone!” she cried. “I would rather you should curse me outright. Come, Rosy,” she added, “he couldn’t marry both of us.”

“I wish you very great joy,” Rosalind repeated, mechanically, sitting down to her glass again, “and a very long life, and plenty of children.”

There was something in the sound of these words not at all to Perdita’s taste. “Will you give me a year to live at least?” she said. “In a year I can have one little boy—or one little girl at least. If you will give me your brush again I will do your hair.”

“Thank you,” said Rosalind. “You had better go to mamma. It isn’t becoming that a young lady with a promised husband should wait on a girl with none.”

“Nay,” said Perdita, good-humouredly, “I have Arthur to wait upon me. You need my service more than I need yours.”

But her sister motioned her away, and she left the room. When she had gone poor Rosalind fell on her knees before her dressing-table, buried her head in her arms, and poured out a flood of tears and sobs. She felt very much the better for this effusion of sorrow. When her sister came back she insisted upon helping her to dress—on her wearing her prettiest things. She forced upon her acceptance a bit of lace of her own, and declared that now that she was to be married she should do her best to appear worthy of her lover’s choice. She discharged these offices in stern silence; but, such as they were, they had to do duty as an apology and an atonement; she never made any other.

Now that Lloyd was received by the family as an accepted suitor nothing remained but to fix the wedding-day. It was appointed for the following April,

and in the interval preparations were diligently made for the marriage. Lloyd, on his side, was busy with his commercial arrangements, and with establishing a correspondence with the great mercantile house to which he had attached himself in England. He was therefore not so frequent a visitor at Mrs Wingrave’s as during the months of his diffidence and irresolution, and poor Rosalind had less to suffer than she had feared from the sight of the mutual endearments of the young lovers. Touching his future sister-in-law Lloyd had a perfectly clear conscience. There had not been a particle of love-making between them, and he had not the slightest suspicion that he had dealt her a terrible blow. He was quite at his ease; life promised so well, both domestically and financially. The great revolt of the Colonies was not yet in the air, and that his connubial felicity should take a tragic turn it was absurd, it was blasphemous, to apprehend. Meanwhile, at Mrs Wingrave’s, there was a greater rustling of silks, a more rapid clicking of scissors and flying of needles, than ever. The good lady had determined that her daughter should carry from home the genteelest outfit that her money could buy or that the country could furnish. All the sage women in the Province were convened, and their united taste was brought to bear on Perdita’s wardrobe. Rosalind’s situation, at this moment, was assuredly not to be envied. The poor girl had an inordinate love of dress, and the very best taste in the world, as her sister perfectly well knew. Rosalind was tall, she was stately and sweeping, she was made to carry stiff brocade and masses of heavy lace, such as belong to the toilet of a rich man’s wife. But Rosalind sat aloof, with her beautiful arms folded and her head averted, while her mother and sister and the venerable women aforesaid worried and wondered over their materials, oppressed by the multitude of their resources. One day there came in a beautiful piece of white silk, brocaded with heavenly blue and silver, sent by the bridegroom himself—it not being thought amiss in those days that the husband-elect should contribute to the bride’s trousseau.⁷ Perdita could think of no form or fashion which would do sufficient honour to the splendour of the material.

“Blue’s your colour, sister, more than mine,” she said, with appealing eyes. “It’s a pity it’s not for you. You would know what to do with it.”

Notes

7. A trousseau was the collection of clothing and other household items that a soon-to-be-bride would prepare to take with her to her new home upon marriage.

Rosalind got up from her place and looked at the great shining fabric, as it lay spread over the back of a chair. Then she took it up in her hands and felt it—lovingly, as Perdita could see—and turned about toward the mirror with it. She let it roll down to her feet, and flung the other end over her shoulder, gathering it in about her waist with her white arm, which was bare to the elbow. She threw back her head, and looked at her image, and a hanging tress of her auburn hair fell upon the gorgeous surface of the silk. It made a dazzling picture. The women standing about uttered a little “Look, look!” of admiration. “Yes, indeed,” said Rosalind, quietly, “blue is my colour.” But Perdita could see that her fancy had been stirred, and that she would now fall to work and solve all their silken riddles. And indeed she behaved very well, as Perdita, knowing her insatiable love of millinery,⁸ was quite ready to declare. Innumerable yards of lustrous silk and satin, of muslin, velvet and lace, passed through her cunning hands, without a jealous word coming from her lips. Thanks to her industry, when the wedding-day came Perdita was prepared to espouse more of the vanities of life than any fluttering young bride who had yet received the sacramental blessing of a New England divine.

It had been arranged that the young couple should go out and spend the first days of their wedded life at the country-house of an English gentleman—a man of rank and a very kind friend to Arthur Lloyd. He was a bachelor; he declared he should be delighted to give up the place to the influence of Hymen.⁹ After the ceremony at church—it had been performed by an English clergyman—young Mrs Lloyd hastened back to her mother’s house to change her nuptial robes for a riding-dress.¹⁰ Rosalind helped her to effect the change, in the little homely room in which they had spent their undivided younger years. Perdita then hurried off to bid farewell to her mother, leaving Rosalind to follow. The parting was short; the horses were at the door, and Arthur was impatient to start. But Rosalind had not followed, and Perdita hastened back to her room, opening the door abruptly. Rosalind, as usual, was before the glass, but in a position which caused the other to stand still, amazed. She had dressed herself in Perdita’s cast-off wedding veil and wreath, and on her neck she had hung the full

string of pearls which the young girl had received from her husband as a wedding-gift. These things had been hastily laid aside, to await their possessor’s disposal on her return from the country. Bedizened in this unnatural garb Rosalind stood before the mirror, plunging a long look into its depths and reading heaven knows what audacious visions. Perdita was horrified. It was a hideous image of their old rivalry come to life again. She made a step toward her sister, as if to pull off the veil and the flowers. But catching her eyes in the glass, she stopped.

“Farewell, sweetheart,” she said. “You might at least have waited till I had got out of the house!” And she hurried away from the room.

Mr Lloyd had purchased in Boston a house which to the taste of those days appeared as elegant as it was commodious; and here he very soon established himself with his young wife. He was thus separated by a distance of twenty miles from the residence of his mother-in-law. Twenty miles, in that primitive era of roads and conveyances, were as serious a matter as a hundred at the present day, and Mrs Wingrave saw but little of her daughter during the first twelvemonth of her marriage. She suffered in no small degree from Perdita’s absence; and her affliction was not diminished by the fact that Rosalind had fallen into terribly low spirits and was not to be roused or cheered but by change of air and company. The real cause of the young lady’s dejection the reader will not be slow to suspect. Mrs Wingrave and her gossips, however, deemed her complaint a mere bodily ill, and doubted not that she would obtain relief from the remedy just mentioned. Her mother accordingly proposed, on her behalf, a visit to certain relatives on the paternal side, established in New York, who had long complained that they were able to see so little of their New England cousins. Rosalind was despatched to these good people, under a suitable escort, and remained with them for several months. In the interval her brother Bernard, who had begun the practice of the law, made up his mind to take a wife. Rosalind came home to the wedding, apparently cured of her heartache, with bright roses and lilies in her face and a proud smile on her lips. Arthur Lloyd came over from Boston to see his brother-in-law married, but without his wife, who was expecting very soon to present him with an heir. It was

Notes

8. Millinery refers to the design and decoration of women’s hats.

9. Hymen is the Greek god of marriage ceremonies.

10. The appropriate outfit for women to wear when riding horses; also known as riding habits.

nearly a year since Rosalind had seen him. She was glad—she hardly knew why—that Perdita had stayed at home. Arthur looked happy, but he was more grave and important than before his marriage. She thought he looked ‘interesting’—for although the word, in its modern sense, was not then invented, we may be sure that the idea was. The truth is, he was simply anxious about his wife and her coming ordeal. Nevertheless, he by no means failed to observe Rosalind’s beauty and splendour, and to note how she effaced the poor little bride. The allowance that Perdita had enjoyed for her dress had now been transferred to her sister, who turned it to wonderful account. On the morning after the wedding he had a lady’s saddle put on the horse of the servant who had come with him from town, and went out with the young girl for a ride. It was a keen, clear morning in January; the ground was bare and hard, and the horses in good condition—to say nothing of Rosalind, who was charming in her hat and plume, and her dark blue riding coat, trimmed with fur. They rode all the morning, they lost their way, and were obliged to stop for dinner at a farm-house. The early winter dusk had fallen when they got home. Mrs Wingrave met them with a long face. A messenger had arrived at noon from Mrs Lloyd; she was beginning to be ill, she desired her husband’s immediate return. The young man, at the thought that he had lost several hours, and that by hard riding he might already have been with his wife, uttered a passionate oath. He barely consented to stop for a mouthful of supper, but mounted the messenger’s horse and started off at a gallop.

He reached home at midnight. His wife had been delivered of a little girl. “Ah, why weren’t you with me?” she said, as he came to her bedside.

“I was out of the house when the man came. I was with Rosalind,” said Lloyd, innocently.

