

# ALPHA

Volume 9

Approaches to Literary Phantasy



Maria Fleischhack/Elmar Schenkel (eds.)

## Ghosts – or the (Nearly) Invisible

Spectral Phenomena in Literature  
and the Media



PETER LANG  
EDITION



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Edited by Elmar Schenkel and Maria Fleischhack

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## Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.



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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Fleischhack, Maria, 1983- editor. | Schenkel, Elmar, 1953- editor.

Title: Ghosts – or the (nearly) invisible : spectral phenomena in literature and the media / Maria Fleischhack/Elmar Schenkel (eds.).

Description: Frankfurt am Main ; New York : Peter Lang, 2016. | Series:

Approaches to literary phantasy | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016014690 | ISBN 9783631665664

Subjects: LCSH: Supernatural in literature. | Ghosts in literature. | Ghosts in motion pictures. | Future life in literature. | Ghosts. | Ghost stories—History and criticism.

Classification: LCC PN56.S8 G54 2016 | DDC 809.2/51209375—dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016014690>

Cover Image:

*Henri Robin and the Spectre* by Eugene Thiebault, 1863.

ISSN 1864-323X

ISBN 978-3-631-66566-4 (Print)

E-ISBN 978-3-653-05962-5 (E-Book)

DOI 10.3726/978-3-653-05962-5

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Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften

Frankfurt am Main 2016

Peter Lang Edition is an Imprint of Peter Lang GmbH.

Peter Lang – Frankfurt am Main · Bern · Bruxelles · New York ·  
Oxford · Warszawa · Wien

This publication has been peer reviewed.

[www.peterlang.com](http://www.peterlang.com)

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## Preface: Ghosts – or the (Nearly) Invisible

Ghost stories are inevitably involved with the history of the invisible and the question as to how this can be represented. When David Garrett, the great 18<sup>th</sup>-century actor, tried to visualise the invisible ghost of Hamlet's father, he had to resort to a technological gimmick, the mechanical wig that would rise on command – no ghost, but hair standing on end. The audience could not see a ghost, but only its effect: *horripilation*, as the terminology goes. The ghost had been transferred on to the living human being. That invisible beings might enter the spectators is a deep fear undermining human identity at its core. It is also the source of horror in many ghost and vampire stories.

From prehistory to this day, we have been haunted by our memories, the past itself, by inklings of the future, by events playing outside our lives and by ourselves. Hence the lure of ghost stories throughout history and presumably prehistory. Science has been a great destroyer of myth and superstition, but at the same time it has created new black boxes which we are filling with our ghostly imagination. No wonder then that the ghost story really takes off on the eve of the Scientific Revolution and industrialisation. Daniel Defoe, among his many projects, also wrote what was called the first modern ghost story (“The Apparition of Mrs Veal”, 1706). The Romantic era welcomed the supernatural as an antidote to rationalism and mechanisation, its poetry being full of somnambulistic experiences, visual and auditory dream sequences and revelations of natural magic. But it is the Victorians who turned the ghost story into a commodity for the newly established magazine culture. Their greatest representatives, from Dickens to Charlotte Brontë, did not disdain the genre. Others followed in their wake: Amelia Edwards, Edith Nesbit, Arthur Conan Doyle or Robert Louis Stevenson. There were a market and needs that had to be served – a mutually successful enterprise. The ghost story was even taken up by great non-sensational writers such as Henry James or Virginia Woolf. Another James, Montague Rhode James, became what was probably the most important ghost story writer of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. His stories are learned and wicked, disturbing and cosy at the same time. All this faded away with the Great War. Haunting took another shape – spiritualism, thus reviving a mid-Victorian fashion. Communicating with the dead from battlefields around the world became a great hope and obsession. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle took up this duty as he did so many others – to establish contacts between the living and the dead.

The turn of the century was a period when the new media of photography, film and phonograph/gramophone engaged with kingdom come. Even Thomas Alva

Edison, the greatest inventor of his time, had turned to the occult possibilities of technology. Ghosts appeared in early films by Georges Méliès and the magician Harry Houdini documented his tricks on film. The film, as film scholars have found out, was the perfect medium to manifest the disappearance and dissolution of self and the dematerialisation of the body. X-Rays were further proof of the loss of material solidity. Science and technology were fulfilling a theatrical prophecy made by Prospero in *The Tempest*:

These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and  
Are melted into air, into thin air. (Act 4, Scene 1)

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels turned this into a formula in *The Communist Manifesto*: “All that is solid melts into air.” And even their programme for a revolution based on science and reason has the trappings of a ghost story:

A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the ghost has changed political sides (as it so often does, whimsy as it is), when Arundhati Roy wrote her essay “Capitalism: A Ghost Story” (2015), which reminds us again of Marx who called capitalism a form of vampirism.

All this goes to show that the discourse on ghosts and haunted sites of memory is still very vital, even after 200.000 years of human ghost hunting.

In May 2015, the English Department of Leipzig University in collaboration with the Inklings Society organised a conference on “Ghosts, or the (Nearly) Invisible”. The proposals came from around the world and we had to split the proceedings eventually. Many of the German language talks went into *Inklings Yearbook* 33 (2016), edited by Dieter Petzold. In our selection, we concentrate on historical pieces, on media and geography. Contributions thus range from essays on the Middle Ages to Oscar Wilde, Neil Gaiman and the media on the one hand, while on the other we are looking at particular places such as the Antarctic with its haunting whiteness, at houses in poetry or Haitian practices. Russia and China are also represented. All this will hopefully provide a broad view over the presence of ghostliness, and inspire further reflection, for as Derrida said: “I believe that ghosts are part of the future.”

Elmar Schenkel, Leipzig, February 2016

Maik Hildebrandt

## Medieval Ghosts: the Stories of the Monk of Byland

**Abstract:** It is well known that ghosts as well as supernatural phenomena and creatures in general were of great importance to medieval minds. Thus, it is no wonder that much of the literature of the Middle Ages is ripe with references to monsters, phantoms, miraculous characters and the like, from Beowulf's Grendel to the Lady of the Lake to visions of the dead. Focussing on the latter category, it is the aim of this paper to analyse a collection of ghost stories written down in the early years of the fifteenth century at Byland Abbey in Yorkshire. The first part traces the evolution of medieval perceptions of the dead found both in doctrinal teachings as well as in more popular ideas, including a consideration of the role of Purgatory in this development and the functions ghost stories could perform. In the second part of the paper, the Byland stories are analysed and compared to the notions described in the first part. It is concluded that these tales relate to both 'official' Christian concepts of the dead as well as to the rather more popular notion of the *draugar* found in Scandinavian folklore. This combination means that the stories are ideal for a possible use as *exempla* in confessions or sermons.

Stories of ghosts are widespread in the later Middle Ages. The following excerpt is from a collection of narratives written down in the early years of the fifteenth century at Byland Abbey in Yorkshire:<sup>1</sup>

Concerning a certain ghost in another place who, being conjured confessed that he was severely punished because being the hired servant of a certain householder he stole his master's corn and gave it to his oxen that they might look fat; [...] and he said there were fifteen spirits in one place severely punished for sins like his own which they had committed. He begged his conjuror therefore to ask his master for pardon and absolution so that he might obtain the suitable remedy. (Story VII, trans. Grant 371)<sup>2</sup>

The writer of this story tells us about a living man encountering a dead servant who asks him for help in escaping the punishments he suffers for the sins he had committed. In tales such as these, the dead appear in various forms and for various

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- 1 The *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King's Collections* dates the script to around 1400 (cf. Warner and Gilson 147). Since the reign of Richard II (1377–99) is referred to in the past at the beginning of story II, it seems likely that the stories were recorded in the early fifteenth century.
  - 2 References to the Byland stories will be according to the Roman numerals given to them by M.R. James who transcribed the tales from the manuscript in 1922.

reasons. It is the aim of this paper to consider the stories in the Byland collection in terms of their description of encounters with the dead as well as regarding the possible use these narratives could have had. Before this can be done, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the development of the medieval opinions towards these apparitions, focussing mainly on the connection between the establishment of Purgatory as a third realm in the other-world and the apparitions of the dead, as well as several functions these tales performed. However, not only the 'official' perception of ghosts will be considered but also a more popular concept, namely the *draugar* of Scandinavian folklore.

The early Church was quite suspicious of ghostly apparitions.<sup>3</sup> In the words of Schmitt, the "ecclesiastical culture of the early Middle Ages" was characterised by "a persistent yet somewhat ambiguous and contradictory refusal to admit the possibility that the dead might return in dreams or perhaps in conscious visions" (11). One of the main reasons for this negative response towards apparitions of the dead is that they were considered to be traditions inherited from classical and pagan cultures from which the early Church endeavoured to somewhat disassociate itself. This is not to say, however, that there were no ghost stories in this period at all, but they were relatively rare in comparison with later centuries.

This suspicion of apparitions of the dead slowly gave way in the following centuries to a more accepting and incorporating stance. The main motivation for this development was the progressing establishment of Purgatory as a separate realm in the afterlife. Since quite early in the history of Christianity, there had been the notion of a fire that purges one's sins after death. The fate of the people eligible for this treatment – the "not altogether good" in St. Augustine's four categories of sinners (Le Goff 69) – can be made more tolerable by the so-called suffrages of the living. These suffrages are the sponsoring and singing of masses, the saying of prayers as well as alms-giving.

The theological theories about the afterlife, especially concerning the fate of the people who died having committed only minor sins, were discussed and refined intensely in the High Middle Ages. From the late twelfth century onwards, there were three places for the dead: Heaven for the saved, Hell for the damned, and Purgatory for everyone else. Purgatory was in essence a concept of hope, since even if a person committed sins during his or her lifetime, he or she could still be among the saved at the moment of the Last Judgment. The time a dead person

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3 The following, necessarily quite selective, delineation of the development of ghost stories in the Middle Ages is based on Jean-Claude Schmitt *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, passim, as well as on Jacques Le Goff *The Birth of Purgatory*, passim, and Ronald C. Finucane *Appearances of the Dead*, 29–89.



needed to spend in this place depended on the number and seriousness of his or her sins; however, it could be shortened by the suffrages of the living. According to Le Goff, this possible connection between the living and the dead through suffrages proved invaluable in the development of Purgatory: "In these [suffrages] the faithful found what they needed both to satisfy their desire to support their relatives and friends beyond the grave and to sustain their own hopes of benefiting in turn from similar assistance" (134). Consequently, the bonds between the living and the dead were tightened during this period.

This is the situation in which many stories about apparitions of the dead emerge. In order to popularise the concept of Purgatory as a place in its own right as well as to prove the effectiveness of suffrages for the souls in Purgatory, preachers used tales about encounters with the dead as exemplary stories in their sermons. In most of these tales, the living encounter the souls of the dead from Purgatory, who tell about the pains suffered in this place and ask them for suffrages. Apart from this didactic function of supporting doctrinal teaching about the afterlife and suffrages, these tales also have other uses. The encounters with the dead stressed the need for continual confession and absolution as well as moral concepts of sin and punishment. The ghosts' return from Purgatory or Hell was a warning against sinning, since the living did not want to have the same fate as the dead they encounter or are told about in the exemplary tales (cf. Le Goff 134 f., 177 ff.). However, ghost tales did not always serve as illustrating narratives in sermons or confessions: sometimes, they were recorded alongside other miraculous events in chronicles simply because of their interesting nature (cf. Schmitt 59). At other times, they were also used to promote political causes (cf. Le Goff 206 f.; Schmitt 161).

The dead appeared to the living in a variety of forms and ways.<sup>4</sup> They often appeared while the living, usually close relatives or friends, were awake and conscious, since these kinds of apparitions are less delusive than those in dreams, which could easily be induced by the devil. Usually the ghosts were described as spirits, as something that is neither body nor soul, but in between, something that is not completely immaterial but also not completely corporeal either. Although they are not entirely physical, they nonetheless could have a physical impact on the living people they encounter, for example by leaving marks that proved their existence. If they were visible, and they not always were, they usually have a hu-

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4 The following list, which is far from comprehensive, is based on the descriptions provided by Schmitt 195–205 and Finucane 80–5 as well as on the ghost stories gathered in Andrew Joyne's *Medieval Ghost Stories*.

man form and appear just as they were at the time of death: they have the same age, the same features and often wear the same clothing they used to wear, which obviously aids the possibility of recognition and thereby increases the reliability and authority of their appearances. However, this appearance is only a likeness of their former self – they appear as if alive, but are, in fact, not the deceased persons themselves, but spiritual images.

Leaving aside these, so to say, ecclesiastically approved ghosts for a moment, there are also more popular concepts of the dead that differed from those returning from Purgatory or Hell. One of these folkloric types of dead are the Scandinavian *draugar*. Unlike the ghosts encountered so far, these creatures are explicitly corporeal. N. K. Chadwick describes them as “animated corpses, solid bodies, generally mischievous, and greatly to be feared” (50). These revenants are often able to wander about and thus pose a great danger to people and animals alike. Their harmfulness could be prevented by physically disabling their corpses, for example through decapitation or burning (cf. Caciola 15, 31 f.). Probably the most famous example of such beings appears in the *Grettissaga*. In this Icelandic story, a mischievous shepherd called Glámr is killed violently and returns after his burial to terrorise and kill the locals. The saga’s protagonist Grettir comes to the aid of the people and fights with the *draugr*; having overcome him eventually, he hacks off his head and places it between the corpse’s legs (cf. Morris 79–91; see also Caciola 15; Lecouteux 135–9; Chadwick 50 f.).<sup>5</sup> Accounts of revenants were popular throughout the Middle Ages (cf. Caciola 15), being kept alive through oral transmission, although Christianity had an increasing influence on the manner of their appearance – stories such as that of Glámr betray the attempts of the Church to reinterpret local stories in a Christian light (cf. Lecouteux 139).

In summary, the dead in the Middle Ages could appear to the living in a variety of forms, be it as the ‘official’ ghosts that supported Church doctrine about Purgatory and suffrages as well as warn the living to live more virtuously, or as the revenants of Scandinavian folklore that often aggressively attacked the local population. How, then, are these concepts reflected in the Byland story collection?

As mentioned above, these Latin stories were written down in the early fifteenth century at Byland Abbey in Yorkshire by an anonymous monk of the Abbey using blank space in a twelfth century manuscript (cf. James 414). All in all, there

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5 It is noteworthy that Glámr is described as unwilling to follow Christian customs (fasting on Christmas Eve); thus, his return from his grave appears to be a punishment from God for his sins (cf. Lecouteux 139).

are twelve stories recorded in this collection; however, only eleven of these will be considered here, since the other one does not deal with an apparition of the dead. In general, the narrations tend to adhere to the following structure: A living person encounters a dead one. The living person makes the sign of the cross or appeals to the trinity in order to deflect any possible harm that could be done by the apparition. He then conjures the dead person to tell his name, the cause of his wandering and a possible remedy.<sup>6</sup> After the conjuration, the living person takes actions to help the dead, who then finds rest and peace.

In order to give one further example of this structure and the language and atmosphere of these stories in general, story VI shall be cited in its entirety:

It happened that this man was talking with the master of the ploughmen and was walking with him in the field. And suddenly the master fled in great terror and the other man was left struggling with a ghost who foully tore his garments. And at last he gained the victory and conjured him. And he being conjured confessed that he had been a certain canon of Newburgh, and that he had been excommunicated for certain silver spoons which he had hidden in a certain place. He therefore begged the living man that he would go to the place he mentioned and take them away and carry them to the prior and ask for absolution. And he did so and he found the silver spoons in the place mentioned. And after absolution the ghost henceforth rested in peace. But the man was ill and languished for many days, and he affirmed that the ghost appeared to him in the habit of a canon. (Story VI, trans. Grant 371)

Several aspects of ghosts described above can be pointed out here. To begin with, it is striking that the dead canon is depicted as fighting with and tearing the clothes of the living man. Obviously, this ghost is physical rather than insubstantial, and he is able to pose a definite threat to the health of the living. This corporeality and possible harmfulness of the apparition can also be observed in the other stories: In story II, the ghost in the form of a raven throws a tailor off his horse and then threatens him with pain and death if he is unwilling to help. Even after helping him, the tailor becomes ill for several days. The ghosts in stories III, V and XII are said to be captured by the living before being dealt with in various ways, thus proving their materiality, and the ghost in story IX throws a living man over a hedge but catches him before he hits the ground.

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6 Conjurament here needs to be understood in an older sense rather than the modern one with its connotations of magic. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as follows: "II. 3. To constrain (a person to some action) by putting him upon his oath, or by appealing to something sacred; to charge or call upon in the name of some divine or sacred being; to adjure."

This description of the ghosts is obviously related to the revenants of popular belief encountered above – like the *draugar*, they are entirely physical and able to harm the people they meet. As dangerous as these apparitions appear to be, however, it must also be acknowledged that none of them mortally wounds the living. They may cause fear, torn clothes and illnesses, but they do not wander about killing every person they encounter; some even explicitly try not to harm the living too much, such as the ghost in story IX who catches the man he threw before he hits the ground. This may appear strange at first, since revenants are usually described as very menacing and aggressive, but it can be argued that the actions and threats of these ghosts are aimed at obtaining help from the living rather than hurting them. The ghostly raven attacking the tailor, the apparition fighting with the man in the story quoted above as well as the ghost throwing a living man over a hedge: all of these happenings are described in close connection with the conjuration of the ghosts – since they seem to be unable to initiate a conversation themselves, they need to resort to milder forms of aggression in order to provoke a response that then ultimately leads to their absolution and, possibly, salvation (cf. Simpson 395).

Once conjured by the living, the dead can finally state their problem. In most of the stories, the apparitions tell of, or at least hint at, sins they have committed while alive and for which they are now punished, such as the ghost in the story quoted at the beginning. This punishment is presumably carried out in Purgatory rather than Hell, since suffrages were considered to be ineffective for the damned in Hell (cf. Le Goff 66; Finucane 64 f.). The ghosts in this collection can find peaceful rest after being absolved or by having masses sung for them. In some cases, such as in story VI, the living first have to remedy a wrong done by the apparition before absolution and suffrages can be obtained. It is apparent from these proceedings – the confession of sins and asking for absolution and suffrages – that the narrations are at least in this point heavily influenced by ecclesiastical teachings.

One ghost narrative from the collection deserves special attention, since it differs significantly from the others. In story IV, the ghost, a rector who was buried at Byland, walks to his former concubine and blinds her. Instead of being conjured, absolved and thereby put to peace, however, the abbot and convent have his body dug out and thrown into a lake far away. This story clearly departs from the ordinary solution of the problem of the wandering dead. It is reminiscent of earlier stories about revenants in which the usual remedy against the creatures is the dismembering or disabling of their corpses. The monk who recorded the tale is clearly taken aback by the actions of the religious people in this story: “God forbid that I be in any danger for even as I have heard from my elders so have

I written” (Story IV, trans. Grant 370). He rejects any responsibility for the tale by stating that he has heard it from his superiors and has written exactly as they have informed him. This reference to the elders, which suggests that the event happened in their youth or even earlier, also is the only instance in the entire collection that explicitly describes the action as being long in the past; all other events seem to have occurred not too long ago. By stressing the tale being set in the distant past as well as by downright rejecting the actions taken by the abbot and convent, the monk makes clear that this kind of behaviour does not represent Church doctrine and should be refrained from.

Summarising the findings of this analysis of the collection, it is evident that the apparitions described neither completely belong to the ‘official’ dead returning from Purgatory that feature for example in the *exempla* of preachers, nor to the more popular concept of revenants. Instead, it seems that the Christian teachings about the afterlife have been imposed on tales of folkloric encounters with ghostly creatures. In this process, the nature of these apparitions was changed fundamentally: the aggressive, ruthless and violent behaviour of their predecessors here is transformed into ghosts that, although they are still physical and capable of wounding the living, actually seek help and absolution, quite like the ghosts in the ecclesiastical tradition. This observation leads to the final point that shall be considered in this paper: why did a monk write down stories that combine doctrinal and popular beliefs about the afterlife and the dead?

Scholarly opinion on this has been somewhat divided. Schmitt states that they may have been intended as *exempla*, but then seems to contradict himself by stating that the monk “above all gave in to a fascination with extraordinary and truly fantastic stories” (142), suggesting that he recorded them because of their curious content rather than their didactic value. Schmitt’s view is supported by Gwenfair Adams, who concludes her analysis of the stories by stating that they were not written as *exempla* but as accounts of events (cf. 215 f.). Opposing this view, Jacqueline Simpson has argued in favour of the stories being *exempla*. She is convinced that “[t]he stories would make excellent material for sermons on the need to pray for the dead and prepare for one’s own death” (395). Finucane also appears to tend towards this viewpoint: although he does not explicitly state it, he nevertheless considers several Byland stories in his discussion of ghosts that are used to teach about doctrine (cf. 60 ff.). Claude Lecouteux argues in a similar direction by observing that the monk might have recorded only those events that can be used for edification (cf. 147, 158).

Considering the arguments put forward by these scholars, it is clear that more point towards the stories being used as *exempla*. Most importantly, the description

of post-mortem punishment for sins and possible remedies in the form of absolution and suffrages is coherent throughout the collection and reflects the official stance towards these topics. Thus, the tales could easily have been used to teach about Christian doctrine. Through the abhorrence expressed by the monk to the unchristian solution in story IV, this focus on the correct doctrinal framework is stressed. In addition, there are some comments made by the monk that appear to be his attempts at understanding the stories told to him in a more religious framework than his informants did (cf. Adams 216). In story VIII, for example, the apparition does not succeed in provoking a positive response from the living—the only outcome of the ghost’s endeavours is to make both people and animals afraid. The monk here suggests that “he was a ghost that mightily desired to be conjured and to receive effective help” (Story VIII, trans. Grant 372). In the next story, after the apparition is absolved and rests in peace, the monk comments that “[i]n all these things, as nothing evil was left unpunished nor contrariwise anything good unrewarded, God showed himself to be a just rewarder” (Story IX, trans. Grant 372). These comments certainly point towards a didactic use of the stories.

One of the main objections raised against the stories being *exempla* is that they describe specific, local events that cannot be applied universally in the teaching of doctrine (cf. Adams 215 f.). Universality is a characteristic of many exemplary stories used by preachers, because they often travelled from town to town to preach and therefore required examples that were applicable in many situations rather than one specific one (cf. Schmitt 124). However, there is no reason to ignore the possibility that this local setting was exactly what appealed to the monk, since it seems quite reasonable that a preacher would use local tales to make identification with the contents easier for the local audience. All but two stories take place in the immediate vicinity of Byland Abbey. Thus, the audience of these stories was presumably able to recognise the streets and villages mentioned, thereby making it easier for them to apply the stories’ edifying message to themselves.

There is one further point that can be made in favour of a didactic function of the tales. As mentioned above, the texts have been written onto blank pages in a twelfth-century manuscript. Considering the contents of this volume, it is striking that it contains several works by Cicero as well as theological texts (cf. Warner and Gilson 147–8). In the Middle Ages, Cicero was very popular and influential both as a teacher of rhetoric as well as an authority on morals and politics (cf. Dyck 43 f.; Ward 69; Powell 24). The second part of the manuscript contains, among others, Honorius’s *Elucidarium*, which is an encyclopaedic summary of theological knowledge. Written in the late eleventh century,

it contains three books, one of which is concerned with the afterlife. The text was also often copied and translated, and it can be considered as a handbook for the clergy (cf. Haacke and Arduini 572). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the manuscript contains several texts dealing with confession, such as a letter by Ivo of Chartres,<sup>7</sup> as well as theological commonplaces on this subject and a short text *de triplici genere confessionis* ('on the three kinds of confession') that has been entered into the manuscript by the same scribe who recorded the ghost stories. This analysis of the immediate manuscript context of the Byland ghosts strongly suggests that the volume may have been used at the Abbey as a reference book for moral, rhetorical and doctrinal instruction of clerics or monks. The fact that the stories were entered into such a manuscript would further support the argument that they were intended as *exempla*, most likely to be used in the context of a confession or a sermon.<sup>8</sup>

In conclusion, medieval stories about encounters between the living and the dead show a huge variety both in form and in functions. Throughout the period, the ecclesiastical reaction towards apparitions of the dead changed fundamentally, leaving behind the initial suspicion in favour of a more accepting perspective in later centuries. This development was heavily influenced by the establishment of Purgatory as a place in the afterlife in itself. Henceforth, ghosts coming from the purgatorial fire appeared to the living in order to ask for suffrages and warn them to avoid sins, thereby proving the very existence of Purgatory and supporting various other teachings. However, there were also more popular concepts of the dead, such as the revenants influenced by Scandinavian folklore. They were kept alive in the tales told from generation to generation, even though the Church attempted to discredit them through association with the activities of the devil. Nevertheless, there are still some remnants of this tradition even in the literature of the later Middle Ages, such as the Byland story collection. As we have seen above, these tales constitute a combination of both the folkloric as well as the ecclesiastical perception of ghosts; the apparitions described by the anonymous monk are as corporeal and able of aggression as those of popular legend, but they behave like the dead in Christian tales.<sup>9</sup> This

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7 Ep. 69 (*Patrologia Latina* 162, 89). The letter concerns the question whether canons regular should be allowed to hear confessions (cf. Rolker 187).

8 It seems that this aspect – the immediate manuscript context – has not yet been considered in the secondary literature on the Byland stories.

9 When considering the texts surviving from the Middle Ages, one should always be aware of the fact that they were usually recorded by either religious writers or, at least, a literate elite. Hence, it should not be assumed that what the monk of Byland wrote

introduction of doctrine to folklore makes the stories ideal for the teaching of the Church's theories about the afterlife and the relation between the living and the dead, since their popular nature could appeal to the local audience. The Byland ghosts can therefore be seen as a valuable and important example of medieval apparitions of the dead.

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down is necessarily an exact representation of the local population's beliefs about these apparitions; instead, their perception of the dead is very likely filtered through the religious background of the monk.



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Ruth Heholt

## Speaking of Seeing Ghosts: Visions of the Supernatural in the Tales of Catherine Crowe

**Abstract:** In 1848 Catherine Crowe's ground-breaking book *The Night Side of Nature* was published in England. In a fragmented and disjointed narrative, Crowe looks at ghosts, the spectral and the weird through stories, anecdotes and reported personal experience. Crowe gleaned stories from people she met and who wrote to her with their own ghost tales and she believed that these vocalised experiences were worthy of serious attention. *The Night Side of Nature* is a folklore narrative, or more specifically a collection of folk tales. Traditionally ghost stories were most often told tales and much of what Crowe presents is deeply rooted in oral traditions and consists of hearsay and gossip. During Victorian times and until very recently, orality, folklore and gossip were all denigrated and feminised forms of story-telling and communication. Crowe's "evidence" of ghosts is subjective; gleaned from people's talk about ghosts and their experiences of ghosts manifested through the senses – sight, sound and bodily reactions to grief and/or terror. The type of tales she published pointed the way to the manifested ghost sightings and experiences that the Spiritualist movement was founded upon. This movement began in America in 1848 with the Fox sisters but Spiritualism did not reach England until 1849, the year after Crowe's book was published. Uninfluenced by the phenomenon that Spiritualism was to become, Crowe's work shows independence of thought and a clear feeling for the spiritual needs of her time. This paper argues that Crowe is an important but often overlooked figure who greatly influenced the way the Victorians imagined the spectral. Immersed in oral traditions and a part of what Birchall calls "unruly orality" (101), *The Night Side of Nature* was a disruptive, subversive and feminine text that gave voice to the start of the Spiritualist generation in England.

Can we believe what we see? This must be the most pressing question posed by ghost stories as well as those who have had experiences of "seeing ghosts". In fictional tales, with few exceptions, the answer tends to be yes, the ghost-seer can believe what he or she sees. However, there are different kinds of ghost stories and the ones examined in this essay are not the usual, fictional tales, rather they consist of reports, rumours and testimonies of *real* ghost sightings and experiences of the paranormal.

In 1854 a sixty-four year old woman was found wandering the streets of Edinburgh naked, carrying a handkerchief in one hand and a card case in the other believing that she was invisible. This woman was the fêted author and compiler of

“real” ghost stories, Catherine Crowe. The story was widely reported and Charles Dickens (who had been friendly with her) wrote to Emile de la Rue:

There is a certain Mrs. Crowe, usually resident in Edinburgh, who wrote a book called the *Night Side of Nature*, and rather a clever story called *Susan Hopley*. She was a Medium and an Ass, and I don't know what else. The other day she was discovered walking down her own street in Edinburgh, not only stark mad but stark naked too. ... She is now under restraint of course. (qtd. in Storey, Tillotson and Easson, 288)

Crowe was not, as Dickens reported in another letter, “hopelessly insane” (285) and she recovered but she never regained her former position whereby she “was once as famous as Dickens or Thackeray” (Wilson v). The root of this erstwhile fame was a book she wrote in 1848, *The Night Side of Nature: of Ghosts and Ghost Seers*. This book was published in January just before the advent of Spiritualism which is agreed to have begun with the Fox sisters hearing table rapping and communing with spirits in America in March. *The Night Side* proved to be a phenomenally popular book and it was very well known in the Victorian era. Before the aforementioned “problem”, Dickens reviewed it in *The Literary Examiner* and called it, “one of the most extraordinary collections of ‘Ghost Stories’ that has ever been published”, declaring that Crowe “can never be read without pleasure and profit, and can never write otherwise than sensibly and well” (1848 1). Crowe’s intention with the book was to gather evidence which could provide authentic accounts of ghost seeing and perhaps pave the way to the discovery of the truth of the supernatural. Accordingly she gathered a plethora of tales ranging from stories told directly to her, reports of experiences of the supernatural told to others, letters, newspaper reports, legends and contemporary myths. She also solicited people to write in to her with their own ghost tales and in very many places she vouches for the credibility of the ghost-seer or the source of the tales.

*The Night Side of Nature* is a peculiar book which consists of lots of disjointed snippets all mish-mashed together. It is not an easy read but in its disjointedness it provides a snapshot or montage of ghost seeing and experiences. Despite the popularity of *The Night Side of Nature* with the general public, Crowe herself came in for some quite unpleasant comments from critics. As late as 1930 G. T. Clapton wrote that:

The chapters are very loosely constructed, the instances not rigorously classed or criticised, the repetitions frequent and the whole is written in a deplorable style, packed with solecisms and even faults of spelling. Her narrative runs on interminably with a careless inconsequence betraying the worst aspects of feminine laxity and vagueness. (290)

Despite this “laxity”, for more modern scholars her work certainly has merit and interest. Gillian Bennett, writing in the introduction to Folklore Society edition of *The Night Side of Nature*, makes the claim that:

Mrs. Crowe’s lack of system is actually a bonus. Because everything is jumbled together – legends, personal experience, *dites* and rumours – each validates the other to present a picture of the sorts of things that were reported, transmitted and thought believable at one particular point in time. (2000, 13)

Crowe’s book contains a wide variety of different types of phenomena. She has chapters on “Wraiths”, “Warnings”, “Apparitions”, dreams, trances, poltergeists and presentiments as well as traditional ghost sightings. Crowe gathered all the reports and tales in the certainty that ghosts and all the supernatural phenomena reported on were real.

Crowe was also certain that experiences of the paranormal or the supernatural were more frequent than most people thought and she states:

The number of stories on record, which seem to support the view I have suggested is, I fancy, little suspected by people in general; and still less is it imagined that similar occurrences are yet frequently taking place. ... I do not mean to suggest that all my acquaintance are ghost-seers, or that these things happen every day; but the amount of what I do mean, is this; ... that besides the numerous instances of such phenomena alluded to in history, which have been treated as fables by those who profess to believe the rest of the narratives, though the whole rests on the same foundation, that is, tradition and hearsay; besides these, there exists in one form or another, hundreds and hundreds of recorded cases in all countries, and in all languages, exhibiting that degree of similarity which mark them as belonging to a class of facts. (142)

Crowe makes an interesting comment here about history. Her point is that, whilst some aspects of historical narrative are accepted as factual and believable, those parts of the narrative that document supernatural occurrences and events are not. However, she argues that *all* historical narrative is based on ‘tradition and hearsay’ as are the accounts in *The Night Side of Nature*. And throughout history, as well as in her own book, the documented experiences that people have had of the supernatural are surprisingly numerous and consistent throughout the centuries.

Diana Basham argues that ‘the ghost story provided for many writers in the second half of the century its own peculiar route into feminism’ (157), and Crowe’s ghost tales certainly empowered her, gave her a voice and gained her a hearing. Alex Owen and Vanessa Dickerson, among others, have pointed to Victorian ghost stories and the Spiritualist movement as providing space for women and allowing celebrations of femininity (Owen 1989; Dickerson 1996). However Crowe was writing *before* Spiritualism had come into being, before the rise of the female

medium and before the golden age of the ghost story. *The Night Side of Nature* was certainly a timely book that captured the imagination of the public and helped pave the way for the rapid rise of Spiritualism when it was introduced to Britain a few years later.

## Mundane Ghost Sightings

Crowe's ghost tales are often narrated by people in everyday settings. They detail people's *experience* of seeing ghosts. These sightings can happen just as easily in the day as at night and very often do not carry any fear or dread: the experiences themselves seem, at the time, commonplace. The following extract is from the chapter in *The Night Side of Nature* entitled 'Wraiths':

Mr C F and some young ladies, not long ago, were standing together looking in at a shop window in Brighton – when he suddenly darted across the way, and they saw him hurrying along the street, apparently in pursuit of somebody. After waiting a while, as he did not return, they went home without him; and, when he was come, they of course arraigned him for his want of gallantry.

'I beg your pardon,' said he, 'but I saw an acquaintance of mine that owes me money, and I wanted to get hold of him.' [...]

No more was thought of the matter; but, by the next morning's post, Mr C F received a letter enclosing a draft from the father of the young man he had seen, saying that his son had just expired, and one of his last requests had been that he would pay Mr C F the money that he owed him.

Two young ladies, staying at the Queen's Ferry, arose one morning, early to bathe; as they descended the stairs, they each exclaimed, 'There's my uncle!' They had seen him standing by the clock. He died at that time.

Very lately, a gentleman living in Edinburgh, while sitting with his wife, suddenly arose from his seat and advanced towards the door with his hand extended, as if about to welcome a visitor. On his wife's enquiring what he was about, he answered that he had seen so-and-so enter the room. She had seen nobody. A day or two afterwards, the post brought a letter announcing the death of the person seen.' (116–7)

This is a mere fraction of the type of tales that make up *The Night Side of Nature*. These stories are contemporary and do not carry any great shocks or surprises; they are mundane. The narrative style is matter of fact and straight-forward, albeit disjointed. There is no drama in the telling, none of the ghost-seers are afraid and the sightings are reported as absolute fact with no questioning of their veracity. These tales are included by Crowe, not for sensational effect, but as proof of the *usualness* of sightings like these. The stories are subjective, remembered tales and often have more in common with the traditions of oral ghost-telling than with the more usual Victorian literary ghost stories. The stories are not literary narratives

but *told* tales and whilst there are a few ghost stories of the more traditional type in *The Night Side of Nature* there is mixing of genres and the tales themselves, coming as they do from so many different sources, are presented in many different forms.

In a section of *The Night Side of Nature* entitled “Haunted Houses” Crowe reproduces a series of letters about a house that is haunted. These letters provide a seemingly authentic account of an experience of ghost-seeing forming a document that attests to the witnessing of the phenomenon. This story and the characters involved are included in an anthology compiled by Peter Ackroyd in 2010, but the source of the tale is not attributed to Crowe (204). This suggests that it was a ‘known’ tale, one spoken about and which had perhaps passed into contemporary legend. This is what Crowe tells us about her own source:

The proprietor of the house, who lives in it, declines to make public the particulars of the disturbance to which he has been subjected, and it must be understood that the account of the visit we are about to lay before our readers is derived from a friend to who Dr Drury presented a copy of his correspondence on the subject. (244)

Here we have several frames for the documents, but they are still presented by Crowe as authenticated evidence. The scenario laid out in the correspondence is one familiar to all who read literary ghost stories. Dr Edward Drury, a dis-believer and sceptic, asks leave of the owner of a reputedly haunted house, to take a companion and spend a night there. Having been granted permission they examine the house and, satisfied it is empty apart from themselves, they begin to sit up and take watch. They hear noises but experience nothing much more and Dr Drury decides to go to bed. He notes in one of his letters what happens next:

I took out my watch to ascertain the time, and found that it wanted ten minutes to one. In taking my eyes from my watch, they became riveted upon a closet-door, which I distinctly saw open, and saw also the figure of a female attired in greyish garments, with the head inclining downwards, and one hand pressed upon the chest as if in pain, and the other, viz., the right hand extended towards the floor, with the index finger pointing downwards. It advanced with an apparently cautious step across the floor towards me; immediately as it approached my friend who was slumbering, its right hand was extended towards him. I then rushed at it, giving, as Mr Proctor states, a most awful yell; but instead of grasping it I fell upon my friend, and I recollected nothing distinctly for nearly three hours afterwards. I have since learned that I was carried downstairs in an agony of fear and terror. (247–8)

The level of detail given here is important to the writer who bears witness to his experience of seeing the ghost. Drury includes as much detail as he can – making sure we know which is the ghost’s right hand and left hand, which finger points downwards and the exact stance of the ghost. His eye goes from the objective, verifiable technology and accuracy of his watch to the apparition that appears in

front of him and the suggestion is that both are subjected to the same objective gaze. That it is Mr Proctor who states that Drury gave a terrible cry gives another layer of credibility from a second witness and the fact that the whole is written out in a letter carries connotations of authenticity and truth and points towards the possibility of verification. Indeed, the letter ends with the following statement: "I hereby certify that the above account is strictly true and correct in every respect" (248). This reads more as a legal eye witness account than an actual ghost story. This acknowledgment of the truth of the existence of the supernatural has been drawn out of Drury with reluctance. In one of his letters after the event he writes: "I am persuaded that no one went to your house at any time more *disbelieving in respect to seeing anything peculiar*; and now no one can be more satisfied than myself" (246 emphasis in the original). Edward Drury has *seen* something and this has convinced him of the reality of the supernatural. The letters that Crowe includes persuade the reader also that they are witnessing something that is a true account: Edward Drury has seen a ghost.