Mrs Lloyd made a little moan, and turned away. But she continued to do very well, and for a week her improvement was uninterrupted. Finally, however, through some indiscretion in the way of diet or exposure, it was checked, and the poor lady grew rapidly worse. Lloyd was in despair. It very soon became evident that she was breathing her last. Mrs Lloyd came to a sense of her approaching end, and declared that she was reconciled with death. On the third evening after the change took place she told her husband that she felt she should not get through the night. She dismissed her

servants, and also requested her mother to withdraw—Mrs Wingrave having arrived on the preceding day. She had had her infant placed on the bed beside her, and she lay on her side, with the child against her breast, holding her husband’s hands. The night-lamp was hidden behind the heavy curtains of the bed, but the room was illumined with a red glow from the immense fire of logs on the hearth.

“It seems strange not to be warmed into life by such a fire as that,” the young woman said, feebly trying to smile. “If I had but a little of it in my veins! But I have given all my fire to this little spark of mortality.” And she dropped her eyes on her child. Then raising them she looked at her husband with a long, penetrating gaze. The last feeling which lingered in her heart was one of suspicion. She had not recovered from the shock which Arthur had given her by telling her that in the hour of her agony he had been with Rosalind. She trusted her husband very nearly as well as she loved him; but now that she was called away for ever she felt a cold horror of her sister. She felt in her soul that Rosalind had never ceased to be jealous of her good fortune; and a year of happy security had not effaced the young girl’s image, dressed in her wedding-garments, and smiling with simulated triumph. Now that Arthur was to be alone, what might not Rosalind attempt? She was beautiful, she was engaging; what arts might she not use, what impression might she not make upon the young man’s saddened heart? Mrs Lloyd looked at her husband in silence. It seemed hard, after all, to doubt of his constancy. His fine eyes were filled with tears; his face was convulsed with weeping; the clasp of his hands was warm and passionate. How noble he looked, how tender, how faithful and devoted! ‘Nay,’ thought Perdita, ‘he’s not for such a one as Rosalind. He’ll never forget me. Nor does Rosalind truly care for him; she cares only for vanities and finery and jewels.’ And she lowered her eyes on her white hands, which her husband’s liberality had covered with rings, and on the lace ruffles which trimmed the edge of her night-dress. ‘She covets my rings and my laces more than she covets my husband.’

At this moment the thought of her sister’s rapacity seemed to cast a dark shadow between her and the helpless figure of her little girl. “Arthur,” she said, “you must take off my rings. I shall not be buried in them. One of these days my daughter shall wear them—my rings and my laces and silks. I had them all brought out

and shown me to-day. It’s a great wardrobe—there’s not such another in the Province; I can say it without vanity, now that I have done with it. It will be a great inheritance for my daughter when she grows into a young woman. There are things there that a man never buys twice, and if they are lost you will never again see the like. So you will watch them well. Some dozen things I have left to Rosalind; I have named them to my mother. I have given her that blue and silver; it was meant for her; I wore it only once, I looked ill in it. But the rest are to be sacredly kept for this little innocent. It’s such a providence that she should be my colour; she can wear my gowns; she has her mother’s eyes. You know the same fashions come back every twenty years. She can wear my gowns as they are. They will lie there quietly waiting till she grows into them—wrapped in camphor¹¹ and rose-leaves, and keeping their colours in the sweet-scented darkness. She shall have black hair, she shall wear my carnation satin.¹² Do you promise me, Arthur?”

“Promise you what, dearest?”

“Promise me to keep your poor little wife’s old gowns.”

“Are you afraid I shall sell them?”

“No, but that they may get scattered. My mother will have them properly wrapped up, and you shall lay them away under a double-lock. Do you know the great chest in the attic, with the iron bands? There is no end to what it will hold. You can put them all there. My mother and the housekeeper will do it, and give you the key. And you will keep the key in your secretary, and never give it to anyone but your child. Do you promise me?”

“Ah, yes, I promise you,” said Lloyd, puzzled at the intensity with which his wife appeared to cling to this idea.

“Will you swear?” repeated Perdita.

“Yes, I swear.”

“Well—I trust you—I trust you,” said the poor lady, looking into his eyes with eyes in which, if he had suspected her vague apprehensions, he might have read an appeal quite as much as an assurance.

Lloyd bore his bereavement rationally and manfully. A month after his wife’s death, in the course of business, circumstances arose which offered him an opportunity of going to England. He took advantage of it, to change the current of his thoughts. He was absent nearly a year, during which his little girl was tenderly nursed and

guarded by her grandmother. On his return he had his house again thrown open, and announced his intention of keeping the same state as during his wife’s lifetime. It very soon came to be predicted that he would marry again, and there were at least a dozen young women of whom one may say that it was by no fault of theirs that, for six months after his return, the prediction did not come true. During this interval he still left his little daughter in Mrs Wingrave’s hands, the latter assuring him that a change of residence at so tender an age would be full of danger for her health. Finally, however, he declared that his heart longed for his daughter’s presence and that she must be brought up to town. He sent his coach and his housekeeper to fetch her home. Mrs Wingrave was in terror lest something should befall her on the road; and, in accordance with this feeling, Rosalind offered to accompany her. She could return the next day. So she went up to town with her little niece, and Mr Lloyd met her on the threshold of his house, overcome with her kindness and with paternal joy. Instead of returning the next day Rosalind stayed out the week; and when at last she reappeared, she had only come for her clothes. Arthur would not hear of her coming home, nor would the baby. That little person cried and choked if Rosalind left her; and at the sight of her grief Arthur lost his wits, and swore that she was going to die. In fine, nothing would suit them but that the aunt should remain until the little niece had grown used to strange faces.

It took two months to bring this consummation about; for it was not until this period had elapsed that Rosalind took leave of her brother-in-law. Mrs Wingrave had shaken her head over her daughter’s absence; she had declared that it was not becoming, that it was the talk of the whole country. She had reconciled herself to it only because, during the girl’s visit, the household enjoyed an unwonted term of peace. Bernard Wingrave had brought his wife home to live, between whom and her sister-in-law there was as little love as you please. Rosalind was perhaps no angel; but in the daily practice of life she was a sufficiently good-natured girl, and if she quarrelled with Mrs Bernard, it was not without provocation. Quarrel, however, she did, to the great annoyance not only of her antagonist, but of the two

Notes

11. Camphor is a white, volatile, crystalline substance with an aromatic smell and bitter taste, occurring in certain essential oils; it is used to repel moths, silverfish, and other insects.

12. Refers to the color of the satin resembling a carnation, a flower most commonly of a pinkish color.

spectators of these constant altercations. Her stay in the household of her brother-in-law, therefore, would have been delightful, if only because it removed her from contact with the object of her antipathy at home. It was doubly—it was ten times—delightful, in that it kept her near the object of her early passion. Mrs Lloyd’s sharp suspicions had fallen very far short of the truth. Rosalind’s sentiment had been a passion at first, and a passion it remained—a passion of whose radiant heat, tempered to the delicate state of his feelings, Mr Lloyd very soon felt the influence. Lloyd, as I have hinted, was not a modern Petrarch;¹³ it was not in his nature to practise an ideal constancy. He had not been many days in the house with his sister-in-law before he began to assure himself that she was, in the language of that day, a devilish fine woman. Whether Rosalind really practised those insidious arts that her sister had been tempted to impute to her it is needless to inquire. It is enough to say that she found means to appear to the very best advantage. She used to seat herself every morning before the big fireplace in the dining-room, at work upon a piece of tapestry, with her little niece disporting herself on the carpet at her feet, or on the train of her dress, and playing with her woollen balls. Lloyd would have been a very stupid fellow if he had remained insensible to the rich suggestions of this charming picture. He was exceedingly fond of his little girl, and was never weary of taking her in his arms and tossing her up and down, and making her crow with delight. Very often, however, he would venture upon greater liberties than the young lady was yet prepared to allow, and then she would suddenly vociferate her displeasure. Rosalind, at this, would drop her tapestry, and put out her handsome hands with the serious smile of the young girl whose virgin fancy has revealed to her all a mother’s healing arts. Lloyd would give up the child, their eyes would meet, their hands would touch, and Rosalind would extinguish the little girl’s sobs upon the snowy folds of the kerchief that crossed her bosom. Her dignity was perfect, and nothing could be more discreet than the manner in which she accepted her brother-in-law’s hospitality. It may almost be said, perhaps, that there was something harsh in her reserve. Lloyd had a provoking feeling that she was in the house and yet was unapproachable. Half-an-hour after supper, at the very outset of the long winter

evenings, she would light her candle, make the young man a most respectful curtsey, and march off to bed. If these were arts, Rosalind was a great artist. But their effect was so gentle, so gradual, they were calculated to work upon the young widower’s fancy with a crescendo so finely shaded, that, as the reader has seen, several weeks elapsed before Rosalind began to feel sure that her returns would cover her outlay. When this became morally certain she packed up her trunk and returned to her mother’s house. For three days she waited; on the fourth Mr Lloyd made his appearance—a respectful but pressing suitor. Rosalind heard him to the end, with great humility, and accepted him with infinite modesty. It is hard to imagine that Mrs Lloyd would have forgiven her husband; but if anything might have disarmed her resentment it would have been the ceremonious continence of this interview. Rosalind imposed upon her lover but a short probation. They were married, as was becoming, with great privacy—almost with secrecy—in the hope perhaps, as was waggishly remarked at the time, that the late Mrs Lloyd wouldn’t hear of it.