## Seeing and Power

It is not just that ghosts are seen, most ghosts *need* to be seen. Ghosts themselves are a phenomenological experience: a *sensory* experience. These most un-fleshly of beings can only be perceived *by* the flesh, be it merely a shrinking, trembling feeling, an intuitive sense that something is there, or an actual vision. Ghosts do not exist unless they are perceived by a living person and the most effective/archetypal way of sensing ghosts is through sight; by *seeing* them. There are of course paradoxes here, not least the idea that ghosts come from the realm of the *unseen*; the Otherworld, the Beyond, from *elsewhere*. Ghosts re-turn from the place of the unseen and the unknown. However the very *raison-d'être* for a ghost must be to be sensed and ultimately to be *seen*. Ethereal, delicate or see-through as the ghost may be, it is the seeing, the *perceiving* of the phenomena that matters.

On the first page of *The Victorian Eye*, Chris Otter says "*Who* could see *what*, *whom*, *when*, and *how* was, and remains an integral dimension of the everyday operation and experience of power" (2008 1, emphasis in the original). In the example of ghost seeing just given in the letters, it is the middle class, respectable male figure who narrates his experience and in an authoritative epistolary form and Dr Drury himself claims objective vision in relation to the ghost he saw. Yet Crowe claims that it is often Other people who see ghosts. She states that this type of receptive seeing is "more frequently developed in women than in men" (176) and she goes on to argue that "it is usually the humble, the simple and the child-like, the solitary, the recluse, nay, the ignorant, who exhibit traces of these occult



faculties” (201). Yet it is often these people who are themselves over-looked. Alex Owen, when talking about Victorian spiritualism says:

Spiritualism as a movement ... privileged women and took them seriously ... . Spiritualist culture held possibilities for attention, opportunity and status denied elsewhere. In certain circumstances it could also provide a means of circumventing rigid nineteenth-century class and gender norms. ... Spiritualism had the potential, not always consciously realised, for subversion. (1989 4)

When Spiritualism arrived in Britain Crowe became a strong advocate of the movement. Her own work, published earlier than Spiritualism, also always held radical potential. Her view of who can and cannot see clearly is progressive. She argues that although for all of us vision is limited, “spiritual seeing” is most often possible when we are open, receptive and intuitively tuned (26). Crowe advocates a *different* way of seeing which is less sure and more open. And it is this openness that might enable us to see what was, before, unseen.

Thomas Fick says that in the nineteenth century “[m]ost women and many feminists ... accepted a fundamental distinction between men and women, assigning women the higher – that is, more spiritual – station” (83). This is certainly the case with Crowe. Alex Owen has argued, in relation to Spiritualism, that this is problematic as women’s “essence” was believed to be different, more passive and intuitive than a man’s (1989). However, she also acknowledges a “democratic impulse” which led to the belief that “any individual, male or female, rich or poor, could become the conduit for a dialogue with the spirits” (5). Crowe believed spirit-seeing to be empowering and enlightening. She says in order to see a ghost “there must be ... the “opening of the eye”, which may perhaps signify the seeing of the spirit without the aid of the bodily organ” (180). It is not the body of the seer that is important, it is the opening of perception as well as a willingness to believe.

Crowe is always critical of those who refuse to countenance the possibility of ghosts and other supernatural phenomenon. She says that many people who see apparitions believe them to be an illusion, however she goes on to state: “[b]elieving the apparition to be an illusion *because* they cannot bring themselves to believe in ghosts, simply amounts to saying “I don’t believe, because I don’t believe,” and is an argument of no effect” (142). The idea that one would refuse to believe in what one has perceived with one’s own eyes seems somewhat strange. However Kate Flint claims that “[t]he Victorians were fascinated with the act of seeing, with the question of the reliability – or otherwise – of the human eye, and with the problems of interpreting what they saw” (2000 1). Interpretation of a seeming ghost-sighting is certainly a difficulty. Crowe notes

another phenomenon whereby a person is perceived to be in two places at once. She documents the case of Mr H:

Mr H was one day walking along the street, apparently in perfect health, when he saw, or supposed he saw, his acquaintance, Mr C, walking before him. He called to him aloud, but he did not seem to hear him, and continued moving on. Mr H then quickened his pace for the purpose of overtaking him, but the other increased his [...] and proceeded at such a rate that Mr H found it impossible to make up to him. This continued for some time, till, on Mr C's reaching a gate, he opened it and passed in, slamming it violently in Mr H's face. Confounded at such treatment from a friend, the latter instantly opened the gate, and looked down the long lane into which it led, where, to his astonishment, no one was to be seen. Determined to unravel the mystery, he then went to Mr C's house, and his surprise was great to hear that he was confined to his bed, and had been so for several days. (125)

Crowe gives several instances of this “doubling” whereby what appears to be the body of a person is seen by another when their actual body is elsewhere. She says:

These appearances seem to have taken place when the corporeal condition of the person seen elsewhere, permits us to conceive the possibility of the spirit's having withdrawn from the body; but the question then naturally arises, what is it that was seen; and I confess, that of all the difficulties that surround the subject I have undertaken to treat of, this seems to me the greatest. (114)

This “doubling” seems to trouble the concept of vision and what it is that has been seen even more than straight-forward ghost sighting. Yet for Crowe, the imperative point is to keep an open mind. She is certain that these experiences are real and because of this they are worthy of documenting and discussing.

## Conclusion

This essay originated from a paper given at the conference co-hosted by the University of Leipzig and the Inklings Society entitled “Ghosts: A Conference of the (Nearly) Invisible”. This title suggests that ghosts are not (quite) invisible and that the concepts of *seeing* and ghosts are very often necessarily juxtaposed and as such Crowe's work is important in this discussion. Crowe herself took many of her sources from German texts and she was fluent in the language. Crowe had a deep love and respect for German culture and German people. She says:

I wish ... to make the English public acquainted with the ideas entertained on these subjects by a large proportion of German minds of the highest order. It is a distinctive characteristic of the thinkers of that country, that, in the first place, they do think indepen-

dently and courageously; and, in the second, that they never shrink from promulgating the opinions they have been led to form, however new, strange, heterodox, or even absurd, as they may appear to others.' (18)

Crowe attributes a national characteristic of courage and free and independent thinking. She wished to convey this to the British public and ascertains that it is Germans who have looked most seriously and deeply at phenomenon such as “phrenology and mesmerism” (18). In the preface to *The Night Side of Nature* she says that the title she has chosen for her book is a term:

I borrow from the Germans, who derive it from the astronomers, the latter denominating that side of a planet which is turned from the sun, its *night-side*. ... There are two or three books by German authors, entitled ‘The Night-Side,’ or ‘The Night-Domination of Nature’ which are on subjects, more or less analogous to mine (3–4).

Crowe was educated, cosmopolitan and very open minded. She was a vocal advocate for women’s education and financial independence, was vehemently anti-slavery and spoke out on animal rights. Crowe is an important but often overlooked figure who greatly influenced the way the Victorians imagined the spectral. Crowe presents ghost stories but they are personal, individual visions and versions of what people believe that they have seen. Crowe’s own view is wide and because she is detailing a vast array of ordinary people’s visions of the (un)seen her work remains vibrant, relevant and innovative.

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Eleanor Dobson

## The Ghost of Oscar Wilde: Fictional Representations

**Abstract:** A century after the death of Oscar Wilde, literature, films, cartoons and comic books provide fictional spaces in which his ghost can rematerialise. This essay examines a number of these representations of Wilde in phantasmal form, analysing the ways in which they conform to the figure of Wilde as he endures in the cultural consciousness: as the epitome of visual dandyism and the paragon of aphoristic wit. While the ghost of Wilde imitates these most celebrated qualities, confirming the perpetual recycling of the Wildean stereotype, his impact upon the contemporary worlds in which he is reimagined reveals his persisting influence upon and relevance to modern culture. Across media, his power is shown to have a magical potency, which, fairytale-esque, contributes to harmonious conclusions for those he encounters.<sup>1</sup>

Oscar Wilde [...] did not respond. He inclined his head to sniff the green carnation in his lapel and smiled to himself. (Bailey 134)

The purpose of this chapter is to explore a niche within the body of fictional representations of Oscar Wilde across a variety of media: the depiction of his ghost. Considering films, cartoons and comic books as well as literature, it argues that the reappearances of Wilde's specter in contemporary culture conform to a single particular facet of Wilde's complex and changing identity – the elegant, dandified Wilde, endlessly issuing witty aphorisms. As Laurence Dumortier has recently observed, the photographic images of Wilde which proliferate are most often the portraits taken by Napoleon Sarony, images characterised by a kind of *effete* languor, in which Wilde, decked out in capes, velvet waistcoats and silken knee breeches, poses with an expression of exquisite *ennui*. This, Dumortier claims, is to the detriment of Wilde scholarship, which consistently seeks to comment upon Wilde in this guise, to the exclusion of aspects of the multiple and varied personas that he embodied, adopted and performed throughout his life.<sup>2</sup> Depic-

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- 1 I am indebted to Jennie Challinor for her thoughtful comments and suggestions.
  - 2 Specifically, Dumortier suggests that this is as a result of both scholarly and popular interest in Wilde's sexuality. C. Robert Holloway's *The Unauthorized Letters of Oscar Wilde* (Barnstead: Xlibris, 1997) and David Levithan's *Hold Me Closer: The Tiny Cooper Story* (London: Penguin, 2015) both utilise the ghost of Wilde as a character who contributes to the protagonists' celebration of their homosexuality. On 23 May 2015, the

tions of Wilde's ghost, as I shall demonstrate, conform to this trend: the Wilde who we wish to invoke in the present day is Wilde as he has been consistently celebrated and glamorised. Yet even in this form, arguably one which, through its enforcement of the Wildean stereotype, is fairly hackneyed and restricted, Wilde's ghost proves his continuing energy and relevance in the modern world. Across a variety of contemporary sources, he is shown to influence and comment upon the fictional universes in which he is resurrected; even if, on the surface, he appears and acts in accordance with our expectations and tastes, his influence from beyond the grave still has the power to surprise.

Accompanying the visual conformity of Wilde's ghost to the style of aestheticism is an insistence on the reproduction of his characteristic epigrammatic wit, an aspect of Wilde which delights modern audiences. Indeed, Wilde's death-bed quip is often cited as reassuring evidence of his continuing flippancy up until his final breath: "This wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. Either it goes or I do." As Kirby Joris records, modern fictions of Wilde often "incorporate [his] well-known witticisms [...] echoing postmodern techniques of pastiche and intertextuality" (23). Joris states that "[b]y putting his own words into a fictionalised mouth, these biofictions represent a most topical example of what it signifies to (re-)tell of a life in retrospect: everything is memory-bound" (32). This is certainly one of the most significant features of Wilde as he appears in fiction; it transpires that Wilde, as he is reimagined, can say very little new, often quoting himself *ad nauseam*, although this technique is frequently put to comic effect and to novel ends. Wilde's ghost, however, twists this concept of the endless repetition of the Wildean stereotype. Reintroduced into modern worlds, his words take on new meanings, prove pertinent to a variety of contemporary situations, and impress themselves upon individuals in need of guidance or advice. Ultimately, the reappearance of Wilde's ghost in fiction symbolises his continuing importance and relevance in the modern world, rather than a mere banal recycling of Wilde's existing writing and remarks. Indeed, as this chapter demonstrates, when Wilde's ghost returns, he acts as a benevolent magical force, wielding a kindly supernatural control over events.

Wilde's ghost makes an unexpected appearance in "Père-Lachaise" directed by Wes Craven, a short segment within the anthology film *Paris, je t'aime* (2006).<sup>3</sup>

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actor Stephen Fry who played the eponymous role in the 1997 biopic *Wilde*, tweeted in response to the Republic of Ireland's vote to legalise same-sex marriage: "Oscar smiles in his grave." Wilde's ghost continues to be invoked as a gay icon.

3 Jim Yates's novel, *Oh! Père Lachaise: Oscar Wilde's Purgatory* (2007), imagines a whole host of spirits in limbo at the Père Lachaise Cemetery: Jim Morrison, Georges Seu-

With his hair long and cigarette in hand, this specter (played by Alexander Payne) is Wilde in his most familiar semblance, sporting a velvet jacket and wearing his coat on his shoulders as if it were a cape. Wilde's voice echoes faintly, causing it to sound distant and otherworldly. Yet his words are characteristically aphoristic: "death of the heart is the ugliest death there is." William, the romantic hero (Rufus Sewell), follows Wilde's advice to avoid this fate: he and his fiancée, Frances (Emily Mortimer), have been quarreling, and he rushes after her in a bid to save their crumbling relationship. Having seen Wilde's ghost, William quotes an epigram attributed to Wilde – "friends stab you in the front" – and paraphrases another – "how could you ever be happy with a man who insists on treating you as though you were a perfectly normal human being?" "Those are two of my favorite things he ever said," Frances replies, startled by William's sudden channeling of her literary idol. William is as astonished as his fiancée. Catching one final glimpse of Wilde's ghost as it fades from view, it is clear that it is the specter who has transplanted these witticisms into the hero's mouth, perhaps gesturing towards the Victorian vogue for spiritualism, which frequently saw the channeling of the words of the dead via a spirit medium.

John Wooley states that this "swift and smart little vignette [...] thematically illustrates the benefits of including the arts and literature in your life" (228). Certainly, it is through the quotation of Wildean aphorisms that Frances and William are reconciled. William proves himself willing to engage with his fiancée's interests, whereas before the encounter with Wilde's ghost, he has seemed apathetic and unresponsive. Specifically, Frances wants William to make her laugh, and it is the recitation of Wilde's lines that satisfies this desire. Yet the transposition of some of Wilde's most famous quotations into this setting, so self-consciously post-mortem and in the very cemetery in which Wilde is buried, highlights his continuing agency in the modern world, and his ability to influence present events. His epigrams are showcased as comic and relevant, the immediate solution to a contemporary romantic problem.

The cause of this visitation is initially implied to be a blow to the head upon the iconic sculpture by Jacob Epstein that marks Wilde's tomb, which is located in the titular cemetery. Indeed, critics have identified the ambiguity of the

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rat, Frédéric Chopin, Édith Piaf, Marcel Proust, Eugène Delacroix and Honoré de Balzac are among Wilde's spectral companions. Of the famed individuals buried at Père Lachaise, Craven originally proposed Morrison and Piaf for the phantom cameo, but he was refused by their estates. See John Wooley, *Wes Craven: The Man and His Nightmares* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011), 228.

ghost's reality as one of the most intriguing aspects of this section of the film. Kendall R. Phillips questions:

Is this the actual spirit of Oscar Wilde come from the grave [...], or is this some neurological side effect of the recent blow to [William's] head? Such ambiguity plays a crucial role in the development of gothic narratives. Not only are we made aware of the unreliability of the narrator – are we seeing a real ghost or just a delusion generated by the protagonist's imagination? – but we, like the disoriented young man, must seek to puzzle out the nature of this suddenly appearing spirit. (74)

The other segments of *Paris je t'aime* complicate our understanding of these events. In "Place des Victoires" directed by Nobuhiro Suwa, a woman's faith in God is restored after a magical cowboy allows her to see her dead son one final time. As in "Père-Lachaise," supernatural agents and ghosts appear solid and life-like. Furthermore, the segment which directly precedes "Père-Lachaise," "Quartier de la Madeleine" directed by Vincenzo Natali, focuses upon vampirism. In these segments, supernatural encounters are presented as entirely and indisputably real.

The implication is, therefore, that the appearance of Wilde's ghost is more than a hallucination; there is something more magical at work. Like many of Wilde's devotees, Frances kisses the plinth that marks his grave, adding the print of her lips to the thousands of others with which the sculpture is tinted.<sup>4</sup> It is after this act of admiration that William hits his head and Wilde's ghost is invoked. Through moments of physical contact with his shrine, Wilde's spirit is summoned: one, a performance of love and veneration, and the other, a violent, if accidental, blow. Like components of a spell, these instances in which Wilde's tomb is touched, thematically reflect the supernatural assistance that Wilde will provide. Smoothing over the turbulence and aggression in their relationship, Wilde's ghost directs the couple to a more serene, gentle love. Of course, the involvement of a kiss not only anticipates the kiss at the couple's reconciliation, but also that at the culmination of the marriage ceremony which Frances and William plan to undertake (and, through Wilde's involvement, becomes far more likely to take place). In addition, the kiss, as an integral component in the process of Wilde's awakening, recalls the fairytale trope of the rousing kiss that summons the sleeper from a death-like state.

A magical summons also takes place in the *Jennifer Wilde* comic books (2013). Set in 1921, the comics follow the protagonist Jennifer Chevalier, who is accompanied and aided in her investigations by the ghost of Wilde. In the first issue, holding a locket belonging to her late father with her own photograph in one half

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4 A glass barrier was erected around the sculpture in 2011 to prevent pilgrims to Wilde's tomb from leaving lipstick prints.



and one of Wilde in the other, and standing within the hotel in which Wilde died and her father had been subsequently living (the Hôtel d'Alsace), Jennifer asks "Papa, what happened to you?" At this, the ghost of Wilde materialises, like a genie from within a lamp. "My dear, you called, and I appeared," he declares, eager to help Jennifer solve the mystery behind her father's death (Curley, McHugh and Downey 1: 10/5; 11/3).<sup>5</sup> The locket becomes an amuletic object in this moment. Through this item of jewelry, images of Jennifer and Wilde are united, as their names are combined in the title of the series. This magic, as in "Père-Lachaise," is intricately entwined with notions of love. It transpires that Wilde and Jennifer's father had been romantically involved. The locket thus unites – both figuratively and literally – the individuals whom he loved the most.