The marriage was to all appearance a happy one, and each party obtained what each had desired—Lloyd ‘a devilish fine woman’, and Rosalind—but Rosalind’s desires, as the reader will have observed, had remained a good deal of a mystery. There were, indeed, two blots upon their felicity, but time would perhaps efface them. During the first three years of her marriage Mrs Lloyd failed to become a mother, and her husband on his side suffered heavy losses of money. This latter circumstance compelled a material retrenchment in his expenditure, and Rosalind was perforce less of a fine lady than her sister had been. She contrived, however, to carry it like a woman of considerable fashion. She had long since ascertained that her sister’s copious wardrobe had been sequestered for the benefit of her daughter, and that it lay languishing in thankless gloom in the dusty attic. It was a revolting thought that these exquisite fabrics should await the good pleasure of a little girl who sat in a high chair and ate bread-and-milk with a wooden spoon. Rosalind had the good taste, however, to say nothing about the matter until several months had expired. Then, at last, she timidly broached it to her husband. Was it not a pity that so much finery should be lost?—for lost it would be, what with colours fading, and moths

Notes

13. Petrarch, an Italian poet and predecessor of Shakespeare, was known for his use of the courtly love trope as well as for being a humanist, which James is claiming Mr. Lloyd was not.

eating it up, and the change of fashions. But Lloyd gave her so abrupt and peremptory a refusal, that she saw, for the present, her attempt was vain. Six months went by, however, and brought with them new needs and new visions. Rosalind’s thoughts hovered lovingly about her sister’s relics. She went up and looked at the chest in which they lay imprisoned. There was a sullen defiance in its three great padlocks and its iron bands which only quickened her cupidity. There was something exasperating in its incorruptible immobility. It was like a grim and grizzled old household servant, who locks his jaws over a family secret. And then there was a look of capacity in its vast extent, and a sound as of dense fulness, when Rosalind knocked its side with the toe of her little shoe, which caused her to flush with baffled longing. “It’s absurd,” she cried; “it’s improper, it’s wicked”; and she forthwith resolved upon another attack upon her husband. On the following day, after dinner, when he had had his wine, she boldly began it. But he cut her short with great sternness.

“Once for all, Rosalind,” said he, “it’s out of the question. I shall be gravely displeased if you return to the matter.”

“Very good,” said Rosalind. “I am glad to learn the esteem in which I am held. Gracious heaven,” she cried, “I am a very happy woman! It’s an agreeable thing to feel one’s self sacrificed to a caprice!” And her eyes filled with tears of anger and disappointment.

Lloyd had a good-natured man’s horror of a woman’s sobs, and he attempted—I may say he condescended—to explain. “It’s not a caprice, dear, it’s a promise,” he said—“an oath.”

“An oath? It’s a pretty matter for oaths! and to whom, pray?”

“To Perdita,” said the young man, raising his eyes for an instant, but immediately dropping them.

“Perdita—ah, Perdita!” and Rosalind’s tears broke forth. Her bosom heaved with stormy sobs—sobs which were the long-deferred sequel of the violent fit of weeping in which she had indulged herself on the night when she discovered her sister’s betrothal. She had hoped, in her better moments, that she had done with her jealousy; but her temper, on that occasion, had taken an ineffaceable fold. “And pray, what right had Perdita to dispose of my future?” she cried. “What right had she to bind you to meanness and cruelty? Ah, I occupy a dignified place, and I make a very fine figure! I am welcome to what Perdita has left! And what has she left? I never knew till

now how little! Nothing, nothing, nothing.”

This was very poor logic, but it was very good as a ‘scene.’ Lloyd put his arm around his wife’s waist and tried to kiss her, but she shook him off with magnificent scorn. Poor fellow! he had coveted a ‘devilish fine woman.’ and he had got one. Her scorn was intolerable. He walked away with his ears tingling—irresolute, distracted. Before him was his secretary, and in it the sacred key which with his own hand he had turned in the triple lock. He marched up and opened it, and took the key from a secret drawer, wrapped in a little packet which he had sealed with his own honest bit of blazonry. *Je garde*, said the motto—‘I keep.’ But he was ashamed to put it back. He flung it upon the table beside his wife.

“Put it back!” she cried. “I want it not. I hate it!”

“I wash my hands of it,” cried her husband. “God forgive me!”

Mrs Lloyd gave an indignant shrug of her shoulders, and swept out of the room, while the young man retreated by another door. Ten minutes later Mrs Lloyd returned, and found the room occupied by her little step-daughter and the nursery-maid. The key was not on the table. She glanced at the child. Her little niece was perched on a chair, with the packet in her hands. She had broken the seal with her own small fingers. Mrs Lloyd hastily took possession of the key.

At the habitual supper-hour Arthur Lloyd came back from his counting-room. It was the month of June, and supper was served by daylight. The meal was placed on the table, but Mrs Lloyd failed to make her appearance. The servant whom his master sent to call her came back with the assurance that her room was empty, and that the women informed him that she had not been seen since dinner. They had, in truth, observed her to have been in tears, and, supposing her to be shut up in her chamber, had not disturbed her. Her husband called her name in various parts of the house, but without response. At last it occurred to him that he might find her by taking the way to the attic. The thought gave him a strange feeling of discomfort, and he bade his servants remain behind, wishing no witness in his quest. He reached the foot of the staircase leading to the topmost flat, and stood with his hand on the banisters, pronouncing his wife’s name. His voice trembled. He called again louder and more firmly. The only sound which disturbed the absolute silence was a faint echo of his own tones, repeating his question under the great eaves. He nevertheless felt

irresistibly moved to ascend the staircase. It opened upon a wide hall, lined with wooden closets, and terminating in a window which looked westward, and admitted the last rays of the sun. Before the window stood the great chest. Before the chest, on her knees, the young man saw with amazement and horror the figure of his wife. In an instant he crossed the interval between them, bereft of utterance. The lid of the chest stood open, exposing, amid their perfumed napkins, its treasure of stuffs and jewels. Rosalind had fallen backward from a kneeling posture, with one hand supporting her on the floor and the other pressed to her heart. On her limbs was the stiffness of death, and on her face, in the fading light of the sun, the terror of something more than death. Her lips were parted in entreaty, in dismay, in agony; and on her blanched brow and cheeks there glowed the marks of ten hideous wounds from two vengeful ghostly hands.

Contextual Documents

Excerpts from “A Pair of Hands” by A. T. Quiller-Couch¹⁴

“A Pair of Hands,” published within a collection of short stories in 1900 by Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch, is another story about ghostly hands. Although these hands are not malevolent like the hands that kill Rosalind in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” they are similarly related to the Victorian-era gender roles hinted at in the first half of James’s story. The hands in Quiller-Couch’s story are helping hands that happen to belong to the ghost of a little girl named Margaret. The story begins with an older Miss Le Petyt knitting and lamenting about a time when she lived in a house with a friendly female ghost:

“Well, my dears, I am not quite the coward you take me for. And, as it happens, mine was the most harmless ghost in the world. In fact”—and here she looked at the fire again— “I was quite sorry to lose her.”

“It was a woman, then? Now I think,” said Miss Blanche, “that female ghosts are the horriddest of all. They wear little shoes with high red heels, and go about

tap, tap, wringing their hands.”

“This one wrung her hands, certainly. But I don’t know about the high red heels, for I never saw her feet. Perhaps she was like the Queen of Spain, and hadn’t any. And as for the hands, it all depends how you wring them. There’s an elderly shop-walker at Knightsbridge, for instance—”

“Don’t be prosy, dear, when you know that we’re just dying to hear the story.”

Miss Le Petyt turned to me with a small deprecating laugh. “It’s such a little one.”

“The story, or the ghost?”

“Both.”

The above passage helps to define what type of female ghost is acceptable or unacceptable based on how they wring their hands. In the eyes of the characters, if a female ghost wrings her hands the wrong way she is horrid. If she wrings them in another way, she could be harmless like the ghost Miss Le Petyt is referring to. Also, Miss Le Petyt is using her hands to knit as the story begins, which is a very common, if not expected, activity for a woman to be doing in this era (Plante 156). This detail could be an allusion to the proper types of activities, or wringing, a woman’s hands should be doing, setting the tone for the rest of the story. Miss Le Petyt learns in the next passage that a ghostly pair of little girl hands has been doing the housework for her at night:

“Over the porcelain basin and beneath the water trickling from the tap I saw two hands. That was all—two small hands, a child’s hands. I cannot tell you how they ended. No: they were not cut off. I saw them quite distinctly: just a pair of small hands and the wrists, and after that—nothing. They were moving briskly—washing themselves clean. I saw the water trickle and splash over them—not through them—but just as it would on real hands. They were the hands of a little girl, too. Oh, yes, I was sure of that at once. Boys and girls wash their hands differently. I can’t just tell you what the difference is, but it’s unmistakable.

“I saw all this before my candle slipped and fell with a crash. I had set it down without looking—for my eyes

Notes

14. This story, originally published within one of the author’s short story collections called *Old Fires and Profitable Ghosts: A Book of Stories* in 1900, was edited and published by Lionel G. Sear in 2006 and cataloged by Project Gutenberg.

were fixed on the basin—and had balanced it on the edge of the nest of drawers. After the crash, in the darkness there, with the water running, I suffered some bad moments. Oddly enough, the thought uppermost with me was that I must shut off that tap before escaping. I had to. And after a while I picked up all my courage, so to say, between my teeth, and with a little sob thrust out my hand and did it. Then I fled.”

In the Victorian era, a woman’s destiny was to provide the perfect domestic sphere to shelter her family from the harmful world, and housekeeping was a major part of keeping the home running smoothly (Plante 35). This theme is evident in both James’s story and Quiller-Couch’s story. A significant question to raise is: why would the ghost of the girl who died in the house only come back as a pair of hands? This question could be partly answered in the explanation of how she is washing her hands: “They were the hands of a little girl, too. Oh yes, I was sure of that at once. Boys and girls wash their hands differently. I can’t just tell you what the difference is, but it’s unmistakable.” As in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” these hands were being used to represent the work women were expected to do in the private sphere.

*Excerpts from “The Cold Embrace” by Mary E. Braddon*¹⁵

Mary E. Braddon’s story “The Cold Embrace,” published in 1860, takes on the ghostly hands motif in a similar way to James’s story in that there is a pair of hands that kill someone. Braddon’s story is focused on a secret engagement of two cousins, Gertrude and an unnamed man, that never results in marriage because of her cousin’s disregard to his initial promise. This engagement is unconventional for the Victorian era because Gertrude’s father did not consent and because her cousin never followed through with the marriage (Plante 23). James’s story is also centered around atypical engagement and marriage processes, apparent in Mr. Lloyd’s choice between the two sisters and in his allowing Rosalind to take over Perdita’s private sphere after her death. Thus the hands in both these stories are

connected to dead females who were wronged within their marital commitments.

This excerpt describes the initial engagement of Gertrude and her cousin. Note the detail of Gertrude’s hands in this scene:

So they are betrothed; and standing side by side when the dying sun and the pale rising moon divide the heavens, he puts the betrothal ring upon her finger, the white and taper finger whose slender shape he knows so well. This ring is a peculiar one, a massive golden serpent, its tail in its mouth, the symbol of eternity; it had been his mother’s, and he would know it amongst a thousand. If he were to become blind tomorrow, he could select it from amongst a thousand by the touch alone.

He places it on her finger, and they swear to be true to each other for ever and ever—through trouble and danger—sorrow and change—in wealth or poverty. Her father must needs be won to consent to their union by and by, for they were now betrothed, and death alone could part them.

But the young student, the scoffer at revelation, yet the enthusiastic adorer of the mystical, asks:

“Can death part us? I would return to you from the grave, Gertrude. My soul would come back to be near my love. And you—you, if you died before me—the cold earth would not hold you from me; if you loved me, you would return, and again these fair arms would be clasped round my neck as they are now.”

But she told him, with a holier light in her deep-blue eyes than had ever shone in his—she told him that the dead who die at peace with God are happy in heaven, and cannot return to the troubled earth; and that it is only the suicide—the lost wretch on whom sorrowful angels shut the door of Paradise—whose unholy spirit haunts the footsteps of the living.

After making his promise to Gertrude, he goes to Italy to work as an artist, and his communication with Gertrude slowly fades until they lose all contact. Gertrude kills herself because of his thoughtless actions and because of her unwillingness to marry another man whom her father has arranged for her to wed.

Notes

15. This story, originally published in 1860, is from the anthology called *Victorian Ghost Stories: By Eminent Women Writers* which was edited and published by Richard Dalby in 1989.

According to Calder, the “helpless female borne off by the villainous male or, worse, the susceptible female compliant to the false promises of the unscrupulous male” was a common theme in Victorian fiction (16). Gertrude fits this description, but later in the story her ghostly hands and arms seek vengeance and refuse to be compliant with the transgressions inflicted by her unethical cousin. The hands first appear in both James’ and Braddon’s stories when engagement is brought into the plot, and the stories end with the hands killing the betrayer of their marital promise. However, while Perdita retaliates against Rosalind, Gertrude takes her revenge out on the man who was unfaithful to her.

In the following scene, Gertrude’s suicide leaves her ghost to roam the earth, and she fulfills her cousin’s expressed wish from the first excerpt: “if you loved me, you would return, and again these fair arms would be clasped round my neck as they are now.”

He is not thinking of his drowned cousin, for he has forgotten her and is happy.

Suddenly some one, something from behind him, puts two cold arms round his neck, and clasps its hands on his breast.

And yet there is no one behind him, for on the flags bathed in the broad moonlight there are only two shadows, his own and his dog’s. He turns quickly round—there is no one—nothing to be seen in the broad square but himself and his dog; and though he feels, he cannot see the cold arms clasped round his neck.

It is not ghostly, this embrace, for it is palpable to the touch—it cannot be real, for it is invisible.

He tries to throw off the cold caress. He clasps the hands in his own to tear them asunder, and to cast them off his neck. He can feel the long delicate fingers cold and wet beneath his touch, and on the third finger of the left hand he can feel the ring which was his mother’s—the golden serpent—the ring which he has always said he would know among a thousand by the touch alone. He knows it now!

His dead cousin’s cold arms are round his neck—his dead cousin’s wet hands are clasped upon his breast. He asks himself if he is mad. “Up, Leo!” he shouts. “Up, up, boy!” and the Newfoundland leaps to his shoulders—the dog’s paws are on the dead hands, and the animal utters a terrific howl, and springs away from his master.

The student stands in the moonlight, the dead arms around his neck, and the dog at a little distance moaning piteously.

The previous scene marks the first time Gertrude’s ghostly embrace haunts and threatens her cousin. She is a ghost enraged by the actions of an ungentlemanly suitor, one who defied the conventions of engagement in the Victorian era by not committing properly and by not treating Gertrude like a lady because, as Plante states, “no true gentleman would pay excessive visits to or shower constant attention upon a lady whom he was not considering for marriage” (20). The ring that bound the couple is on Gertrude’s ghostly hands, tormenting her cousin with the reminder of his broken promise, and threatening him for breaking it. The next scene marks the death of Gertrude’s cousin through her last angry, ghostly embrace:

Alone, and, in the terrible silence, he hears the echoes of his own footsteps in that dismal dance which has no music.

No music but the beating of his breast. The cold arms are round his neck—they whirl him round, they will not be flung off, or cast away; he can no more escape from their icy grasp than he can escape from death. He looks behind him—there is nothing but himself in the great empty salle; but he can feel—cold, deathlike, but O, how palpable!—the long slender fingers, and the ring which was his mother’s.

He tries to shout, but he has no power in his burning throat. The silence of the place is only broken by the echoes of his own footsteps in the dance from which he cannot extricate himself. Who says he has no partner? The cold hands are clasped on his breast, and now he does not shun their caress. No! One more polka, if he drops down dead.

The lights are all out, and, half an hour after, the gendarmes come in with a lantern to see that the house is empty; they are followed by a great dog that they have found seated howling on the steps of the theatre. Near the principal entrance they stumble over—

The body of a student, who has died from want of food, exhaustion, and the breaking of a blood-vessel.

In James’s story, Perdita’s hands kill Rosalind, who

betrayed her by replacing her in every important aspect of a Victorian-era female’s life through taking over her home, husband, and child; Mr. Lloyd, however, is not physically harmed. Braddon’s ghost, by contrast, is less petty than the sisters within James’s story. Instead of bickering over possessions or rights to a suitor, Braddon’s ghost exacts her revenge upon the man who wrongs her by breaking his promise. Braddon’s powerful female ghost, strengthened by spiritualist ideals, makes a commentary on the patriarchal system that entrapped and silenced women from voicing their opinions or grievances. In each case, the hands that bound the women to commitment are the weapons they use against those who wronged them.

*Excerpts from “Some Odd Facts About the Tiled House—Being an Authentic Narrative of the Ghost of a Hand” by J. Sheridan Le Fanu*¹⁶

In another Victorian ghost story concerning hands, we see a house being haunted by a ghostly hand that tries to make its way inside. This chapter, from J. Sheridan Le Fanu’s book *The House by the Church-Yard*, later republished in 1863 as “The Narrative of a Ghost of a Hand,” tells a story of a ghostly hand that terrorizes all levels of a household, from the servants to the upper-class family.