This Wilde, too, is visually familiar. Throughout the series of comics he wears either a suit with a carnation in his buttonhole, or his famous fur coat, reproducing Wilde as the long-haired dandy whose photographic image is captured and immortalised within the locket. This nod to the Sarony portraits draws upon Wilde as he exists in popular culture: the Wilde we most easily recognise is Wilde as he appears in these photographs. Mirroring this portrayal, the ghost who is summoned reflects the depiction of Wilde in the locket. His ghostliness is signified through his stark whiteness and sketchy outline, edged with a spectral glow. Both he and his attire are colorless, but those who are familiar with his iconography can fill in the details for themselves – his carnation is, most likely, green. The speech bubbles which contain Wilde's words also share this spectral appearance. Unlike the speech of living characters, they have no dark outline, but rather dissolve into the image itself.<sup>6</sup> This not only extends the visual evidence of Wilde's ethereality from his form to his words, but indicates that he can only be heard by those upon whom the supernatural ability of receiving the speech of ghosts is conferred.

Although the visual appearance of Wilde's ghost conforms to the tendency to depict him with this haircut and in these items of clothing, the comics react against portrayals of Wilde that merely harness and reuse the most familiar textual material. The writer of the comics, Maura McHugh, uses Jennifer as a

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5 A crime-solving Wilde, albeit in living form, is the central figure in a series of six novels by Gyles Brandreth. The first book in the series, *Oscar Wilde and the Candlelight Murders* (2007), was published in America under the alternative title *Oscar Wilde and a Death of No Importance*.

6 There is a third kind of speech bubble in the *Jennifer Wilde* comics. When Jennifer speaks to Wilde's ghost, the outline around her speech bubbles is translucent, a mid-point between the defined black outlines of living-to-living speech, and Wilde's spectral speech bubbles that have no outline.

mouthpiece to mock the trend that sees Wilde parrot his own famous phrases, which occurs both in retellings of Wilde's life and more specifically, in depictions of his ghost. Jennifer asks, "were you always so convinced of your talents?" Wilde responds with a well-known aphorism, "to love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance," to which she retorts, "to quote oneself is the beginning of banality" (Curley, McHugh and Downey 3: 5/4). Although sharp, Wilde does not always rely upon his famous wit; elsewhere, he is presented as emotionally sensitive and thoughtful, casting aside the amusing veneer when his characteristic levity would not be appropriate. Yet nor would a total absence of epigrams be suitable either: without them, Wilde would not be recognisable as the aphoristic enchanter that witnesses to his afterlife have come to expect.

Wilde also appears, like so many celebrities, in an episode of the longest-running American sitcom and animated program, *The Simpsons* (1989–). In "Father Knows Worst" (2009), Homer Simpson, falling asleep whilst building a model of Westminster Abbey, encounters a number of ghosts, including that of Wilde (voiced by Hank Azaria), each conforming to a floating, blue, translucent appearance, and whose entrances are marked by the eerie glissandos of a theremin. As is the case in "Père-Lachaise" and the *Jennifer Wilde* comics, Wilde appears within surroundings either associated with his death or subsequent commemoration. Rather than the site of his death, or his place of burial, however, Westminster Abbey is the location of a cenotaphic panel dedicated to Wilde within the larger Edward Hubbard memorial stained glass window in Poets' Corner.<sup>7</sup> Perched nonchalantly next to this panel, the years of his birth and death emblazoned across the center, this Wilde too is one of flowing hair and dreamy eyes, flower in buttonhole. Comically, the ghost appears unable – or, rather, unwilling – to speak in anything other than the familiar vocabulary of his famous quips, much to Homer's frustration:

OSCAR WILDE. Homer, there are only two tragedies in life. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it.

HOMER SIMPSON. But that makes no sense.

OSCAR WILDE. Experience is simply the name we give to our mistakes.

HOMER SIMPSON. Shut up!

OSCAR WILDE. These days, man knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

HOMER SIMPSON. Whatever happened to 'boo'?

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7 This tribute to Wilde was unveiled in 1995. The panel beneath Wilde's in the memorial window – dedicated to Christopher Marlowe – is visible but deliberately unreadable in "Father Knows Worst," presumably in order to avoid detracting attention from Wilde's own name.

On this occasion, Wilde's witticisms do not initially appear to be relevant to the episode's plot; Wilde's ghost seems to relish reciting some of his most memorable lines, at the expense of being able to engage in a coherent exchange.<sup>8</sup> As in "Père-Lachaise," there is some uncertainty as to whether encounters with Wilde's ghost really take place. Yet Bart Simpson, we later learn, has seen the ghost of Wilde in his own dream, which suggests that, rather than a coincidental shared vision of Wilde's visitation, his appearance was a genuine supernatural occurrence. Towards the episode's conclusion Bart repeats one of Wilde's lines – "experience is simply the name we give to our mistakes" – revealing that the witticisms spouted in Homer's dream were not random and nonsensical after all. Bart has learned to take responsibility for his own work, and is able to do what Homer cannot – to draw a thread of coherency out of the seeming chaos of Wilde's remarks.

At the end of the episode, immediately before the credits, Wilde's ghost appears from within a pink-lit Westminster Abbey in a parody of the Walt Disney Pictures introduction logo in which the fairy Tinker Bell emerges from a castle and casts a shower of fairy dust from her magic wand. Wilde brandishes his own magic wand, casting glittering spells in the direction of the viewer to the accompaniment of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's "Dance of the Reed Flutes" from *The Nutcracker Suite* (1892), returning him to his contemporary culture, that of the *fin de siècle*. Although this pastiche is typical of *The Simpsons*, it removes Wilde from the containment of the dream narrative, and suggests his actuality in the waking world. It also constructs Wilde as a mischievous weaver of magic, an influence drawing upon the tradition of the fairy godmother, in which he casts a supervisory eye over proceedings and encourages the moral epiphany and the conclusory happy ending that characterises the sit-com genre.<sup>9</sup>

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8 One of Wilde's most famous quotations forms the basis of another joke in a later episode of *The Simpsons*. Raphael, the character from whom Homer purchases the materials with which to make the model of the Abbey in "Father Knows Worst," quotes Wilde in "Luca\$." After Principal Seymour Skinner's car rolls down a hill into the garage at which Raphael is now working, the following exchange takes place:

RAPHAEL. Would you like a quote?

SKINNER. Uh, yes.

RAPHAEL. Some cause happiness wherever they go; others, whenever they go.  
Oscar Wilde.

Pleasingly, Raphael, like the ghost of Wilde in "Father Knows Worst," is voiced by Hank Azaria.

9 Of course, this also plays upon notions of Wilde's sexuality, and specifically alludes to the word "fairy" as a slang term for an effeminate or homosexual man. It may also nod

Having explored the representation of Wilde's specter across fictional forms it is clear that, compliant with Dumortier's observation of Wilde's limited iconography, his ghost must resemble Wilde in dandified guise. One sentimental explanation for this, perhaps, is the desire to remember the dead not as they were immediately before their passing, but how they were at the height of their success and happiness. As in Lord Alfred Douglas's sonnet, "The Dead Poet" (1901), in which Douglas experiences the return of his former lover in a dream shortly after his death on November 30, 1900, Wilde appears "All radiant and unshadowed of distress," as he was when he was most celebrated, before the scandals of his trials. Furthermore, Douglas imagines Wilde's "golden voice" "as of old, in music measureless" able to "conjure wonder out of emptiness" until "all the world was an enchanted place." As with these modern incarnations of Wilde's ghost, his words are significant. He must speak in witty epigrams which weave their own kind of generative and captivating charm. Unlike the sonnet's volta, however, which sees Douglas's dream transform into a mournful lament of what Wilde might have written had he lived, the fictional forms in which Wilde's ghost is resurrected see him not only reissuing his most famous quips but producing aphoristic witticisms appropriate for the contemporary worlds in which he appears. Wilde is far from ineffectual and obsolete in spectral form: his ghost forges new relationships with the living. He, erudite and avuncular, aids and guides individuals in securing fulfilling outcomes.

As Wooley pragmatically observes, we can conjure Wilde's ghost precisely because "he [has] been dead long enough to be in the public domain" (228). He is sufficiently temporally distanced from us to be depicted without fear of legal battles, yet close enough to our own culture to remain significant, and also so famous as to be instantly recognisable, both visually and verbally. Resultantly, Wilde is the perfect celebrity ghost. He does not appear as a fleeting apparition in the dark, silently melting away into the shadows, nor does he "haunt" in the traditional sense of the word. Rather, he appears in much the way we celebrate him: proud, foppish and loquacious, as opposed to mute or doleful. Most comfortably, however, Wilde's ghost does not wander the earth because his soul has been unable to find peace: Wilde has no unfinished business.<sup>10</sup> Instead, con-

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to Wilde's engagement with the fairy tale genre, resulting in two collections of stories, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888) and *A House of Pomegranates* (1891).

10 There are some occasions in which Wilde's spirit can be found in purgatory, although it is important to note that the outcome of a period in limbo is (usually) the eventual ascent to heaven. The purgatory in Yates's *Oh! Père Lachaise* is "a pink-tinted Parisian kind" (3). Although the epilogue hints that the entire narrative was simply a dream,

temporary culture pays tribute to a Wilde free from the stigma that he suffered in life, a specter as much of our time as his own.

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there is a suggestion that Wilde's spirit has indeed entered paradise. In Marie-Laure Béraud's *Dialogues outre-ciel* (2010), the author imagines conversations between deceased celebrities. The final exchange is between Wilde and the French singer Barbara, in which Wilde is described as "*planté dans le blanc des limbes*." But the blank whiteness of limbo is enlivened by Wilde's apparel: "*ses vêtements ressortaient magnifiquement, dormant un peu de gaieté au décor*" (91). Wilde's lover Lord Alfred Douglas, in contrast, "*grille en enfer*" (99).

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Kati Voigt

## Ghostly Science or Scientific Ghosts: The Fourth Spatial Dimension in Children's Literature

**Abstract:** Ghost stories have always attracted a wide readership and although everybody knows and recognises 'typical' ghost stories, it is difficult to find a definition that accommodates the various different forms. This paper understands ghost stories in the widest sense possible and takes a scientific approach to explain certain phenomena. More precisely, it is concerned with the fourth spatial dimension in four book's for children, namely *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958) by Philippa Pearce, *Marianne Dreams* (1958) by Catherine Storr, *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962) by Madeleine L'Engle and *The Boy Who Reversed Himself* (1986) by William Sleator.

To define a 'ghost story' is a difficult if not futile exercise, since one has to consider the cultural background as well as the time frame of the story. After all, although Lisa Morton ascertains that the "belief in ghosts seems to be nearly universal" (Morton 12), she also observes that "even in our own Western European tradition, the very word 'ghost' has altered in both meaning and form over the last five or so centuries" (ibid.). M.R. James, for example, "whose collection *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* (1904) places him in the very top rank of ghost-tale writers" (Morton 146), never mentioned that "the tale should include a ghost" (Morton 147). Morton speculates that "perhaps the definition of 'ghost' was flexible enough for James to extend it to any supernormal creature that could not be easily explained" (Morton 147). This essay will also extend the concept of the 'ghost story' to what might be called the 'scientific ghost story'. In particular, it will focus on narratives for children that involve the fourth spatial dimension, namely *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958) by Philippa Pearce, *Marianne Dreams* (1958) by Catherine Storr, *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962) by Madeleine L'Engle and *The Boy Who Reversed Himself* (1986) by William Sleator.

One of the first scientists to introduce the idea of a fourth spatial dimension was Gustav Theodor Fechner (1809–1887), a German physicist and experimental psychologist. In his essay "Der Raum hat vier Dimensionen"<sup>1</sup> (1846) he establishes the concept of the fourth dimension using analogies which have since then become the standard explanation for an extra dimension. Fechner introduces a two-dimensional man who lives on a sheet of paper. Therefore, the paper man only

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1 German: "Space has four dimensions"

knows of two dimensions, namely breadth and length, and has never heard of a third dimension. Humans on the other hand, are aware of this additional dimension which is called height. In analogy to this paper man, humans are, however, not aware of an additional fourth dimension, because they cannot observe or experience it. Nonetheless, this does not mean that there is no fourth dimension. Fechner's introduction of time in his argumentation may be his greatest accomplishment. In contrast to H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, Fechner does not define time as the fourth dimension, but uses it to explain the fourth *spatial* dimension. Fechner assumes that the paper man was painted in a certain colour and moved through three-dimensional space. Different light incidences in the third dimension would alter the colour and texture of the paper man. He may initially be red and smooth but blue and wrinkled in the end. Although the paper man does not notice the motion within the three-dimensional space he will perceive a gradual change of his appearance. These transformations would be attributed by him to the passing of time. Humans experience the same phenomenon: they travel through the four-dimensional space and call its effect time. Fechner continues to argue that everything that was and will be is already present and should be imagined as a long beam in the fourth dimension. In other words, at the beginning of that beam a person is still a child, in the middle he is an adult and at the end he is an old man. The three known dimensions simply represent one particular piece of this beam which then represents one moment in time, similar to the Time Traveler's explanation in Wells' *The Time Machine*:

There is no difference between Time and any of the three dimensions of Space except that our consciousness moves along it. [...] For instance, here is a portrait of a man at eight years old, another at fifteen, another at seventeen, another at twenty-three, and so on. All these are evidently sections, as it were, Three-Dimensional representations of his Four-Dimensioned being, which is a fixed and unalterable thing. (5–6)

Taken for themselves, these pieces are the stages of that person's life and only through viewing different pieces at once can a transformation from child to old man be seen. If this person were able to travel to the fourth dimension he would see his whole existence and could jump to any moment in his life:

For centuries humankind has been interested in the idea of the past, present, and future all being together in parallel, or side-by-side, worlds. Authors and filmmakers have often used the idea. The physicist Albert Einstein (1879–1955) used his theory of relativity to prove that the existence of parallel time and space is possible. If it is, then sightings of ghosts may be glimpses of people's past or future lives in another dimension. (Guy 21)

With this explanation, John Guy facilitates the speculation that ghosts might actually be time travellers.



Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958), one of the best-known examples of a time travel adventure, is based on this concept. While visiting relatives, Tom goes to a garden each night at the thirteenth hour which is not there during the daytime. In this garden he meets Hatty and befriends her. At first glance, this time travel story indeed alludes to ghost stories. After all, Tom himself considers ghosts as an explanation for the strange happenings:

Had it been a dream? Another possible explanation occurred to him: ghosts. That was what they could all have been: ghosts. The hall was haunted by the ghosts of a housemaid and a barometer and a stuffed fox and a stuffed owl and by the ghosts of dozens of other things. Indeed, if it were haunted at all, the hall was overhaunted. [...] He was dissatisfied with his own explanation, and suddenly sick of needing to explain at all. (Pearce 25)

Fechner's idea of a fourth spatial dimension and the different stages of a life beam are a more satisfying explanation for Tom's adventures. In *Tom Midnight's Garden*, it is Tom who visits different sections of the garden's beam of life. First of all, Tom always jumps back into his time at exactly the moment he had left it (Pearce 45). This way, no time passes in his present while he can technically stay in the garden with Hatty for as long as he likes (Pearce 186). Secondly, he visits the garden at different points in time, not always keeping to the chronological order of events (Pearce 176) and finding time to be an unreliable and confusing entity: "[F]orward to a tree's falling, and then back to before the fall; and then still farther back again, to a little girl's first arrival; and then forward again" (Pearce 101). Lesley Aers points out that Tom's time travel symbolises "the child growing up and changing; the destruction of the garden and its transformation into a housing estate; and a mean little yard mirroring a whole changed pattern of society" (Aers 79). To take the fourth spatial dimension as the basis for Tom's midnight adventures underpins Aers's argument. Being unfolded in the fourth dimension, the garden's beam of life represents change and Tom's visits symbolise different moments of this process. Consequently, "the deep-lying theme of the book is not travel in time but rather the four-dimensional wholeness of life" (Townsend 91).

Eventually, Tom finds out that Hatty is an old lady who lives in the same apartment complex as his relatives. Hatty had been dreaming of her childhood and Tom had joined her in those dreams. This aspect again links the fourth spatial dimension to ghosts, this time in the form of channeling. According to Matt Cardin's *Ghosts, Spirits, and Psychics: The Paranormal from Alchemy to Zombies*, channeling is:

an altered state of consciousness in which a human being, known as a "channel," accesses and expresses spiritual information from a source located in an alternate realm of reality. In this sense, channeling is a more contemporary form of the practice of Spiritualist mediumship, wherein human mediums communicated with the spirits of deceased human beings in rituals called séances. (43–44)

In this respect, the childhood experiences which Hatty relives in her dreams are located in “an alternative realm of reality”, in this case the past, and are accessed by Tom. Again, this phenomenon might easily be explained through the fourth dimension and the aforementioned life beam – this time not the garden’s life beam but Hatty’s. Tom merely enters Hatty’s life beam at a certain moment in her past, the precise time always triggered by Hatty’s dream.

The mental connection between Tom and Hatty can also be linked to telepathy. The term ‘telepathy’ was coined by Frederic Myers in 1882 “to describe cases where impressions were received at a distance by one individual from another without the apparent mediation of any known sensory organs” (Cardin 328). Again, similar to channelling and the life beam in the fourth dimension, telepathy can be apprehended as a phenomenon of the fourth spatial dimension. Given that everything of a two-dimensional sheet of paper can be seen from the third dimension, a three-dimensional being would be able to perceive everything on this sheet at once. This happens in Edwin A. Abbott’s *Flatland* (1884), where the two-dimensional protagonist A. Square is visited by a three-dimensional sphere. Being in the position to perceive the insides as well as the outsides of the two-dimensional world, the sphere is able to touch the very inside of A. Square at which “[he] felt a shooting pain in [his] inside, and a demoniacal laugh seemed to issue from within [him]” (Abbott 91). Taking this argument one step further, it seems only logical that someone from a higher dimension can also intrude into the thoughts and dreams of a creature from a lower dimension. This feature of the fourth spatial dimension supports the idea of telepathy or mind reading and explains special connections between people who have never met before, but feel as if they have known each other for years.

A perfect example for this four-dimensional telepathy is Catherine Storr’s *Marianne Dreams* (1958). Marianne is confined to her bed after a serious illness and starts to draw a house. While she sleeps, she finds herself within her picture and meets a boy called Mark. She soon realises that Mark is a real person and that he suffers from polio. The children’s interactions in Marianne’s dream world seem to have an immediate effect on Mark in real life. The first instance occurs when Marianne gets very angry with Mark and threatens him: “[A]nd then I’ll stop dreaming about you and you’ll die! You’ll be dead if I won’t dream about you, and I won’t” (Storr 58). Shortly after, she learns that Mark is in hospital because he caught a cold and his life is truly at risk (Storr 63). Secondly, Marianne now believes that it is indeed her doing which caused Mark’s serious condition (Storr 64) and resolves “to draw him getting well” (Storr 66) which results in Mark’s increasing health. Marianne even draws furniture and food for Mark in their

dream house which affects the real Mark and leads to his full recovery from the infection. Thirdly, since Mark suffers from polio, he cannot walk and is unwilling to exercise his muscles on a daily basis in real life. Nevertheless, Marianne fulfils Mark's wish and draws a bicycle in their dream world. She encourages him to practice riding it and even though he is reluctant at first, he starts to enjoy the exercise. In real life, Mark's condition improves as well and before long Marianne hears that he is getting better every day (Storr 131). In the end, Mark recovers from polio and is "so much better than the doctors ever thought he could be in such a short time" (Storr 176).

Incidents in which terminal cases are miraculously healed permeate history and common explanations of Mark's case might include his young age (Signori 81–86), a form of healing sleep (Signori 95–97) or the mind's power over the body (Signori 131–136). Being a qualified doctor and psychiatrist (Eccleshare), Catherine Storr was acquainted with the power of the mind and its importance during the process of recovery. Her prime concern in the novel was "to show the possibilities of explaining events in more than one way, both scientific or 'real', and magical" (Eccleshare). One such scientific explanation is the fourth spatial dimension. The drawn house symbolises Mark's consciousness and Marianne, or rather her mind, enters it while she is sleeping. Similar to Abbot's sphere and A. Square, Marianne enters Mark's thoughts through the fourth dimension. This psychological connection helps Mark to recover without any actual physical treatment and substantiates Storr's conviction of the powerful mind. Only by invading his mind can Marianne help Mark to find the courage to struggle on and defeat his illness. Therefore, the fourth spatial dimension employed in the story combines the scientific with the magical side of the narrative.

Besides establishing a connection between the minds of two people, the fourth spatial dimension also bears risks for the 'space' traveller, for example being trapped in a higher dimension or coming back mirrored. One of the earliest philosophers giving thought to the latter problem was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Although it was not his intention, Kant introduced the notion of mirror images into the discussion of the fourth dimension in his essay "Von dem ersten Grunde des Unterschiedes der Gegenden im Raum"<sup>2</sup> (1768). Certainly, he did not talk about a possible fourth dimension, but his deliberations about the impossibility of mirror images were taken up by numerous authors. Kant argues that the right and left hand are never exactly the same because their surfaces cannot be identical. Again, this can be explained with analogy of a paper man

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2 German: "Foundation for the Distinction of Positions in Space."

living on a sheet of paper. The paper man can rotate on the surface of his world but he cannot produce his symmetrical twin. In order to do this he would have to lift himself off the sheet into the three-dimensional space, flip himself over, and return to the paper. The same holds true for humans: a person would have to travel to the fourth spatial dimension to create a mirror image of himself. H.G. Wells and Arthur C. Clarke used this explanation in their short stories “The Plattner Story” (Wells 1897, 103) and “Technical Error” (Clarke 57–59) respectively. Both stories deal with the effects of an involuntarily adventure of their protagonist in the fourth spatial dimension. In “Technical Error” the main character Nelson “has been rotated in the Fourth Dimension” (Clarke 59) and is now starving to death “because he can no more assimilate certain molecules of food than we can put our right foot into a left boot” (Clarke 60–61). In “The Plattner Story”, Gottfried Plattner disappears for nine days (Wells 1897, 107) only to come back with his anatomical structure being inverted (Wells 1897, 101). His tale is a remarkable one and bears many elements of a ghost story. First of all, he talks about being in an “Other-World” (Wells 1897, 110), which seems to be a ghostly version of the real world. Secondly, he himself becomes a ghost which haunts others in their dreams (Wells 1897, 105–106) but is unable to communicate in real life (Wells 1897, 108–109). As Guy explains:

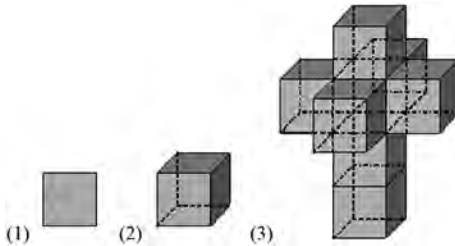
Ghosts may not be the spirits of dead people from this world. Perhaps they are beings from a parallel world. They are not normally visible to our human senses but occasionally we may catch a glimpse of them. (21)

In Plattner’s case, this parallel world is the fourth dimension and people only get glimpses of him in their sleep. Lastly, he encounters “Watchers of the Living” (Wells 1897, 111–113) which he describes as faces that surround and follow people in the real world unnoticed. Although Plattner himself offers no real interpretation (Wells 1897, 113), these creatures are at times linked to “childhood memories” (Wells 1897, 112), “the Dead” (Wells 1897, 113) or “human souls” (Wells 1897, 113) which clearly present links to ghost stories of any kind. However, since “The Plattner Story” is more concerned with science and the possibilities and dangers of a spatial fourth dimension, it is unmistakably a science fiction story rather than a ghost story.

Similar to Wells’s short story, William Sleator’s *The Boy Who Reversed Himself* core element is the fourth spatial dimension. It also extensively uses the metaphor of the paper man and its rotation in the third dimension. In the novella, a character named Laura finds out that the new student Omar can travel to the fourth dimension but often reverses himself in the process. She tricks him into taking her along. Although she dislikes the experience at first, Laura finds herself

fascinated with this higher dimension and, after travelling with Omar a few times, manages to go there on her own. Sleator's novella is indeed the best example of an author using the fourth dimension as a central theme for his work. Omar explains the additional spatial dimension to Laura in great detail using analogies such as Fechner's paper man (Sleator 17–20). The whole story is based not only on the possibility of another spatial dimension, but it furthermore plays with its many attributes and peculiarities. Sleator thus creates a fantastical world with strange creatures and many dangers which are scientifically plausible and fully explainable but still unimaginable and uncanny.

In contrast to Wells's creatures, however, Sleator tries to explain how four-dimensional creatures and objects would look like using a more scientific rather than spiritualistic approach. His explanations echo Charles Howard Hinton's (1853–1907) deliberations. Hinton was one of the first scientists who not only studied the possibility of a fourth dimension but who also tried to establish a visualisation of such objects. In his essay "What is the Fourth Dimension" (1884) he creates a theoretical four-dimensional cube:



He explains that four lines create a square which is a two-dimensional figure (1). Six squares in turn generate a three-dimensional cube (2). By analogy, he concludes that a four-dimensional 'four-square' would be formed by eight cubes (3). He calls this object in the fourth dimension a *tesseract*. As mesmerizing as the tesseract is for scientists, it also bewitches artists, philosophers and authors alike and inspires them to explore the possibilities of such a dazzling object.<sup>3</sup> *Crucifixion (Corpus Hypercubus)*, one of the most famous paintings by Salvador Dalí, for example, depicts Jesus Christ nailed to a tesseract. The Grande Arche in Paris resembles another form of representation of the tesseract. In Robert Heinlein's

3 for more information on the fourth dimension in art see Linda Dalrymple Henderson's *Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*.

short story “And He Built a Crooked House” (1940) the main characters barely escape a building in the form of a four-dimensional hypercube. Most famously, however, Madeleine L’Engle utilised the tesseract in her Newbery Medal-winning novel *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962), as Anna Quindlen summarises “the action of the book, the search for Meg and Charles Wallace’s missing father, relies on something called a tesseract, which is a way to travel through time and space using a fifth dimension” (qtd. in L’Engle 2). Similar to *Tom’s Midnight Garden*, readers are led astray as to whether this story deals with ghosts when Charles Wallace confronts Mrs Whatsit:

‘I really don’t think you ought to have taken Mrs. Buncombe’s sheets without consulting me,’ he said, as only a very small boy can be. ‘What on earth do you want them for?’  
[...]

The little woman sighed. The enormous glasses caught the light again and shone like an owl’s eyes. ‘In case we need ghosts, of course,’ she said. ‘I should [43] think you’d have guessed. If we have to frighten anybody away Whatsit thought we ought to do it appropriately. That’s why it’s so much fun to stay in a haunted house.’ (L’Engle 42–43)

However, the light tone of this conversation as much as the rather amusing explanation already suggests that this is not a ghost story after all as the opening line “[i]t was a dark and stormy night” might have implied.

L’Engle’s religious belief always plays an important part in her stories, as seen for example in Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which, who are associated with “guardian angels” (L’Engle 210), “messengers of God” (L’Engle 210) or simply “supernatural entities” (McGrath 158). In contrast to C.S. Lewis and his *Narnia Chronicles*, however, L’Engle’s interest in modern science enables her to exploit science as the frame work to depict the struggle between good and evil. While the frequent allusions to politics and religion have been studied numerous times, L’Engle’s references to science have been neglected or merely mentioned in passing. This scientific take on her novels, however, would be just as interesting and rewarding. For example, she freely adjusts the idea of the tesseract to suit her purpose:

‘And the fourth [dimension]?’

‘Well, I guess if you want to put it into mathematical terms you’d square the square. But you can’t take a pencil and draw it the way you can the first three. I know it’s got something to do with Einstein and time. I guess maybe you could call the fourth dimension Time.’

‘That’s right,’ Charles said. ‘Good girl. Okay, then, for the fifth dimension you’d square the fourth, wouldn’t you?’

‘I guess so.’

‘Well, the fifth dimension’s a tesseract. You add that to the other four dimensions and you can travel through space without having to go the long way around.’ (L’Engle 88)

Her descriptions of the fourth dimension in the story are in the tradition of Fechner, Hinton and other specialists of the fourth dimension. The assertion that time is the fourth dimension is also plausible, considering that since H.G. Wells this is the generally accepted interpretation in literature. In addition, the introduction of the fifth dimension for the purpose of travelling through space, although not necessary, is an understandable way to explain space travel within her novel:

Mrs Who took a portion of her white robe in her hands and held it tight. 'You see,' Mrs Whatsit said, 'if a very small insect were to move from the section of skirt in Mrs Who's right hand to that in her left, it would be quite a long walk for him if he had to walk straight across.'



Swiftly Mrs Who brought her hands, still holding the skirt, together. 'Now, you see,' Mrs Whatsit said, 'he would be there, without that long trip. That is how we travel.'



It can be argued that, as Kathy Piehl points out, L'Engle blends religion and science with the result that her books are not only "interesting and imaginative, they also create new possibilities in the minds of her readers" (Hughes and Piehl 17).

In conclusion, the examples of Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*, Catherine Storr's *Marianne Dreams*, William Sleator's *The Boy Who Reversed Himself* and Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* show that authors of children's litera-

ture consciously or unconsciously exploit mathematical concepts in their works of fiction. Especially the fourth spatial dimension can function as an additional source for ghosts, mental connections or incredible happenings. Although it is rather difficult to classify these as ghost stories in the traditional sense since unimaginable, uncanny and mysterious elements are explainable, it nevertheless can be seen as a modern take on the ghost story which provides authors with a number of different possibilities to construct and strengthen their story with the use of unimaginable, uncanny and mysterious science.

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Claudia Richter

## Carl Gustav Jung and the Ghosts

**Abstract:** This essay explores Carl Gustav Jung's approach to paranormal phenomena. It sets out by looking at two of Jung's personal experiences with ghostly phenomena and his explanations of them, followed by an overview of the most relevant aspects of Jung's life-long interest in the supernatural. Special attention is given to notions of sensitivity and pre-rational cognition in the context of Jung's struggle with the Cartesian worldview.

### Introduction

Carl Gustav Jung has been many things to many people. While literary scholars have found his ideas about archetypes and the collective unconscious theoretically limiting, Osho, the Indian guru, was full of praise for Jung's discovery of synchronicity, the law of acausality, which seemed to capture something that Eastern spirituality had always known ("Being is intrinsically valuable", chapter 3). American psychologist Elaine Aron credited Carl Gustav Jung with the discovery of "innate sensitivity," which she expanded on and popularised through her concept of "high sensitivity" (Aron). Although Jung never elaborated on the idea, there is evidence that he thought of himself as somehow different in terms of sensitivity and perception. Aron dedicated the major part of her research to this subject and found that sensitivity is more pronounced in a minority of the population (15–20 %, according to Aron), and that their way of perceiving and processing external stimuli is significantly different from the majority. These may be the "introverts" (another concept coined by Jung), creative people, visionaries, and potential prophets, whose complex perception and heightened empathy allow them to register subtle information and forebodings. This difference has a biological purpose and exists in the animal world, too: it has been observed with packs of wolves, for example, that the abnormal cognitive make-up of the proverbial lonely wolf ultimately serves the survival of the collective. As with wolves, so with men: according to Aron, the highly sensitives are the ones who are able to warn the group – even if they may not function so well in daily life. I have chosen to highlight this factor because high sensitivity is relevant to Jung's approach to the supernatural, especially his own experiences with ghosts, which I would like to discuss in the following.

## Wotan's Army of Departed Souls

At his tower in Bollingen in the spring of 1924, Carl Gustav Jung had one of his numerous encounters with the other world. In the night, he heard footsteps around the tower and the sound of voices, singing and music, which seemed to come closer. He wasn't sure if he was dreaming or not, went to the window and opened it, but saw – nothing. He went back to sleep, had the same dream again, of voices, footsteps and singing. Again, he woke up and in the waking state, still heard the sounds. The image of several hundred dark-clad figures presented itself in his mind. When he went to the window, there was again nothing, and Jung concluded that something ghostly must have taken place. It was only much later that he came across a 17<sup>th</sup> century chronicle from Lucerne, which offered some clarification: the author of the chronicle, a Rennwart Cysat, had had a very similar experience in the Swiss Alps. While spending a night on a high pasture of Mount Pilate, he too had heard a procession at night close to his hut – with men talking, singing and making music. Cysat noted that the pasture was “notorious for apparitions” and “it [was] said that Wotan to this day practise[d] his magic arts there” (Jung qtd. in *Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal*, 69–70).<sup>1</sup> A local shepherd explained the next day that Cysat's nocturnal experience had surely been of “Wotan's army of departed souls” – also known as the *sälig Lüt* in Swiss dialect, who were “in the habit of walking abroad and showing themselves” (*JSP* 70). In explaining these parallel events, Jung considers the possibility of a “phenomenon of solitude” (*JSP* 70), i.e. a compensatory hallucination common with hermits, for example, and people who spend a long time in solitude: in their minds, they reproduce the company that is lacking in real life. However, since Jung is aware that “premonitions or visions very often have some correspondence in external reality” (*JSP* 70) he finds it equally convincing to think that his solitude might have sharpened his senses in a way that he was able to perceive the actual procession of souls of the dead. Jung is also reminded of another historical parallel, namely the former existence of the so-called *Reisläufer*. This was a mercenary army of young Swiss men who usually gathered each spring before marching from central Switzerland to Italy – “with singing and jollity [bidding] farewell to their native land” (*JSP* 70). Jung thought that he might have witnessed one of these past gatherings. Although he fails to explicate in detail by which laws of nature this information could have been transmitted to him, he hints at synchronicity as a possible explanation.

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1 Henceforth abbreviated: *JSP*.

## A Haunted House

In summer 1920, Carl Gustav Jung was invited to England. His host and colleague – he refers to him as “Mr. X” – had booked the last country cottage that was still available during the summer holidays at a remarkably cheap rate. The highly attractive cottage was situated in Buckinghamshire and they were planning to spend their weekends there. Jung took the room on the first floor. On the first night of their first weekend, he was exhausted from work and slept immediately. From the second night onwards, however, he did not sleep well at all. The air felt stifling and there was a strange smell in the room – but he could not figure out what it was, where it was coming from, or what it reminded him of, except that there was something sick about it. He went to bed with the windows opened, but the stench remained – despite the fresh air coming in with the “night wind” that was blowing “softly through the room, filling it with the flowery scents of high summer” (*JSP* 64).<sup>2</sup> Throughout the sojourn, his discomfort prevented him from getting a good night’s rest. Mr. X recommended drinking a bottle of beer before going to bed – which did have a relaxing effect, but only temporarily. Lying awake, Jung tried to pinpoint what the smell reminded him of. At last, the image of an old woman with an open carcinoma came to mind, whom he had treated in hospital. The smell reminded him of her room.

During the following weekends, more strange things happened: there was the sound of dripping water, although there was no water; “something brushed along the walls, the furniture creaked now here and now there, there were rustlings in the corners. A strange restlessness was in the air” (*JSP* 65). Jung noticed that the maids never stayed in the house past sunset. When he asked them whether there was something wrong with the house, they told him that it was haunted, didn’t he know? The fifth weekend was “unbearable,” Jung recalls:

It was a beautiful moonlight night, with no wind; in the room there were rustlings, creakings and bangings; from outside, blows rained on the walls. I had the feeling there was something near me, and opened my eyes. There, beside me on the pillow, I saw the head of an old woman, and the right eye, wide open, glared at me. The left half of the face was missing below the eye. The sight of it was so sudden and unexpected that I leapt out of bed with one bound, lit the candle, and spent the rest of the night in an armchair. The next day I moved into the adjoining room, where I slept splendidly and was no longer disturbed during this or the following weekend. (*JSP* 66)

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2 The German original text was first published in Fanny Moser, *Spuk. Ein Rätsel der Menschheit*, Olten: Walter, 1977 (1950), 253–261.

This story was published in 1950 in a book on hauntings by Fanny Moser, for which Jung also wrote the preface. Again, the narrative concludes with Jung's attempt to explain the experience from a psychological point of view. While he cannot find an explanation for the dripping noise, he is willing to admit that the other sounds were probably not objective perceptions but that his hypnoid state had made them seem exaggeratedly loud. As for the vision of the old woman in his bed, he interprets it as "a hypnagogic hallucination and was probably a reconstruction of the memory of the old woman with carcinoma" (*JSP* 67–68). When he comes to the olfactory hallucination, he presumes yet another important cognitive function which man has in common with animals:

Coming now to the olfactory hallucination, I had the impression that my presence in the room gradually activated something that was somehow connected with the walls. [...] Common speech links intuition with the nose: I had 'smelt' something. If the olfactory organ in man were not so hopelessly degenerate, but as highly developed as a dog's, I would have undoubtedly had a clearer idea of the persons who had lived in the room earlier. Primitive medicine-men cannot only smell out a thief, they also 'smell' spirits and ghosts. [...]