The family within “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” is very concerned with keeping up with a class system. Though they are living in America, they are very concerned with keeping their allegiance with Europe. We see a similar kind of class anxiety in Le Fanu’s story. In this tale, a family, the Prossers, rent out a house from Mrs. Prosser’s father, Alderman Harper. Upon moving in, a mysterious hand begins to haunt the family and their servants. The hand first appears to Mrs. Prosser one evening as she is sitting in the back parlor of the house, looking out into the garden:

“...looking out into the orchard, [she] plainly saw a hand stealthily placed upon the stone window-sill outside, as if by some one beneath the window, at her right side, intending to climb up. There was nothing

but the hand, which was rather short but handsomely formed, and white and plump, laid on the edge of the window-sill; and it was not a very young hand, but one aged, somewhere about forty, as she conjectured. It was only a few weeks before that the horrible robbery at Clondalkin had taken place, and the lady fancied that the hand was that of one of the miscreants who was now about to scale the windows of the Tiled House. She uttered a loud scream and an ejaculation of terror, and at the same moment the hand was quietly withdrawn.”

It is important to note the description of the hand as “white and plump . . . [and] aged.” This description suggests it belongs to someone of higher class as a lower-class person’s hand would be tanned and rough with work. Indeed, a discussion on class begins to develop within this story just as it did in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes.”

Soon the hand begins appearing to the servants, and we realize that the hand desperately wishes to come inside the house. It raps on windows and doors and tries to push its way inside at one point and later succeeds. Like the grappling of lower classes for higher status in society, the hand wishes to enter where it has been forbidden to enter. However, the hand seems to be one of an upper-class gentleman, as it is hinted at in the end of the story:

The person to whom that hand belonged never once appeared: nor was it a hand separated from a body, but only a hand so manifested and introduced that its owner was always, by some crafty accident, hidden from view.

In the year 1819, at a college breakfast, I met a Mr. Prosser—a thin, grave, but rather chatty old gentleman, with very white hair drawn back into a pigtail—and he told us all, with a concise particularity, a story of his cousin, James Prosser, who, when an infant, had slept for some time in what his mother said was a haunted nursery in an old house near Chapelizod, and who, whenever he was ill, over-fatigued, or in anywise feverish, suffered all through his life as he had done from a time he could scarce remember, from a vision of a certain gentleman, fat and pale, every curl of whose wig, every button and

Notes

16. This story is a chapter from a book by Le Fanu called *The House by the Church-Yard*. This particular edition was originally published in 1904 by The Macmillan Company and was cataloged by Project Gutenberg in 2006 by Ted Garvin and Janet Blenkinship.

fold of whose laced clothes, and every feature and line of whose sensual, benignant, and unwholesome face, was as minutely engraven upon his memory as the dress and lineaments of his own grandfather’s portrait, which hung before him every day at breakfast, dinner, and supper.-

.....

This hand, then, is the ghost of a previous owner, specifically an earl who died with financial troubles. After this incident, the hand is seen at other times by servants, some of whom die of fright or run off. Mr. Prosser becomes very angry that his servants are acting so foolishly. Believing his servants are just acting like normal, lower-class servants, Mr. Prosser plans

an investigation into the origin of a handprint within the kitchen that has frightened many of his servants believing it to be from the ghostly hand. However, as Katherine Rowe points out, he does not find the owner of the print and soon he and his wife become just as hysterically “imaginative” as their servants, reversing from the higher class to the stereotypes of the lower classes (155). Meanwhile, the hand of the owner goes about the house surveying what used to be his property. Like the hand of the owner of the house in this story, the hands of Perdita in “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes,” return to claim what is rightfully hers.

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Ghosts of Loss: Christina Rossetti's Haunted Poetry

Edited by Ruth Weller-Passman, Mackenzie Fluharty, & Ashley Starling

This critical edition presents Christina Rossetti's ghostly poetry, analyzing its overall cultural impact and influence. In addition to her poetry, we have included contextual documents pertaining to mourning, widowhood, and poetic expression. As a whole, this edition gives insight into how and why poetry can be an appropriate method for women to express grief in the Victorian era.

General Introduction | A Time to Change, A Time to Mourn

Christina Rossetti was a Victorian British poet best known for her fantastical work "Goblin Market" (1862). However, this poem, recounting the whimsical tale of two sisters and their magical goblin encounter, does not say as much about Rossetti's life as some of her other works. Rossetti dealt with substantial personal losses in her lifetime, losses that are expressed in her ghostly poetry. By looking into these poems, especially "The Ghost's Petition" (1866), it is possible to gain insight not only into Rossetti's losses but also into the mourning practices common in the Victorian era itself.

Rossetti lived at an age filled with political and social changes, both in her native England and around the world. The Victorian era was a time of transition in many walks of life, a time of expanding enlightenment and an increased interest in unfamiliar cultures and ideologies. These sweeping changes affected many details of day-to-day life for citizens, but for Rossetti in particular the biggest and most threatening change was public opinion about religion. This was one of the first moments in history when religious doubt became socially acceptable and believers were encouraged to question and examine their faith. Rossetti's increasingly religious writings may have been a reaction to this new environment of religious skepticism, a way of fighting back against what she perceived as religious backsliding (D'amico).

For deeply religious individuals such as Christina

Rossetti, this backsliding was nothing short of terrifying. Rossetti faced a great deal of uncertainty throughout her life, including failing health, numerous deaths in the family, and unsatisfied love. Her Protestantism was the one constant in her life, and the climate of religious doubt threatened the only certainty she had. This doubt also lends itself well to the concepts of ghosts and hauntings, as Rossetti likely felt very isolated and alone in her steadfast faith. Both of her poems that are included in this edition feature a profound sense of loneliness, suggesting that Rossetti's life was similar to the "life" of a ghost frozen in the middle of a transition and isolated even in the company of others.

Rossetti certainly was not alone in enduring multiple deaths in the family. One particularly telling death was the probable suicide of her older brother Gabriel's romantic interest, Elizabeth Siddal. He had led her on for years, promising to marry her but never following through with a proposal, until her failing health guilted him into marrying her on the spot. When their first child was born dead, it sent Lizzie into a tailspin of depression and psychosis. She died within the year under mysterious circumstances that could easily have pointed to suicide, though all evidence that might have proved it so was destroyed. Guilt-ridden and distraught, Gabriel buried an irreplaceable collection of poems he had been working on with her (though he later had her coffin secretly exhumed so that he could retrieve the manuscript). Later in his life as his health failed him, he became convinced that he had been visited by her spirit. Whether this was

the result of a guilty conscience, a deterioration of mental health, or a true posthumous visitation, Gabriel’s conviction may have struck a chord with Rossetti and inspired her to include ghosts and spirits in her own writing.¹

Victorian society need not look to fiction such as Rossetti’s works to find death and its influence. Losing a loved one and having to perform the standard mourning rituals was an eventual experience. For the poor in society, death meant being tossed into a large pit and buried with other nameless souls (Strange 110). For the middle and upper classes, however, death took on a graceful etiquette. The well-to-do were “sent off” with beautiful funerals and elaborate burials. Cassell’s Household Guide, a London publication for Victorian women, describes various funeral packages that could be purchased, the most grandiose of which included spectacles such as a hearse with four horses, ostrich feather plumes, and fourteen men to serve as pages and coachmen (66). Additionally, those who had lost a loved one donned all black and wore these mourning clothes for a year or more. Widows were even expected to arrive late for social functions, including church. Generally, mourning became not only an emotion but a complete lifestyle for those left behind. At the surface, these mourning practices seem to be a remarkable way in which to honor the dead. All that this etiquette serves to do, however, is to prolong the grieving process.

In order to deal with their grief, many women turned to their diaries. However, poetry was also a common outlet for grief and sorrow because of its personal nature. Between the feelings of loss and the general desire for the dead to somehow remain, it was only natural for these grief poems to eventually feature ghostly figures.

In this critical edition, we will examine the connection between grief and ghost poetry in the primary text, Christina Rossetti’s “The Ghost’s Petition.” Additionally, a deeper look into Rossetti herself, the culture of the time period, and the experience of a Victorian widow will be featured in the contextual documents.

Poem Introduction | Petitions, Promises, and Protestantism

Ghosts are often associated with the terror of the undead: beings that have somehow cheated death to remain on Earth for some nefarious or vengeful purpose. Yet

there is another style of ghost that is often forgotten in the wake of horror stories and haunted houses: the ghost that remains tethered to the mortal world by grief instead of anger. This is the type of ghost to be found in Christina Rossetti’s poem “The Ghost’s Petition.” Published in her 1866 anthology *The Prince’s Progress and Other Poems*, the poem opens on a recently widowed woman sitting up with her sister and watching for her husband. The bereft wife is convinced that her husband “must keep his word” and return to her from death, and after her skeptical sister has gone to bed for the night, the husband does indeed make a posthumous appearance. It becomes apparent that the wife is inadvertently binding her husband to life: her grief itself is keeping him from peaceful rest.