The smell may have 'embodied' a psychic situation of an excitatory nature and carried it across to the percipient. It is by no means impossible when we consider the extraordinary importance of the sense of smell in animals. I myself have had a number of experiences in which 'psychic smells', or olfactory hallucinations, turned out to be subliminal intuitions which I was able to verify afterwards.

This hypothesis naturally does not pretend to explain all ghost phenomena, but at most a certain category of them. I have heard and read a great many ghost stories, and among them are a few that could very well be explained in this way. For instance, there are all those stories of ghosts haunting rooms where a murder was committed. In one case, bloodstains were still visible under the carpet. A dog would surely have smelt the blood and perhaps recognized it as human, and if he possessed a human imagination he would also have been able to reconstruct the essential features of the crime. Our unconscious which possesses very much more subtle powers of perception and reconstruction than our conscious minds, could do the same thing and project a visionary picture of the psychic situation that excited it. (*JSP* 68)

Whereas Jung finds a rational explanation for the acoustic and visual hallucinations, seeing them as products of his own psyche, he speculates about a physical reason for the smell – although he seems to imply here that a psychic situation might be recorded in smell, and that a smell could transmit information from the past to the present. The idea of smelling something and receiving information from the unconscious is indeed something that had a particular fascination

for Jung, and the identification with “animals” and “primitive men” is crucial to his entire worldview.<sup>3</sup>

In his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* he recalls an incident where he recounted the life of a man at a dinner table, without knowing him. Jung unwittingly gave an exemplary account of an imaginary criminal, which happened to be the exact description of the life of the man sitting opposite him. Jung refers to this strange and hitherto unclassified form of cognition as “archaic,” and again, as something that likens him with animals:

I too have this archaic nature, and in me it is linked with the gift – not always pleasant – of seeing people and things as they are. I can let myself be deceived from here to Tipperary when I don't want to recognise something, and yet at bottom I know quite well how matters really stand. In this I am like a dog – he can be tricked but he always smells it out in the end. This ‘insight’ is based on instinct, or on a *participation mystique* with others. It is as if the ‘eyes of the background’ do the seeing in an impersonal act of perception. (*JSP* 74–75)

In all of these experiences, a special kind of sensitivity is crucial, of which Jung is very much aware. In 1960, a year prior to his death, he writes:

Paranormal psychic phenomena have interested me all my life. Usually [...] they occur in acute psychological states (emotionality, depression, shock, etc.), or, more frequently, with individuals characterized by a peculiar or pathological personality structure, where the threshold to the collective unconscious is habitually lowered. People with a creative genius also belong to this type. (*JSP* 107)<sup>4</sup>

Based on the examples mentioned above, I think it is safe to assume that he saw himself as such a creative person with a “peculiar personality structure” comprising an innate sensitivity and a lower threshold to the collective unconscious.

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- 3 It is important to note here that Jung has an entirely positive understanding of “primitive man,” who is still in touch with the forces of nature that Western (urban) man has lost, primarily as a result of processes of modernisation. This view is the polar opposite of Freud's, who in his influential work *Totem and Taboo* famously aligned pre-modern tribal religious beliefs with neurosis. Jung, in contrast, thought that it was the worldview underlying modernity that was likely to induce neurosis, and with his Analytical Psychology, Jung thought to provide a modern cure to a specifically modern problem. He had also observed that tribal societies considered “loss of soul” as one of the great dangers against which every man must guard himself, which seemed to closely correspond to his understanding of neurosis. For “loss of soul”, see for example his essay “Archaic Man” (“Der archaische Mensch,” 1930) and “The Psychological Foundations of Belief in Spirits” (1920) in Jung, *Psychology and the Occult*, 108–125 (Henceforth abbreviated as *PO*).
  - 4 Jung, Letter to A.D. Cornell, 9.2.1960. C.G. Jung, *Letters, Vol. 2: 1951–1961*, 537–43.

## Jung and the Occult

Although sensitivity is crucial to Jung's personal experiences with ghostly phenomena, it was not the only question that interested him – especially when dealing with patients. During the first half of his career, the more important question to ask was not “did ghosts really exist?” but: “Exactly *who* is it that sees a ghost? Under what psychic conditions does he see it? What does a ghost signify when examined for its content, i.e., as a symbol?” (Jung, Foreword to Jaffé 1989, 9). To Jung, what mattered was the *reality of the experience*, and in this, he took his patients very seriously. While the psychological approach made him focus on exteriorisations (e.g. projections), he came to have doubts about this in the second half of his life. In 1947, he writes:

To be honest, I now doubt whether an exclusively psychological method and approach does justice to the phenomena in question. Not only the discoveries of parapsychology but also my own theoretical considerations have led me to certain conclusions touching on the realm of nuclear physics, more precisely, the continuum of space-time. In this, we are confronted with the question of a trans-psychic reality, which is the immediate basis of the psyche. (qtd. in Jaffé 19–20)<sup>5</sup>

The reference to nuclear physics is, of course, an allusion to his concept of synchronicity, which he developed after his encounter with nuclear physicist Wolfgang Pauli. Synchronicity implies that there are meaningful coincidences and that events may be related in a non-causal manner in a way that questions established concepts of space and time – a view that resonates with the discoveries of quantum physics. After failing to explain paranormal experiences from a strictly psychological point of view, Jung is increasingly inclined to propose a wholly new outlook on the nature of reality by suggesting the introduction of a fourth concept to complement the categories of space, time and causality. Even if it is difficult to represent synchronicity in language due to its abstract nature, “it is not a philosophical view but an empirical concept which postulates an intellectually necessary principle” (*JSP* 34) – a principle belonging neither to

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5 Qtd. in Jaffé (1968), 19–20: “Ich zweifle offen gestanden daran, daß eine ausschließlich psychologische Methodik und Betrachtung den in Frage stehenden Phänomenen gerecht werden kann. Nicht nur die Feststellungen der Parapsychologie, sondern auch meine eigenen theoretischen Überlegungen, die ich in meinem Eranosbeitrag 1946 skizziert habe, führten mich zu gewissen Postulaten, welche das Gebiet der atomphysikalischen Vorstellungen, das heißt des Raum-Zeit-Kontinuums, berühren. Damit wird die Frage der transpsychischen Realität, welche der Psyche unmittelbar zugrunde liegt, aufgeworfen.”



materialism nor to metaphysics. Again, he sees pre-rational psychic cognition as comparable to cognition in non-human life, i.e. animals, insects and “lower organisms”:

[Synchronicity] ascribes to the moving body a certain psychoid property which, like space, time and causality, forms a criterion of its behaviour. We must completely give up the idea of the psyche’s being somehow connected with the brain, and remember instead the “meaningful” or “intelligent” behaviour of the lower organisms, which are without a brain. Here we find ourselves much closer to the formal factor which, as I have said, has nothing to do with brain activity. (Jung *Synchronicity*, 89)

As the statement reveals, Jung would have thought little of today’s focus on neurology and the brain for explaining psycho-physical realities, which he thinks is as irrational as previous metaphysical explanations.<sup>6</sup> Whilst being troubled by contemporary definitions of the nature of the external, physical world, he was of course mainly preoccupied with the nature of the *inner world*. Unlike Freud, he did not believe in a singular unconscious, but rather in at least two different aspects of the unconscious: Jung distinguished between the *personal unconscious*, which is unique in every individual, and the *impersonal unconscious*, better known as the *collective unconscious*, which is shared by a group, a nation, or in fact, all sentient beings, not just humans. The fact that he did not offer final conclusions and kept exploring the nature of the human soul from different angles must be understood within the context of his complex understanding of the world. Although he always insisted on being a scientist and empiricist in the Kantian tradition, he does seem to have entertained the possibility of an invisible world of subtle substances and energies which the pre-rational psyche was able to perceive, and which were in turn affected by the psyche, as the concept of synchronicity suggests.

In summary, it is probably accurate to describe Jung’s stance on paranormal phenomena as incoherent (“recht schwankend”), but perhaps “still searching” would be a fairer assessment. As Jung himself humbly writes to J.B. Rhine:

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- 6 In his Zeitgeist-critical essay “Die Entschleierung der Seele” (505), he writes: “[...] wenn jemand heutzutage das geistige oder seelische Phänomen aus Drüsenfunktionen ableitet, so kann er der Andacht und der Hochachtung seines Publikums ohne weiteres sicher sein, wenn aber jemand den Versuch machen sollte, den Atomzerfall der Gestirnmaterie als eine Emanation des schöpferischen Weltgeistes zu erklären, so würde dasselbe Publikum ihn als geistige Abnormität bedauern. Und doch sind beide Erklärungen gleich logisch, gleich metaphysisch, gleich willkürlich und gleich symbolisch.”
- 7 Theodor Locher, “Carl Gustav Jung”, in: *Parapsychologie in der Schweiz. Gestern und Heute*. Biel: Selbstverlag der schweizerischen Vereinigung für Parapsychologie, 1986, p. 61.

I can't omit to warn you that I perhaps don't know so much about parapsychology as you suspect me to do. It is not exactly my field, and therefore I don't feel very competent to talk much about it. There is only a faint possibility that you will find something of value in the maze of my thoughts. (*JSP* 104)<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, Jung's ideas about ghosts are far from clearly delineated. However, that is so with many of his ideas, which has been the source of frustration to many a scholar used to working with clear cut definitions and axioms. After all, rhizomatic<sup>9</sup> thinking is one of Jung's core traits, and it is not a coincidence that post-Jungians today tend to point out the value of Jung's work by highlighting the postmodern quality of his thinking.

Jung had been interested in the occult throughout his life, and had the opportunity to think about the issue from many different perspectives. He encountered an extremely wide range of empirical and theoretical material, his own experiences with the occult starting already at an early age:

1. There were a number of psychics in his family, first of all his mother Emilie Jung (née Preiswerk, 1849–1923) who left a diary where she had recorded paranormal experiences and premonitions. Her father Samuel Preiswerk (1799–1870) was antistes of the reformed Church in Basle, who used to feel disturbed by spirits whilst writing his sermons. His second wife Augusta (née Faber, 1805–1862) is also said to have had second sight because, as a young girl, she had been in a state of apparent death for 36 hours, which might have altered her perception.<sup>10</sup>
2. Already as a child, Jung himself experienced dreams, visions and apparitions. Especially during his crisis after his break with Freud, he was overcome by vivid dreams and visions, which have come down to us in the recently published *Red Book*<sup>11</sup>; prior to the outbreak of WW1, Jung had apocalyptic

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8 Jung, Letter to J.B. Rhine, 18.9.1945, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 378–9.

9 I am alluding to the term made famous by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, London, New York: Continuum, 2004. Christian Kerslake has exposed the omnipresence of Jung in Deleuze's work, despite the fact that Deleuze deleted all the references to Jung in his records, presumably owed to Jung's unpopularity in (mainly Freudian) intellectual circles in Paris. Deleuze had been an avid reader of Jung when he began his intellectual career, and there are numerous references to the "rhizome" in Jung's work. It appears that this most archetypical post-modern figure of thought is actually of Jungian origin: Christian Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious*, London and New York: Continuum, 2007.

10 Jaffé (1968), pp. 15–16.

11 Jung, *The Red Book (Philemon)*. Ed. Sonu Shamdasani. Trans. Mark Kyburz. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009.

visions of terrible destruction visiting Europe and rivers of blood; although he did not know what to make of them at the time, he realised, had been a premonition when the war broke out. Towards the end of his life, he had a disturbing vision of the last fifty years of mankind, which was never published and only exists in the notes of his daughter. His assistant Marie Louise Franz tells us that he had another vision where he saw enormous stretches of the planet devastated. In an interview, von Franz says that she prayed every day that humankind would wake up from its “shadow foolishness” and prevent the final catastrophe.<sup>12</sup>

3. As a student, Jung had studied a wide range of spiritualistic literature. He certainly followed the debate in German-speaking academia between Eduard von Hartmann, *Der Spiritismus* (1898) and Alexander Aksakow, *Animismus und Spiritismus* (1894), and was familiar with Emanuel Swedenborg’s *Arcana Coelestia* (1749–56) and Immanuel Kant’s response, *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (1766).<sup>13</sup> Jung himself acknowledges the works of Leipzig astrophysicist Karl Friedrich Zöllner and British chemist and physicist William Crookes, president of the British *Society for Psychical Research*, and repeatedly refers to Justinus Kerner’s *Die Seherin von Prevorst* (1829). Spiritism had been fashionable in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and he was intensely interested in it. However, he also ridiculed the “epidemic of table-turning” (PO 93) that had spread from the US to Europe. His academic career begins, not with his PhD but with a student lecture on the occult, where the twenty-two year old already expresses the conviction that “the soul does exist, [that] it is intelligent and immortal, not subject to time and space” (PO vii). For his PhD entitled *The Psychology and the Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena* (1902), he had conducted his own séances with his cousin Helly Preiswerk, who served as a medium.

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12 C.G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles, *Remembering Jung Series* on DVD. The interviews with von Franz took place between 1977 and 1979. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhDOI1kpWF0> [last accessed: 11.6.2015].

13 Much has been written about Kant and Swedenborg, but the question of Kant’s stance on the irrational does not seem to have been answered conclusively. Cf. Friedemann Stengel, *Kant und Swedenborg. Zugänge zu einem umstrittenen Verhältnis*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008. Therein: Paul Bishop, “Kant und Swedenborg aus der Sicht von C.G. Jung” pp. 133–155, and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Swedenborg aus der Sicht von Kant und der akademischen Kantforschung,” pp. 157–172. See also Constantin Rauer, *Wahn und Wahrheit. Kants Auseinandersetzung mit dem Irrationalen*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2007.

4. As an inheritor of the German Romantic tradition, Jung was naturally sympathetic to the “nightside of science,”<sup>14</sup> the irrational, and dreams, which continuously brought him into conflict with the modern *Zeitgeist*. Throughout his work, there are condescending remarks about the stupidity and arrogance of a one-sidedly materialistic, rationalistic Cartesian world view, and he was particularly upset about the fact that scientists dismissed supernatural phenomena simply because they could not explain them.<sup>15</sup> Jung was critical of the Enlightenment although he saw himself in the Kantian tradition and kept insisting that he was an empiricist. At the same time it must be emphasised that Jung retained a critical distance to occult phenomena and was fully aware of the fact that the spiritualistic scene was populated with charlatans. (PO 105–107)
5. Throughout his life, Jung insisted on the value of pre-modern thinking – such as paradoxical thinking, symbolical thinking, as well as a-causal reasoning and thinking in correspondences<sup>16</sup> – which also led him to appreciate pre-modern European and non-European myth. Hence, he came across many stories from the folklores of various peoples that abounded with spirits and supernatural beings. He was asked to write prefaces to collections of such stories, e.g. collections of supernatural and ghost stories by Fanny Moser and his own assistant, Aniela Jaffé; he also wrote an introduction and a psychological commentary to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, an ancient manual to prepare the soul of a dying person for life after death and reincarnation. The text ar-

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14 I am alluding to the work of German natural scientist and philosopher, Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert. His *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft* (1808; engl.: Perspectives on the Nightside of Science) is an early Romantic critique of Enlightenment views of nature. Schubert’s work *Geschichte der Seele* (1830; engl.: History of the Soul) is considered an important predecessor to psychoanalysis and was known to both Freud and Jung.

15 This is really one of the running themes in Jung’s work, but it is particularly pronounced in an exemplary and condensed manner in “Die Entschleierung der Seele” (1931), where he addresses the problematic nature of the modern materialistic *Zeitgeist*, which prided itself in having overcome irrationalism whilst being totally unaware of the irrationalism of a blind faith in absolute reason.

16 Remarks are scattered throughout his work. Exemplary evidence may be found in his essay “Über die zwei Arten des Denkens” (“Concerning the two kinds of thinking”). Cf. also his polemical critique of modern binary thinking (“Duodezverstand”) that was no longer capable of tolerating paradox, which had been an important key to wisdom and understanding in pre-modern cultures: Jung, *Traumsymbole des Individuationsprozesses*, p. 21.

articulates the idea that the souls of the dead do not know that they are dead, an idea which he had already encountered in Emanuel Swedenborg and in “the most banal, uneducated, spiritistic literature of Europe and America[.]”<sup>17</sup> Neither could have known of the other: the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* was first translated into a European language in Jung’s lifetime, and could not have been available to Swedenborg or to Methodists in the US, which once again seemed to confirm that certain ideas were common to all of mankind regardless of cultural differences and specifics.

## Conclusion

Having considered the phenomenon of ghosts from so many different perspectives, Jung still did not reach a resolution of his analysis of the subject. Towards the end of his life, he surmised:

I myself cannot brag about any original research in this field, but declare without hesitation that I was able to witness enough of these phenomena to be wholly convinced that they are real. However, I cannot explain them, and hence cannot decide on any of the usual interpretations.<sup>18</sup> (Jaffé 1968, 25)

Nevertheless, the statements and incidents scattered throughout his work show that the supernatural was deeply linked to his overall worldview and understanding of the psyche. For Jung, things were complex because he remained open to ideas that challenged the mechanistic Cartesian worldview which modern science subscribed to. For them, the question was resolved; for Jung, it was not, and he laboured continually to navigate around conflicting worldviews. Jung’s system of thought was an open-ended project, and his struggle with the paranormal testifies to the sincerity with which he tried to reconcile modern and pre-modern concepts of the world while trying to retain his credibility in the scientific community – and his own sanity.

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17 Jung, “Psychologischer Kommentar zum Bardo Thödol,” p. LXV: “[...] daß diese Behauptung ebenso häufig anzutreffen ist in der banalsten, ungebildetsten, spiritistischen Literatur Europas und Amerikas[.]”

18 “Ich selber habe mich speziell auf diesem Gebiet (des Okkultismus) durch keine originale Forschung hervorgetan, stehe aber nicht an, zu erklären, dass ich genügend derartige Phänomene beobachtet habe, um von deren Realität völlig überzeugt zu sein. Sie sind mir unerklärlich, und ich kann mich daher für keine der gewöhnlichen Deutungen derselben entscheiden.”