The format of the poem itself bears some analysis. While the version presented here has the poem arranged into triplets, there are some versions of the poem where the stanzas are longer and less broken up. This version is in this edition because its format seems more appropriate for its topic. The triplets allow for the repetitions to stand out, as in the repeated reference to one sleeping and one weeping in stanzas 7, 8 and 17. There is also something to be said for the power of threes: the number three is often associated with mysticism and magic, and additionally the poem features three characters (the wife, her sister Jane, and her husband Robin). The shorter stanzas also call the reader’s attention to the rhyme structure. Lines one and three of each stanza are rhymed, and there is an internal rhyme within the second line of each stanza. This hasty resolution of rhyme structure compels the reader to pick up speed as the poem progresses, giving the poem an urgency that is mirrored by Robin’s urgency in pleading for his wife’s help.

One of the most noteworthy features of this poem is its lack of narration. Only four brief stanzas bridge the dialogue between the sisters and the dialogue between husband and wife. The rest of the piece is conversation—conversation, in fact, that is not even broken up to identify the speakers. The reader is left to deduce what line has been spoken by which character. This, coupled with the fact that the wife’s name is never mentioned, renders the language of the poem as ghostly as the story itself. Perhaps Rossetti intentionally left the characters unidentified so that readers could imagine themselves within the world of the poem, but she also endowed them with hauntingly familiar themes: the pain of loss, the devotion

Notes

1. See Jones (107-112) for a more detailed account of Elizabeth Siddal’s death.

of love. The characters are simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, abstract and literal, and even material and spectral. The husband is unable to hold his wife, as he states in lines 38 and 39. But he cannot be entirely immaterial, as he references lying in his grave multiple times (lines 44 and 48). Rossetti could have been implying that Robin is still partially bound to his corpse that lies in the grave, despite his spirit’s ability to walk abroad and interact with his living wife. In the 16th stanza he also describes the horror of being unable to shut his ears against his wife’s ceaseless crying. To be bound to life after death as a specter is horrible enough, but to remain tethered to a rotting corpse submerged in the Earth is even more ghastly. The reader certainly cannot fault Robin for seeking an end to that torment.

The imagery of the poem is evocative of ghosts and spectrality. In the first stanza, the sister, looking out the window at her sibling’s request, notes the falling leaves and the howling wind. The season is autumn, then—an appropriately liminal setting for a poem about hauntings. The trees are beginning to retreat into a kind of living death for the winter, but have not yet dropped all their leaves. Robin also states in line 42 that “no tree can stand” on the hill where he is buried. Perhaps he means that the bloom of life may not grow near the tombs of the half-dead, as they are firmly alive while Robin is neither wholly dead nor alive. The wind, too, has a spectrality to it: an incorporeal manifestation, it nonetheless has a very physical presence, pulling leaves off the trees and casting a chill over anyone it catches. Both these images continue to haunt the narrative: when Robin is ascending the staircase and preparing to enter the house, he shakes the door “like a puff of air” (line 27). Robin, like the wind, is both present and absent: he can shake the door, but he cannot embrace his wife. Later he describes the dead as “trees that have shed their leaves” (line 43). Like a tree in autumn, the spirits of the dead have not been exterminated altogether—they remain partially alive, in spite of their physical forms’ demise. Something, whether it be the “tender hand” (line 67) of God or the grief of a mourning loved one, keeps them tethered to life in death.

There is another specter that haunts this poem: the specter of religious duty. Though it isn’t explicitly referenced, a profound belief in the afterlife drives this poem. “Tender hand hath made our nest” (line 67), Robin tells his wife. It is hard to imagine that this “tender hand” belongs to anyone but God. The only description of the afterlife that the

husband offers is that it is a place where mortal fears vanish and only hope remains. In fact, the wife is almost prepared to give up her life and join her husband in the pleasures of death. Yet it is clear that this notion is never truly entertained by either Robin or his wife: though she is desperately lonely and hungry for the comforting rest of death, the wife knows that her place is on Earth. Suicide is a sin, after all, and perhaps the wife knows that she could jeopardize her place in the afterlife if she followed Robin so prematurely into the grave. This choice between religious duty and love would no doubt have been a familiar one to Christina Rossetti’s audience—and Rossetti herself. Twice Rossetti turned down marriage proposals because of her suitors’ religious affiliations first from a Catholic, and then from an atheist. Though she mourned the losses of love and feared a life of solitude, her Protestant beliefs were more important to her.² Just as Robin’s wife never truly considers following her husband, Rossetti would never have truly considered giving up her religious principles for marriage. In a way, “The Ghost’s Petition” is as much about Rossetti’s ghosts as it is about the ghost of Robin.

The poem also begins and ends with a promise, which is an immaterial specter of sorts whose presence nonetheless can be felt and relied upon. In the third stanza, the wife alludes to a promise that her husband made her to always come home, regardless of the circumstances. The strength of that promise is enough to lift Robin from his grave, enough to keep him from whatever pleasures await him beyond death. One could even argue that his promise haunts him in the same way that he is now haunting his wife. By the end of the poem, however, the story comes full circle: though the wife is desperate to rejoin her husband and tempted by the pleasures of the afterlife, she promises to cease her grieving and move on with her life so that her husband may rest in peace. That promise will continue to haunt the wife as she goes about her days, missing her husband but careful not to miss him too deeply for fear of yanking him back from the grave yet again.

Through a choice use of language, evocative imagery, the employment of religious undertones, and the theme of a promise, Christina Rossetti creates ghosts that haunt not only the characters of the poem itself, but the poem’s readers (and even its own author).

The poem is just as much a ghost as Robin is, haunting all those who come into contact with it.

Notes

2. See Jones 2(9-30) and (34-47) for a thorough discussion of Rossetti’s first proposal of marriage.

**“The Ghost’s Petition”³
by Christina Rossetti**

‘There’s a footstep coming: look out and see,’
‘The leaves are falling, the wind is calling;
No one cometh across the lea.’—⁴

‘There’s a footstep coming; O sister, look.’—
‘The ripple flashes, the white foam dashes;
No one cometh across the brook.’—

‘But he promised that he would come:
To-night, to-morrow, in joy or sorrow,
He must keep his word, and must come home.

‘For he promised that he would come:
His word was given; from earth or heaven,
He must keep his word, and must come home.

‘Go to sleep, my sweet sister Jane;⁵
You can slumber, who need not number
Hour after hour, in doubt and pain.

‘I shall sit here awhile, and watch;
Listening, hoping, for one hand groping
In deep shadow to find the latch.’

After the dark, and before the light,
One lay sleeping; and one sat weeping,
Who had watched and wept the weary night.

After the night, and before the day,
One lay sleeping; and one sat weeping—
Watching, weeping for one away.

There came a footstep climbing the stair;
Some one standing out on the landing⁶
Shook the door like a puff of air—
Shook the door, and in he passed.
Did he enter? In the room centre
Stood her husband: the door shut fast.

Notes

3. The text of the poem is taken from *The Haunted Hour: An Anthology* (1920), compiled by Margaret Widdemer.

4. A plains, grassland or meadow.

5. The sister being one of only two named characters is significant. Rossetti had three older siblings and remained close with them throughout her lifetime. Additionally, allocating the name of ‘Jane’ to the sister emphasizes the sister’s insignificance to the narrator. ‘Jane Doe’ was used for anonymity since 1855.

6. A landing is a transitory space between sets of stairs, signifying another threshold that Robin has to cross to reach his grieving wife.

Chilled with the night-dew: so lily-white you
Look like a stray lamb from our fold.⁸

‘O Robin, but you are late:
Come and sit near me—sit here and cheer me.’—
(Blue the flame burnt in the grate.)

‘Lay not down your head on my breast:
I cannot hold you, kind wife, nor fold you
In the shelter that you love best.

‘Feel not after my clasping hand:
I am but a shadow, come from the meadow
Where many lie, but no tree can stand.

‘We are trees which have shed their leaves:
Our heads lie low there, but no tears flow there;
Only I grieve for my wife who grieves.

‘I could rest if you would not moan
Hour after hour; I have no power
To shut my ears where I lie alone.

‘I could rest if you would not cry;
But there’s no sleeping while you sit weeping—
Watching, weeping so bitterly.’—

‘Woe’s me! woe’s me! for this I have heard.
Oh night of sorrow!--oh black to-morrow!
Is it thus that you keep your word?

‘O you who used so to shelter me
Warm from the least wind—why, now the east wind⁹
Is warmer than you, whom I quake to see.

‘O my husband of flesh and blood,
For whom my mother I left, and brother,
And all I had, accounting it good,

‘What do you do there, underground,
In the dark hollow?¹⁰ I’m fain¹¹ to follow.
What do you do there?—what have you found?’—

Notes

7. Robins are symbols of spring, a transitory time of year and also a time of rebirth and renewal. Robins are also associated with Christ and sacrifice, which was a significant theme in Rossetti’s life (she frequently made life decisions based on her faith).

8. The lamb has Biblical associations with renewal, growth and even sacrifice—it is seen as the perfect victim for selfless sacrifice for the sake of another, much like the wife’s sacrifice of her grief to allow her husband to move on.

9. The east wind is a Biblical harbinger of destruction. Also, in England, a southwesterly wind would come from the Atlantic and be warm and pleasant; an easterly wind would be coming from the Baltic or Arctic and would thus be cold and bitter.

10. Both a hole or cavity, or to cry out in either anguish or encouragement.

11. To be inclined, willing or desirous.

‘What I do there I must not tell:
But I have plenty: kind wife, content ye:
It is well with us—it is well.

‘Tender hand hath made our nest;
Our fear is ended, our hope is blended
With present pleasure, and we have rest.’—

‘Oh, but Robin, I’m fain to come,
If your present days are so pleasant;
For my days are so wearisome.

‘Yet I’ll dry my tears for your sake:
Why should I tease you, who cannot please you
Any more with the pains I take?’

Contextual Documents

*Excerpts from Lady Cavendish’s Diary:
A Widow’s Grief in Victorian Britain*

“The Ghost’s Petition” tells of an expression of female grief that manifests itself in a ghostly visit. In order to fully understand the mindset of the average mourning widow in the Victorian era, one should consider the writings of Lady Lucy Cavendish. Lady Cavendish kept extensive diaries for the majority of her lifetime, including the duration of her husband’s sudden death and elaborate funeral. These entries not only express her inner mourning but also present the common Victorian funeral practices of her time. Lady Cavendish’s diaries offer a complementary female experience and perspective to that of Rossetti’s narrator.

Lady Cavendish was only married to her husband, Lord Frederick Cavendish, for eighteen years before he was assassinated. Lord Cavendish was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland on May 6, 1882 but was fatally stabbed that same afternoon by an extreme nationalist group. His wife was informed of her husband’s death via a friend’s telegram. In the following excerpts, we witness Cavendish’s reaction to learning about her husband’s death and the way she interacted with her uncle, the Prime Minister William Gladstone (referred to as “Uncle W” by Lady Cavendish), his wife

Catherine Gladstone (“Auntie Pussy”), and her various close friends. Even after two years had passed and Lord Cavendish’s murderers were punished, her entries show a lingering sadness characteristic to a mourning widow.

Her diary entries also give insight into the common Victorian funeral practices, of which some resemble the customs we observe at funerals today. After her husband’s death, Lady Cavendish was not expected to attend her normal social functions and was even allowed to enter church at a later part of the service. Flowers and crosses adorned the coffin and church where the funeral was held and prayers emphasizing the good of Christ were said over the body.

Overall, Lady Cavendish’s diaries paint her with an emotional experience quite similar to that of the narrator in Rossetti’s “The Ghost’s Petition.” Both experience the loss of their husbands in rather sudden ways and both hold on to their grief for an extended period of time. The primary difference, of course, is that while Lady Cavendish was able to handle her grief in a healthy manner, Rossetti’s narrator needs a ghostly apparition to incite her to move on.

Excerpts¹² from Saturday, May 6th, 1882 entry¹³

“It was very near 3.30 before I cd get out, but I went to the Abbey, thinking I shd at all events hear the concluding prayers and cd have a quiet time there for prayer.

Notes

12. These excerpts are quoted from *The Diary of Lady Frederick Cavendish* (1927), written by Lucy Cavendish and published by Frederick A. Stokes Company.

13. This entry is dated for May 6th, 1882, but was actually written on February 9th, 1883. As stated in this entry, Lady Cavendish felt she could only record the happenings of that day at a time that she could emotionally handle her grief.

But I got there while they were singing the anthem “In that day”—at the passage “Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee.” These words were sung first by one voice, then by another, then a third, then in chorus, with the most lovely harmony and sweetness; and I thought, “O, these are the very words for my Fred”; during the final chorus I knelt down and prayed for him with my whole heart, but not that he might be saved from peril—(a mere idle thought crossed me once—what if the steamer shd go down on the passage?)—that I never thought of—but that he might have wisdom and strength and help...

...I was not left alone till near 12. I sat down at my writing-table and wrote 2 notes, one to the little sisters to ask them to tea on Monday; another to the Byng girls, to propose their coming at 5 on Sunday for some reading. Then I took the paper off a set of beautifully bound little books (his “Gleanings”), which Uncle William had sent over in the course of the day, with a most affectionate little letter to me, begging me to ask Freddy to give them a place on his shelves “in memory—in grateful memory on my part—of what he has been to me these past 2 years.” I was just writing to thank him, and had begun, “Dear Uncle William, I must write one line (though how unnecessary)” when the door opened and Lou came in. No thought of fear struck me at first; I knew she wished for a talk, and I only thought that on her way home from the Admiralty she had looked in so as to find me alone. But as soon as I saw her face, the terror seized me, and I knew something must have happened to my darling. She had the dreadful telegram in her hand—but it said “dangerously wounded,” and I clung to the hope he wd get over it. She could not tell me, but I felt that she did not say a word of hope.

Then Meriel came in, and then the whole anguish fell upon me. All my blessed joy of many years wrecked in the darkness. In the midst of the black storm a confused feeling came over me that it wd kill Uncle W. who had sent him out in such hope—as indeed a “son of his right hand.” But then Uncle W. himself came in with Atie. Pussy—I saw his face, pale, sorrow-stricken, but like a prophet’s in its look of faith and strength. He came up and almost took me in his arms, and his first words were, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Then he said to me, “Be assured it will not be in vain,” and across all my agony there fell a bright ray of hope, and I saw in a vision Ireland at peace, and my darling’s

life-blood accepted as a sacrifice for Christ’s sake, to help to bring this to pass. I write these words at Holker, Feb. 9, 1883, having only been able to write the whole history bit by bit as I could bear it. This my 1st ray of hope has never entirely forsaken me, through all the dark, blank months emptied of joy. I said to him as he was leaving me, “Uncle Wm., you must never blame yourself for sending him.” He said, “O no, there can be no question of that.” Once he said, “Poor Forster!”...

...God be thanked for His wonderful teaching, when He sent upon me the terrible blow, that took away the desire of my eyes with a stroke. No word or presentiment of warning was granted me: one minute I was crowned with the fulness of earthly joy and love—my life full to the brim of hope and interest—the next, all lay shattered around me in one dark wreck, and with what circumstances of horror and fear! How was it that reason and faith and nerves did not give way: how was it that I did not sink down into despair?...

...All the attendant circumstances were most tenderly ordered for me, so that I had round me all loving human help, and was at home among his dear ones and mine. Only by an “accident” was I prevented, at the last moment, from keeping an engagement out of town; which would have taken me among comparative strangers. By another “accident” I did not go out that very Saturday evening. It was without my arranging it that dear Lou, and Meriel, and Alfred were all with me at dinner and afterwards. (In the same “chance” way Eddy happened to be with his father at Chatsworth.)

Other things there were to bring me help beforehand; most especially the anthem at Evensong on Saturday at the Abbey. I could only go very late to the service, and only expected to come in for the concluding prayers; but the anthem was being sung as I came in, and the blessed Divine Promise came over and over, in lovely pathetic harmonies. “Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee.” Thus in minute and tender ways did He care for me “more than a mother doth.” “He remembereth that we are but dust.”

But now let me turn to the greater miracles of mercy, whereby alone I was saved from sinking in the deep waters. In the first hour of darkness God sent Uncle William with a message straight from Him, which alone at that moment could give me strength, and which still abides with me, though so often I can but feebly cling to it: the assurance that my darling’s life was not given in vain. In

the midst of the storm, the vision was granted me of my darling called to that highest honour, of being allowed to die, guiltless (most guiltless, as regards Ireland), and thereby good to come, and peace, and better days: that thus his death, and my sorrow, might, for CHRIST’s sake, be accepted as a sacrifice, and ascend to GOD in union with the One Great Sacrifice.

Later, I had the thought sent to me how earnestly I ought to try and not spoil my share in the sacrifice by any repining or want of resignation; but offer up my will with the same single heart as my darling did.”

Sunday, May 7th, 1882

“...I sat all day in our dear, dear house, full of familiar things, and thought I realised that all was shattered and gone from me, but did not: hardly yet can I do it. It was about dawn I think that Lou (who never went home all night) came gently into my room where my darling old Meriel had spent the night with me. Lou had a little kind smile on her face, and for one second I thought “she has come to tell me it is not true.” But the hope vanished. Messages had come during the night saying Charlotte and I were not to go to Dublin; that I shd be able to see my Fred’s face placid and beautiful at Chatsworth. My darling Alfred came upstairs soon afterwards, and it was while he was with me that I thought of the victorious sufferings of Christ...”

Monday, May 8th, 1882

“...Lou and I, Nevy and Alfred, went down to Chatsworth together and I went straight to the Duke’s room. He had written me a few words of heartbroken sorrow. Eddy had had to tell him, and said that he fell on his knees. He looked piteously shattered and stricken. I tried to say to him how I hoped he wd never think it had been wrong for him to go; and he said no, he knew it was his duty. He said, “He was the best son, and I do believe the best man.” I sat in Lou’s little room, and masses of beautiful flowers kept arriving.