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## **‘They only see what they wanna see’: Traumatised Ghosts and Ghost Story Conventions in *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others***

**Abstract:** The essay elaborates on post-mortem films whose ghost-protagonists do not know that they are dead. It takes its point of departure from cognitive narratology and assumes that *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* disguise their narrative unreliability under the cover of established ghost story conventions. It is argued that the films’ unreliability is based on their main characters’ restricted perception which is caused by their dissociative amnesia, that is, they repress the memories of their violent death. Apart from discussing the symptoms of trauma that the protagonists display, it is shown how the discovery and acceptance of their actual demise solves the inner and outer conflicts in the respective ghost story.

### **Introduction**

In a small village in Kansas, the young woman Mary Henry (Candace Hilligoss) is on a day trip with two friends when they accept a challenge to drag race, but are forced off of a narrow wooden bridge. The car sinks into the murky depths, and all the three women are assumed drowned. Although the police and volunteers search for the wreckage in vain, sometime later, and to everyone’s surprise, Mary emerges unharmed from the river, but she cannot remember how she survived. After her recovery, she accepts a new job in Salt Lake City. While driving to Utah, Mary suddenly sees a horrid apparition, a deathlike figure dressed in a tuxedo, with black-rimmed eyes and white hair (Herk Harvey, also the director and producer of the film), that arouses fear and dread in the young woman. The apparition, referred to as ‘the man’, continues to haunt Mary as the story progresses. He seems to be drawing her toward an old abandoned seaside carnival pavilion on the outskirts of town, finally luring her to take part in a macabre dance with other ghouls. Mary, however, runs off. She tries to escape the ghastly apparitions in pursuit of her but tumbles and lies screaming before the gruesome figures close in around her. The very last scene of the film shows the car wreck being hauled out of the river containing the dead bodies of Mary and her two companions, thus revealing that Mary has died in the initial car accident and has been experiencing some kind of hallucinatory nightmare in the split seconds before her death.

Although the cult film *Carnival of Souls* (1962) features supernatural and macabre elements, it is not a conventional ghost story about spirits learning not to linger. Instead it focuses on characters that do not know that they are dead<sup>1</sup>. The final plot twist reveals that the protagonist, who has provided the main narrative point of view in the story and with whom the film viewers have identified, has in fact been dead for the better part of the story. While the audience assumes that the unfolding story of *Carnival of Souls* as well as Mary's terrifying encounters with 'the man' are shown from a more or less unrestricted viewpoint, the presentation of events is actually limited to Mary's perception, imagination and cognition, adhering to the narrative mode of internal focalisation (Genette 1980, 191–205). Since the cinematic narrator<sup>2</sup> avoids to point out the changeover from showing the objective fictional truth (after the car crashes into the river below the three female passengers have drowned) to presenting the subjective perspective of a character that dominates the filmic presentation (Mary has survived the car accident unharmed but is haunted by appalling ghouls), *Carnival of Souls* makes effective use of unreliable narration by disguising the ontological status of its mediated images<sup>3</sup>, thus prompting the viewers to draw false conclusions as regards the story.

There have been occasional film and television productions that feature characters who are either unaware of being in a state between life and death or have actually died, e.g., *La Rivière du Hubou* (1962)<sup>4</sup>, *Haunts of the Very Rich* (1972), *Voices* (1973), *Jacob's Ladder* (1990). It is however M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999), the second highest-grossing film of 1999 and among the top hundred highest-grossing films in history, that not only revitalised this genre but developed it further. Making use of a surprise ending that demands a radical reinterpretation of the proceeding narrative, *The Sixth Sense* is a representative of post-mortem films whose ghost-protagonists walk among the living being literally oblivious to their own demise.

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- 1 Wilshire (2007) points out that *Carnival of Souls* might have been inspired by the episode "The Hitch Hiker" (1960) from the television show *The Twilight Zone* (1959–1964).
  - 2 Cf. Chatman, who defines the cinematic narrator as "the composite of a large and complex variety of communicating devices" (1990, 134).
  - 3 The ontological status of the images is usually clearly indicated in traditional Hollywood cinema. Even if the film camera shows a character's dreams, memories, visions or hallucinations, the 'subjective distortion' is conventionally framed with the help of narrative techniques like a transitional voice-over, close up, or dissolve (cf. Helbig 2005, 135).
  - 4 The short film is an adaptation of Ambrose Pierce's story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890). It was screened in 1964 as an episode of the US television series *The Twilight Zone*.

The critical and economic success of *The Sixth Sense* caused a proliferation of films that depict either the afterlife from the point of view of the newly deceased, who have yet to discover that they are dead, or whose characters are dying, e.g., *The Others* (2001), *Mulholland Dr* (2001), *Donnie Darko* (2001), *Soul Survivors* (2001), *Hellraiser: Hellseeker* (2002), *Dead End* (2003), *Lost Things* (2003), *November* (2004), *The I Inside* (2004), *The Jacket* (2005), *Stay* (2005), *Reeker* (2005), *The Dark Hours* (2005), *The Descent* (2005), *The Abandoned* (2006), *Wind Chill* (2007), *The Deaths of Ian Stone* (2007), *The Escapist* (2008), *Passengers* (2008), *No Man's Land: The Rise of Reeker* (2008), *Haunting of Winchester House* (2009), *Shadow* (2009), and *Wound* (2010).

Films like *Haunts of the Very Rich*, *The Others* or *Passengers* make it practically impossible for the audience to infer that the unfolding mystery is part of the characters' afterlife, because the physical death of the protagonist is not shown onscreen. In contrast, horror films such as *Hellraiser: Hellseeker*, *The Descent*, *Lost Things*, or *The Sixth Sense*, show that their protagonists are involved in a life-threatening event, for instance a car accident, in the first act of the story, which offers the viewers the opportunity to suspect that the characters might undergo some post-mortem experience. Films containing an hallucinatory alternate story that exists in the mind of the characters who are dying usually take the shape of a psychological thriller and can be interpreted as the characters' symbolic flight from being persecuted by death shortly before they actually die (e.g., *Carnival of Souls*, *Jacob's Ladder*, *The I Inside*, *Stay*, *The Escapist*).

*The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* are built around a climatic perceptual twist while disguising their narrative unreliability under the cover of established generic conventions of the ghost story. As will be shown in this paper, both feature haunted houses, clairvoyant children as well as ghost-protagonists who either frighten those they haunt, who contact the living in order to help them to clear up their unfinished business, or who watch benevolently over a loved one. Based on the conventional topic of the ghost story that the spirits of the deceased need to come to terms with their violent death in order to 'move on', the obstacle presented in both films is that the protagonists suffer from dissociative amnesia, repressing the memory of their demise. Since the characters are initially unable to recall the traumatic experience of their death, the subsequent story represents their involuntary recovery of that memory leading to the resolution of their actual inner conflict.

## *The Sixth Sense*

The opening scene of *The Sixth Sense* shows Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis), a distinguished child-psychologist, and his wife Anna (Olivia Williams) at home. They are in the middle of a celebration when they discover a break-in. It turns out that the highly distressed intruder, Vincent (Donnie Wahlberg), is one of Malcolm's former patients. After blaming Malcolm for having failed to help him, Vincent shoots Malcolm and himself. The seven minute prologue ends with a top shot of Malcolm<sup>5</sup>, who lies on top of his bed and puts pressure on his gunshot wound (fig. 1), before the picture fades to black, thus implying that Malcolm will not survive the critical incident.

Despite the fact that the fade to black at the end of the first scene hints at Malcolm's inevitable death, the transitional black screen, as well as the establishing shot of the second scene intend to trick the audience into believing that Malcolm has in fact recuperated from his severe injuries. The black screen following the prologue is shown for ten (!) seconds, which could suggest that Malcolm's recovery might take a very long time. Still, with the narrative's aim of concealing that Malcolm's spirit walks the earth throughout the forthcoming story, the black screen epitomises the film's essential paralipsis, a narrative effect that omits "one of the constituent elements of a situation in a period that the narrative does generally cover" (Genette 1980, 52).<sup>6</sup> Since the narrative withholds the crucial information that Malcolm had actually died at the end of the first scene, presenting therefore less information than the narrative mode is able to provide, *The Sixth Sense* is an example of unreliable filmic narration that is based on underreporting (Phelan/Martin 1999, 95).

The establishing shot that follows the prologue (fig. 2) is also conceived to set the viewers on the wrong track. The long shot shows a Georgian style residential complex with Malcolm sitting on a bench in the lower right hand corner. It also displays the caption "The Next Fall South Philadelphia". Although the narrative commentary appears to be more or less objective in setting up the context of

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5 Quite a few contemporary films use top shots to imply that the soul of the deceased has just left the body looking down on the corpse, e.g., *Gladiator* (2000), *Confidence* (2003), *The I Inside*, *Stay*.

6 For the reason that the paralipsis is an effective narrative tool for creating plot twists or surprises, it is typically used in crime or detective stories, and in films that employ unreliable narration, e.g., *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Fight Club* (1999), *The Machinist* (2004). Crucial information that the narrative withholds from the viewers by using a paralipsis is usually handed in later in form of a flashback.

the scene, and in fact the remainder of the film, the year the story is set in is not mentioned. What can be inferred from this missing piece of information is that the narrative’s underreporting is connected to Malcolm’s restricted perception, knowledge, and thoughts. As will be pointed out by Malcolm in the story (12:30, 25:31), he has lost his track of time.<sup>7</sup> His forgetfulness is one symptom that goes hand in hand with his inability to recall the traumatic experience of his violent death. Since the first half of the upcoming narrative basically shows what Malcolm knows, the establishing shot of the second scene is not presented from an unrestricted perspective but represents Malcolm’s subjective viewpoint.

Fig. 1 Top shot of Malcolm in *The Sixth Sense*



Fig. 2 Establishing shot of the second scene in *The Sixth Sense*



What follows in the story is that Malcolm observes the 9-year-old Cole Sear (Hayley Joel Osment), who is anxious and not communicating well with his mother (Toni Collette), a working-class single mother. Malcolm starts to counsel Cole, visiting his home and school. Apart from Malcolm’s conversations with Cole, the viewers see Malcolm struggling to regain a close relationship with his wife. The main questions that the audience wants to see resolved and which help to establish the genre of mystery in the film’s first half are, ‘What is the cause for Cole’s behavior?’ and ‘What is going to happen to Malcolm’s marriage?’.

Although *The Sixth Sense* was promoted as a ghost story (cf. Ebert 1999), it explicitly admits to this genre after its half over. Following a particularly traumatic incident for Cole that had him locked in an attic where he sustained suspicious injuries, Malcolm persuades Cole to tell him his secret: “I see dead people [...w]alking around like regular people. They don’t see each other. They only see what they wanna see. They don’t know they’re dead” (48:22–48:53). With this pivotal moment in the story, the narrative also presents Cole’s perspective. As a result,

7 Foust and Soukup (2006, 126) observe that the narrative is foggy in its attention to causal sequence after Malcolm is shot in that the scenes are not clearly linked by transitions, hardly ever tracking Malcolm as he moves from place to place or from day to day.

the audience starts to 'see dead people' too. Cole mostly encounters the spirits of people who have died violent deaths and who visit his home. Their sudden appearances as well as their gruesome looks add solid horror effects to the *The Sixth Sense*. In view of the fact that Cole is scared of and haunted by the apparitions, the narrative's second half blends cinematic genres, drawing on the technical elements of the psychological thriller, domestic drama and classic horror to create tension.

Even though Malcolm is not convinced that Cole's statement is true, Cole's observation will eventually help him to gain self-knowledge concerning his own mortality. The real cause why the deceased 'only see what they wanna see' can be deduced from Malcolm's case. Since the memory of his time of death is blocked out (the aforementioned paralipsis), Malcolm continues 'to exist' in his familiar framework. Behaving like nothing has changed since the evening when he was shot, Malcolm holds on to his roles as a loving husband and as a child psychologist.

In the context of the film's emphasis on the therapist-patient relationship that flows in both directions, the splitting of the leading role into two is very efficient. Since Malcolm cannot see the spirits of the people that trouble Cole, he initially resists a paranormal diagnosis but concludes that Cole's anxieties resemble those of Vincent. After listening to one of Vincent's taped sessions and hearing the voice of a deceased, which he takes as evidence of supernatural visitation, Malcolm eventually gives Cole the paternal advice to listen to what the apparitions have to tell him. Cole starts to talk to the ghosts and comes to understand that they seek his help in communicating with the living. After Cole has learned to accept his sixth sense, he is able to tell his mother about his gift, which rebuilds their mutual trust. Additionally, he becomes the ghosts' counselor, which is highlighted by the fact that he advises Malcolm to talk to his wife in her sleep. The sight of his wedding ring dropping from Anna's hand triggers Malcolm's flashback of the night of his death visualised by the dramatic device of the cinematic flashback. The sudden recall of his trauma is followed by the discovery that he is a ghost too, which then gives way to acceptance. Malcolm's knowledge about his actual identity and existence, his recognition of the paranormal, as well as his ability to finally communicate with his wife are all due to Cole.

As regards ghost story conventions, Malcolm's spirit walks the streets of Philadelphia in order to attend to his unfinished business. At the very moment when he accepts his death, he is able to move on: "I think I can go now. Just needed to do a couple of things. Needed to help someone. I think I did" (1:36:30–1:36:52). Since Malcolm doubted his professional ability after having failed Vincent, he got a chance to redeem himself through helping Cole. Malcolm's second concern, his

(false) conviction that his wife has distanced herself from him, is another frustration to him.<sup>8</sup> Anna’s possible motivation is brought up in the film’s prologue when she comments the award Malcolm received from the city for his outstanding achievement in the field of child-psychology by saying, “you’ve put everything second including me” (05:30). In the end, Malcolm comes to understand that Anna had not tried to cool off their relationship but actually needed to come to terms with the loss of her husband. He tells her that she never came second to his profession allowing him to say goodbye to her.

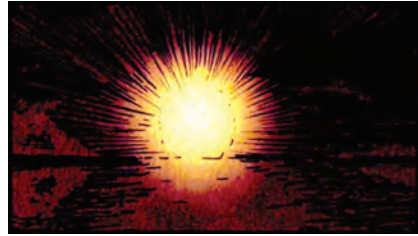
As Freeland points out, the horror in *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* “is subtle and lingering, a matter of mood rather than monsters” (2004, 189). Considering the cinematography of the *The Sixth Sense*, especially the lightning, the (at times expressionist) framing of the characters, and the transitional shots showing Philadelphian fountains, church spires, gargoyles, or house ornamentation help to establish the film’s gothic atmosphere.<sup>9</sup> They create “what feels like a dream world, an almost mythic space disconnected from any American ‘everyday’” (Foust/Soukup 2006, 126).

In *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others*, the narrative focuses on the ghost-protagonists’ ordeals to eventually see the light, that is their discovery and recognition of their own death, which is already implied by the films’ first images. *The Sixth Sense*’s instant presentation of a light bulb in the basement of Malcolm’s home (fig. 3) as well as *The Other*’s extreme close up of a chiaroscuro woodcut that shows a divine light (fig. 4) symbolise that the story is about the search for truth and knowledge. The first picture in *The Sixth Sense* also creates a symbolic context for Malcolm’s task to retrieve the memory of his trauma. The light bulb is located in his cellar, which correspondingly is one of the conventional settings of gothic fiction ever since Horace Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). In *The Sixth Sense*, Malcolm spends a lot of time in his house’s basement. Suffice it to say that the subterranean space represents his unconscious. This is supported by the fact that Malcolm repeatedly finds the basement door locked (15:14, 39:37), but ‘somehow’ manages to unlock it.

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8 Malcolm’s ‘problems’ concerning his marriage can merely be touched upon in this essay. Foust and Soukup (2006) analyse Malcolm’s character in the postindustrial age as well as his masculinity crisis. Barratt (2009), on the other hand, explores the film’s use of primacy effects and schemas that make the viewers overlook that Malcolm is in fact a ghost.

9 The recurring dropping of ambient temperature in the story is an uncanny element that hints at supernatural visitations (15:04, 28:18, 52:22, 1:12:42, 1:34:58, 1:36:23).

Fig. 3 *The first image in The Sixth Sense*Fig. 4 *The Others' first shot*

### *The Others*

*The Others* uses classical features of gothic fiction. It is a frame narrative set in the past. In 1945, just after the Second World War, Grace Stewart (Nicole Kidman) and her children, Anne (Alakina Mann) and Nicholas (James Bentley), live in an isolated and fogbound mansion on the island of Jersey. Grace's husband has never returned from fighting in the war, while the children are dangerously photosensitive and must be kept guarded from sunlight. Since all her servants have disappeared without warning, Grace had placed an advertisement for servants in the letterbox. The story begins with the arrival of three former servants of the house, Mr. Tuttle (Aldo Grilo), the mute Lydia (Elaine Cassidy) and Mrs. Mills (Fionnula Flanagan), who offer their services and whose appearance strikes the viewers as old fashioned, even for 1945. Shortly after, Grace detects that her letter containing the ad is still in the letterbox. She wants an explanation from Mrs. Mills who replies that they came by on the off chance that they would be needed in a house as big as this.

Fig. 5 *Establishing shot of The Others*Fig. 6 *First close up of Grace in The Others*

The genre of the haunted house story is already set up by the establishing shot (fig. 5). It presents a mansion whose mirror picture in the nearby pond together with the film's evocative title implies that 'the others' pose a threat to the inhabit-



ants or represent some ‘dark’ forces in the house<sup>10</sup>. What the narrative however cleverly manages to conceal from the viewers is that *The Others*’ story is primarily presented from the perspective of the spirits that haunt the house. In this context, the film’s mystery and suspense is created by showing the divergent opinions of Grace, Anne and Mrs. Mills which leave the audience in doubt as regards their respective trustworthiness (cf. Helbig 2011, 353–356). Grace is shown to be a highly strung woman and overprotective mother<sup>11</sup>, who suffers from migraines. Her bossy behavior can be attributed to her distressing situation of having to protect the house from Nazi intruders whilst missing her husband. Anne, in contrast, constantly challenges her mother. She speaks of visitors in the house no one else can see, a young boy named Victor, his parents and an old woman. Moreover, in conversations with Mrs. Mills, Anne hints mysteriously at an incident not long ago – ‘that day’ – when her mother ‘went mad’ (10:35–10:53, 13:42, 1:08:27). As Grace herself begins to hear noises coming from empty rooms, she suspects that the spirits of the former owners haunt the house. Since they seem to be opening the doors and window-shutters letting in the light, Grace feels that the ‘intruders’ pose a threat to Anne’s and Nicholas’ wellbeing. It becomes evident though that the servants, who claim to be very honest (05:07, 05:11), talk behind Grace’s back, and Mrs. Mills in particular seems to withhold information that might explain the supernatural phenomena.<sup>12</sup> Her ambivalent statements also make the viewers suspect that the servants are somehow in league with the intruders.<sup>13</sup>

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- 10 The film poster of the horror thriller *Stonehearst Asylum* (2014) shows a similarly symbolic reflection.
  - 11 Concerning Grace’s responsibility for two young children and her disputed madness, she bears a strong resemblance to the governess in Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), one of the literary classics of unreliable narration.
  - 12 After Grace has asked Mr. Tuttle to look for a little cemetery in the garden and to check whether a family and their son Victor were buried there, Mrs. Mills and Mr. Tuttle cover up some gravestones in the garden (50:53–51:28). Following an argument between Grace and Anne concerning the intruders, Mrs. Mills comforts Anne by saying that she ‘can see them’ too. She however reclines from telling Grace about it, because “[t]here are things that your mother doesn’t want to hear. She only believes in what she was taught. But don’t worry, sooner or later she’ll see. Then everything will be different. [...] There are going to be some big surprises. There are going to be... changes” (59:00–59:29).
  - 13 When Mrs. Mills talks to Mr. Tuttle about Grace and her children she concludes that “[t]he children will be easier to convince. It’s the mother who’s going to cause us problems” (59:49–59:57). In conversation with Grace after a particularly traumatic fight between Anne and Grace, Mrs. Mills mysteriously replies, “[y]ou can’t take on all responsibility of this house. Leave it to us. We know what has to be done” (1:05:34–1:05:44).