My own darling was laid in the chapel. His face beautiful and serene and pure, like sleep, only more tranquil: the lines smoothed away. No sign of hurt except a little scratch on the bridge of the nose. His look, as Althorp wrote to me, “as if no shadow of sin or suffering had ever

come near him.” His soft hair falling back from his forehead as it used to do. I put on his breast the little locket with my hair which I gave him in the “golden days.” Mary Gladstone made a long beautiful cross of white flowers and ferns to lay on the coffin, and we covered the floor of the chapel round him with wreaths and crosses. Edward Talbot and Arthur came from Oxford and said prayers with me in my room every day. Nevy or Alfred went out with me a little in the garden. All was lovely, outbreaking spring and bright sunshine, speaking to me of the Eternal Joy and Brightness...

...The way to the church was one great concourse of people ; but there was no disorder. The little half-sisters sent me a wreath of roses with a card “For dear Brother Freddy,” and I took it with me and dropped it into the grave. The Grey-coat Hospital sent a wreath of dark-red roses, with the words, “The Noble army of Martyrs praise Thee,” and this was laid on the coffin, on the transverse of the cross. Edward Talbot read the service beautifully, so as to be heard far round, and said at the end, “Give peace in our time, O Lord...”

October 23rd, 1884

“... The trials lasted through long and terrible weeks. Four were executed: Brady, Kelly, Curley, and Fagan; others were imprisoned for life. People wrote full of sorrow for me, thinking it must “reopen my grief,” but how should that be, when it had never, never for an hour closed. There was no reopening of grief, but it became a long pain to me that my own darling, so gentle and loving-hearted, and so full of faith and hope for Ireland—so tender-hearted for others tho’ so strong to endure hardness himself—should be, with Mr. Burke, the most innocent cause of all this ghastly bloodshed and have his death associated with such terrible wickedness. O, how cd I ever bear it, but for that One Death of Him Who met it at the hands of wicked men...”

“At Home” 1862 | Rossetti’s Ghosts

“The Ghost’s Petition” covers many of the themes and concepts that Christina Rossetti loved to explore in her writing. Rossetti spent a great deal of her life struggling to reconcile her intense religious faithfulness with her desperate loneliness. Twice in her life Rossetti ended romantic relationships because the man in question was

not a Protestant. Although her feelings of isolation frequently manifested in her poetry, her deep-seated religiosity was always more formative in her decision-making.

Both “The Ghost’s Petition” and “At Home” deal with both an unquestioning belief in life after death (in these cases, taking the form of a ghost) and with a sense of isolation and loss. While “The Ghost’s Petition” focuses on a romantic relationship torn asunder by death, “At Home” deals with a ghost looking in on her still-living friends and feeling forgotten. A noteworthy parallel between the two poems is that “The Ghost’s Petition” is written from the perspective of the bereaved wife as she is visited by the ghost of her former husband, while “At Home” is written from the ghost’s point of view. The former was written a decade or so after Rossetti’s first failed engagement, and reflects both a fear of abandonment and a profound belief in and longing for love. Though characters in “The Ghost’s Petition” are separated by the husband’s death, their devotion to each other is so strong that the wife’s grief has actually bound her husband to life, keeping him from the “plenty” that he may receive in the afterlife.

“At Home,” however, was written right around the same time that Rossetti was rejecting her second propos-

al of marriage for religious reasons. Older, unhealthier and perhaps more bitter, Rossetti had watched her three siblings going through their own romantic entanglements. “At Home” illustrates the way that Rossetti’s understanding of ghosts evolved. The “Petition” ghost was tethered to life by love and a sense of duty to his grieving wife. Perhaps it is meant to comfort the grieving by reminding them that their love means something even after they have left this world. The “At Home” ghost remains behind to look for some sign or symptom of this meaning, but instead she finds herself spying on her friends’ merriment and wondering why they are not more saddened by her loss. This is not a ghost meant to comfort. Perhaps this is a ghost meant to warn against finding meaning on earth instead of in Heaven. On their own, the ghosts from both poems provide insight into both the characters in their own narratives and Rossetti herself. But when compared to one another, the progression of Rossetti’s opinions and beliefs truly becomes apparent.

“At Home”¹⁴
by Christina Rossetti

When I was dead, my spirit turned
To seek the much-frequented house:
I passed the door, and saw my friends
Feasting beneath green orange boughs;
From hand to hand they pushed the wine,
They sucked the pulp of plum and peach;
They sang, they jested, and they laughed,
For each was loved of each.

I listened to their honest chat:
Said one: “To-morrow we shall be
Plod plod along the featureless sands,
And coasting miles and miles of sea.”
Said one: “Before the turn of tide
We will achieve the eyrie-seat.”
Said one: “To-morrow shall be like
To-day, but much more sweet.”

Notes

14. The text of the poem was taken from *The Haunted Hour: An Anthology* (1920), compiled by Margaret Widdemer.

“To-morrow,” said they, strong with hope,
And dwelt upon the pleasant way:
“To-morrow,” cried they, one and all,
While no one spoke of yesterday.
Their life stood full at blessed noon;
I, only I, had passed away:
“To-morrow and to-day,” they cried;
I was of yesterday.

I shivered comfortless, but cast
No chill across the table-cloth;
I, all-forgotten, shivered, sad
To stay, and yet to part how loth:
I passed from the familiar room,
I who from love had passed away,
Like the remembrance of a guest
That tarrieth but a day.

“The Dying Widow” (1851) | Gender Issues in Ghost Poetry

This poem, written by Thomas Miller, was published in 1851 in *The London Journal*. It recounts a woman’s grief over her deceased husband and son. Whereas in Rossetti’s poem, the ghost of the husband comes to the narrator to request that she let go of her grief and mourning for him so that he may rest, Miller’s poem fixates on the wife’s mourning and grief being so great that it actually leads to her death. The narrator also seems to see letting herself die as part of her role as a wife, saying “I have faithfully kept my vow/And feel not an accusing sting” (line 51-52). This is a stark contrast to that of Rossetti’s poem that calls for a continuation of life beyond grief and mourning. Rossetti’s more hopeful outlook might be due to her deeply rooted religious beliefs, particularly the aversion of letting a grief becoming so all-consuming that it leads to a death, suicide or otherwise. This is exemplified by Rossetti’s use of the husband in “The Ghost’s Petition” who comes to his grieving wife

and asks for her to grieve for him, yes, but to also move on with her life. Miller, on the other hand, seems to romanticize the concept of the grieving widow. In “The Dying Widow,” we are told that her son had died five months prior to the present of the poem, and also that her husband died one month before; these two people would be viewed as the only reasons that this woman had to be alive. Miller’s poem exemplified the fact that men dictated the patterns of female mourning; he is expressing the ideal of how women should grieve based on the typical male view of female grief in Victorian society. These two poems provide the two different views of how grieving practices should have been viewed. Miller’s representation in the poem may hint at an underlying male perspective that their passing from a woman’s life was meant to be so devastating that women should want to die with, if not shortly after, them. Rossetti, offering a different and decidedly female view, seems to be indicating that men should be grateful for the grieving period women will go through, but that it should not mean the end of the end of women’s lives.

*The Dying Widow*¹⁵
by Thomas Miller

Those cold white curtain-folds displace—
That form I would no longer see:
They have assumed my husband's face,
And all night long it looked at me.
I wished it not to go away,
Yet trembled while it did remain;
I closed my eyes, and tried to pray—
Alas! I tried in vain.
I know my head is very weak;
I've seen what fancy can create;
I long have felt too low to speak:
Oh! I have thought too much of late!
I have a few requests to make—
Just wipe these blinding tears away—
I know your love and for my sake
You will them all obey.

My child has scarce a month been dead,
My husband has been dead but five;
What dreary hours since that have fled!
I wonder I am yet alive.
My child, through him Death aimed the blow,
And from that hour I did decline;
His coffin, when my head lies low,
I would have placed on mine.

Those letters which my husband sent
Before he perished in the deep—
What hours in reading them I've spent!
Whole nights, in which I could not sleep.
Oh! they are worn with many a tear,
Scarce fit for other eyes to see,
But oft, when sad, they did me cheer:
Pray, bury them with me.

This little cap my Henry wore
The very day before he died;
And I shall never kiss it more—
When dead, you'll place it by my side.
I know these thoughts are weak, but, oh!
What will a vacant heart not crave?
And, as none else can love them so,
I'll bear them to my grave.

Notes

15. This text of this poem was taken from the September 16, 1848, issue of *The London Journal*.

The miniature that I still wear,
When dead, I would not have removed:
‘Tis on my heart—oh! leave it there,
To find its way to where I loved!
My husband threw it round my neck,
Long, long before he called me bride;
And I was told, amidst the wreck,
He kissed mine ere he died.

There’s little that I care for now,
Except this simple wedding-ring:
I faithfully have kept my vow,
And feel not an accusing sting.
I never yet have laid it by
A moment, since my bridal day:
Where he first placed it let it lie—
Oh, take it not away!

Now wrap me in my wedding-gown,—
You scarce can think how cold I feel,—
And smooth my ruffled pillow down.
Oh! how my clouded senses reel!
Great God! support me to the last!—
Oh, let more air into the room—
The struggle now is nearly past—
Husband and child, I come!

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