As it turns out, Anne and Mrs. Mills who seem to tell Grace less about the intruders than they really know are more trustworthy than Grace, whose words actually contradict her actions.<sup>14</sup> Still, the narrative mediation is closely connected to Grace's perspective. The film opens with Grace's voice-over. She is about to tell a bedtime story, which is followed by the presentation of a number of chiaroscuro woodcuts that in fact foreshadow the narrative without giving away its twist. Quite contrary to Grace's voice-over's implication to tell a good night story, her introductory close up is an oblique angle showing her to be screaming (fig. 6). She is lying in bed in broad daylight which suggests that she just woke up from a nightmare which also goes to show that she is a troubled character. Although the initial voice-over suggests that the upcoming story is an embedded narrative, this is a narrative ploy to make the viewers believe that Grace is first and fore-mostly a caring mother, who tells comforting stories to her children, and, moreover, that she is basically a flesh and blood character.

The film's cinematography makes effective use of strong contrasts of light referring to the dramatic composition of chiaroscuro to create a gloomy and eerie atmosphere as well as to visualise the story's aim of uncovering the truth. The children's photosensitivity is symptomatic for their groping in the dark as regards their actual death. In this context, the term light is synonymous with truth<sup>15</sup> (09:22–09:49, 11:14–12:55, 1:14:45–1:15:58). In the story, Grace eventually has to face the fact that she herself has brought on the horror to her family. As the unexplained phenomena in the house grow more threatening, she loads her rifle and evicts the servants. After Anne and Nicholas have climbed from their window and discovered the graveyard, where the servants' bodies are buried, they are stalked by the servants and run back upstairs where they come upon the intruders, gathered in a séance. When Grace enters the room, Anne and Nicholas converse with the medium, a blind old woman, who asks about their former death in this room. The film at this point shows the objective viewpoint of the intruders which supports the fact that throughout the story two parallel worlds existed in the house. The alleged intruders turn out to be the new house owners, Victor's family, who found out that the house is haunted by its former inhabitants,

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14 Grace reassures her children "that nothing is going to happen to you while mommy is here" (35:21), despite the fact that she not only killed them but is very hard on Anne whom she also physically attacks.

15 See for instance Grace's replies "[t]hey [the children] must never be exposed to any light [...]. It would eventually be fatal" (09:36–09:47) and "[t]his house is like a ship. The light must be contained as if it were water by opening and closing the doors. My children's lives are at stake" (22:27–22:36).

a mother who had smothered her children and shot herself. In the aftermath of this revelation, Mrs. Mills comforts Grace, who eventually remembers her gruesome deed, and explains that the world of the living and the dead usually do not intermingle, but sometimes, as in this house, ghosts and humans can sense one another. Having accepted their death and no longer being plagued by illness, the children are shown to play in daylight, whilst Grace vows never to leave the house. As Grace is a ghost bound to her former home, her radius of movement is restricted. As can be seen in the story, she is deterred by a dense fog when she tries to leave the grounds.

Although all the main characters in *The Others* have passed away, the story stresses only the trauma symptoms of some of them. After Grace’s initial fear that the alleged spirits of the former house owners might harm her children, she retreats into denial about the intruders. Being not yet able to face her death, Grace is constantly trying to deny the truth. In case of the intruders, she eventually tries in vain to pretend that they do not exist. She also blocks out the horrifying memories of ‘that day’ when she had killed her two children before committing suicide, and since then Grace only sees what she wants to see. In this context, her migraine which seems to get severe whenever she comes across the intruders or has to confront the truth implies that her subconscious is close to retrieving her repressed memories (29:25–29:42). Regarding Grace’s husband, who returns from the war but is rather lethargic, and after a very short time, is simply gone, Grace observes that he is ‘so different’ to which he replies, “sometimes I bleed” (54:22). His subsequent ineloquence and depressed manner as well as his sudden disappearance imply that he has yet to understand that he died in the war. As a result of her death, Lydia too has become ‘speechless’. After Grace asks Mrs. Mills why and when Lydia became mute, Mrs. Mills vaguely apologises and says that her “memory is a bit rusty these days” (42:12), which suggests that she, like Malcolm in *The Sixth Sense*, has lost track of time after she died. When Mrs. Mills replies that Lydia just stopped talking one day, Grace concludes: “But there must have been a reason. People don’t just stop talking. These things are always the result of some sort of trauma. Something must have happened to her” (42:26–42:38). As Grace herself will come to understand, the repressed memory of her own death as well as her inability to be specific about the duration of events in the story are also symptomatic of her individual trauma.

Although the house is usually a safe place for its inhabitants, in *The Others* its symbolic maternal attributes are inverted. With its covered windows, different levels and locked rooms, the house in *The Others* represents Grace’s personality. Taking into consideration that the different rooms of the house correspond to

Grace's experiences and memories, the doors represent the entrances into her unconscious. In this context, whenever she enters the 'upper room', the children's bedchamber, in which the intruders eventually hold the séance that triggers Grace's personal revelation of having smothered her children in their bed, she is emotionally unstable or even violent (on one occasion she almost chokes Anne to death). Her intense mood swings imply that she blocks out the conscious awareness of having murdered Anne and Nicholas in that room, so that the painful memories would not have to be experienced. Grace is not only said to have become mad but by having killed her children actually proves it. The image of the nurturing mother, which Grace believes in and tries to put up throughout the story, is turned upside down. Considering her motive, Liebrand (2003, 223) argues that only the mother who kills her own children (and herself) prevents them from growing old. In this respect, the frequently shown dead tree in the backyard (24:14, 27:45, 59:35, 1:21:07–1:21:18, 1:22:52) indicates that this house does not bring forth any new life.

## Conclusion

*The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* utilise classical features of gothic fiction. As children have long been believed to be better at seeing ghosts than adults, both films feature children that act as an intermediary between the ghosts and the living. Moreover, both stories contain poltergeists (in *The Sixth Sense*, Cole is physically harmed by some of the spirits, while Grace in *The Others* moves the table during the séance), and the filmic ghost story convention that the spirits of the dead can be made perceptible when recorded on some storage device, as for instance in *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Paranormal Activity* (2007), *The Awakening* (2011). In *The Sixth Sense*, Cole's mother detects 'otherworldly flashes of light' in the photographs that show Cole, while Malcolm is able to hear the voice of a ghost listening to a taped session with Vincent. In contrast, *The Others* makes use of post-mortem photography to reveal the truth about the death of the servants. Both films can be considered the ultimate audiovisual exhibit of capturing the images of the dead.

The turn-of-the-millennium films *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* differ from other waves of the horror genre, for instance the psycho killers of the 1960s, or the slashers of the 1970s. Both films show how the individual tries to cope with existential changes, and they present topics like mortality, loss and fear of life to a large audience. For the viewers, the final plot twist reveals that the main characters have been ghosts throughout the story. For the ghost-protagonists, however, the discovery and recognition of their altered state of existence is actually therapeutic. The films show that the narrative agency, the viewpoint of the ghost-protagonists,

is a source of constant dissonance as long as the characters have not accepted that they have passed away. Once they come to terms with their traumatic experience of having died, the inner and outer conflicts in the story are resolved. In order to do that, the protagonists have to acknowledge that their fundamental, existential, and in Grace’s case normative, world view is wrong. One reason for the proliferation of ‘they-don’t-know-they’re-ghosts’ stories in the early twenty-first century is highlighted by Newman who argues that they pick up societies’ unease, because “[i]n the air is a notion, fostered by global trauma, that we’re dead already, or might as well be for all our chances of pulling through” (2011, 454).

Arguably, early horror films like *Carnival of Souls* basically rely on the surprise of the last-reel revelation. Critically acclaimed and financially successful horror films like *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others*<sup>16</sup>, on the other hand, pay close attention to complex storytelling and narrative consistency. Although they aim for artistically cheating their audience, they present ambivalent dialogues, reactions, and scenes that stand multiple viewings.

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Clausdirk Pollner

## 'At the Hollow, there was Magic.' The Language of Kim Newman's Ghost Novel

**Abstract:** This essay discusses briefly the language of Kim Newman's *An English Ghost Story* with a focus on genre specific use of vocabulary and a discussion on whether the novel is, in fact, a ghost story.

Let me begin by quoting the first and final paragraphs of Newman's novel:

They would fall in a clump, like ripe apples. Mother, father, daughter, son [i.e. Father Steve, Mother Kirsty, Daughter Jordan and Son Tim Naremore (Ne'ermore?). C.P.] touched by the charm, their persistent – though thinned – love would flare. As only once before, at the birth of baby Tim, the family would be a whole, united by fiercely shared feeling. Things that had seemed important would be trivial, and things that had seemed negligible would be potent. The Hollow awaited the family with a welcome. It needed them. Unpopulated, it tended to drift. Without people in residence, it might disperse on the winds. That afternoon, the place was at its best behaviour, spring green promising summer gold. (*An English Ghost Story* 7)<sup>1</sup>

Here we see something that characterises the novel throughout: the anthropomorphising of the house named the "Hollow". But let me first give you the final paragraph:

They would mature in the Hollow, like apples in a jam. Mother, father, daughter, son; warmed by the glow, their inescapable – and recently proved – love would thicken. As for years to come, the family were a whole, united by fiercely shared feelings. Things that had seemed important were trivial, and things that had seemed negligible were potent. The Hollow enfolded the family with its welcome. It needed them. Populated, it was fixed. With people, it could withstand the winds. That evening, the place was on its best behaviour, autumn red promising winter white. (313)

A perfect mirror, that is, in terms of syntax, individual lexical items and contents – a promising beginning of life in the Hollow; and a satisfying, pleasant ending of the settling in period. But – between pp. 8 and 312 – the family almost falls apart, they get very close to killing one another; and at one point – in midsummer! – the Hollow seems to be plunged into total darkness, even during daytime (cf. "utter blackness" 300). This then is where the novel apparently changes genre from ghost story to science fiction – the Naremores seem to be utterly alone in the darkness,

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1 All further quotes from this edition.

there are no neighbours, no social contacts, they don't do things like food shopping or seeing friends or being visited. And the ghosts gradually change: "[...] the IP [see below. C.P.] were friendlies" (70), "[...] they are not our friends" (196), "[...] the IP, [...] the hostiles" (230) "The IP. The Hostiles" (254). The result: "They weren't charmed any more. They were haunted" (209). "[The ghosts] are killing us" (239). At one point Jordan has the following thoughts / impressions:

[...] the Hollow was larger on the ground than on the Ordnance Survey map. She had just not realised how vast, how extensive. The property was a continent, with lost tribes and ruined cities and fallen civilisations and trackless wastes. The house was a many-roomed mansion, a folded-up city disguised as a single-family dwelling. (278–79)

If there is such a thing as classic sci-fi territory, we are now firmly on it. And note "wastes" (278) with its faint echo of "Wasteland". One sentence about the story's background – the Naremore family have moved from the jungle of London to a remote village in Somerset – and to an isolated property outside the village called "The Hollows".

Let me come back to a previous observation: here are four randomly chosen examples of the Hollow being seen and written about as though it were a living organism: "The Hollow, they decided, was a happy place" (59), "[...] but [Steven] was going dangerously against the will of the Hollow" (171), "He begged the Hollow not to kill again" (202), "The Hollow might have lied to them" (208). The novel's structure is fairly straightforward – most chapters are headed by the respective seasons: (1) Spring, (2) Moving Day, (3) Settling In, (4) After Midsummer (this being the central and longest chapter), (5) Towards Autumn, and finally (6) Autumn. But there is another, more unusual feature. The chapter "Moving Day" is preceded by an excerpt from a ghost story written by the Hollow's previous tenant/owner, Louise Teazel (US English: a prickly plant): "Weezie and the Gloomy Ghost". Page 33 (recto) shows the exact title page of the original book, with title, author's name and illustrator, incidentally and probably not coincidentally, named Kels Van Loon; page 24 (verso) has, hyper-realistically, the detailed printing history of the book in the book, including "A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library" (24).

Teazel bases her story on her own biography/childhood. She is Weezie and the venue of the story, "Hilltop Heights", is the "Hollow". We read, in the story reproduced here, that there are eight friendly ghosts and one gloomy one. Each of them goes back to a certain period/event in the history of England: Sidney the Saxon, Guillaume the Norman, Noll the Roundhead, and so forth. (Weezie is friendly towards the Gloomy Ghost and he turns into her friend as well – echoes of "The Frog King" here?) These seem to be the ghosts the Naremores inherit,

plus “new” ones, namely Young Weezie and Old Miss Teazle, and the Secretary of the Local Teazle Society, who seems to have committed suicide and whose body crumbles to bits, and is then “resurrected” as a ghost. One pities the tenants following the Naremores . . .

“After Midsummer” is preceded by a chapter from a (made up) non-fiction volume, “Ghost Stories of the West Country” by one Catriona Kaye, and the excerpt given here is concerned with the “Hollow” and its ghosts and hauntings, as seen by a non-fiction writer. “Towards Autumn” is preceded by an excerpt from “The Journal of a Victorian Gentlewoman”, written by another tenant of the “Hollow”, well before Miss Teazle. It is about the writer’s conviction that the “Hollow” has killed her father, and it gives us the reason for the house’s name – a half-hallowed tree in the building’s ground. The tree was partly hollowed out during a particularly violent thunderstorm.

There are about five or six (more or less) obvious inter-textual references, at least to this reader: namely to E. A. Poe’s ghost story “The Pit and the Pendulum” (156), Wilde’s “Canterville Ghost” (64, 88, 238), possibly Orwell’s *1984* (264; a live rat in Kirsty’s magic chest of drawers), the Grimm Brother’s “Froschkönig”, “Frogking” (29–30) and the Cheshire Cat from Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, and to a 1902 horror story entitled “Monkey’s Paw” (208).

All the chapters have subsections, marked by an upper-case initial, and the majority of these subsections are told from one of the four protagonists’ point of view and in their “voice”. When parents are referred to as Mum and Dad, it is the children speaking/thinking, when Steve is e.g. referred to as Stevie, it is his wife speaking/thinking; When Kirsty is referred to as Kirst, it is her husband speaking/thinking, and so forth. When there are references to pop music of the 1960s it is Jordan’s turn – she is obsessed with music that was popular when her mother Kirsty was Jordan’s age, making her mother remarking caustically at one point: “Our daughter has the musical taste of a sixty-year-old drag queen. [...] One day, she’ll make someone a wonderful ‘fag hag’.” “What’s a ‘fag hag’?” asked Tim” (8). Jordan likes Lesley Gore’s songs in particular; Gore was very popular in the 1960s. Incidentally, she died when this essay was being prepared. There are no coincidences. . .

Tim’s sections are most easily identifiable: he uses lexical items, and abbreviations that this reader found quite puzzling – and so do Tim’s parents and older sister. In fact, the narrator introduces the term “Timisms” (36). Tim is a typical (pre) teenager, who lives in his own world, both (a) physically and (b) linguistically:

a) His favourite bolt-hole is the tree that gives the house its name, and that Tim has a code word for, “Green Base”.

b) His favourite way of expressing himself is the frequent use of abbreviations and acronyms, both on “normal” (family) situations and in his “warfare” against the increasingly hostile ghosts. A few examples from both categories: *LL* “lengthy list” (35; “Tim’s acronyms often annoyed mum [...]” – but this is not an acronym of course! Whose mistake is this?), *PP* “paternal parent” (50), *MP* “maternal parent” (51), *BS* “big sister” (152), *HH* “ha ha” (78), *FU* “family unit” (139) etc. Most of these abbreviations occur more than once.

Much more puzzling are some of his “warfare” terms, many picked up from too intense an exposure to computer war-games while he lived in London: *SS* “sister survey” (35), *LRP* “Long Range Patrol” (70), *IP* “Invisible Person / People / Presences, Ghosts” (70 and passim), *SOP* “Standard Operating Procedure” (113), *U-Dub* “U-Double U = UW = Ultimate Weapon = Tim’s Catapult” (113 and passim), *DefCon 4, 3, 2, 1* “an alert system; Defence Control, 4 being low alert, 1 being full alert / “war” (117) and passim, *IPC.inC.* “Invisible People’s Chief in Command (141 and passim), *IpKick* “Ipc.inc. turned into a pronounceable acronym” (114 and passim) etc. And finally a look at Tim’s non-abbreviated “war” vocabulary. In a short paragraph of just 30 lines we find this: *squaddies, Enemy, a shot in the head, well-earned leave, headshots, the order, bullets, combat zone, peace treaty, Killing the enemy, heroism, mission, man-hours, the war, clean victory, no victory, enemy, victory, squaddies* (298–299)! A good example of “lexical cohesion”.

There are two or three direct references to the local, Somerset accent/dialect: the estate agent has the “Somerset burr” (13; a reference to the local rhoticity; “He didn’t sound like a yokel, though; [...]” (113)) and so does the old girl / old ghost / Miss Teazel (?) (160); and Tim, now attending Primary School, quickly picks up the local pronunciation and lexical items (307; “*a burr*”, *youm* “you are”, *gurt* “great”). Early in the story he has an idiosyncratic pronunciation of cool: *kew-all* (12) and *kewel* (72). His reason seems obvious – *cool* can only be emphasised by lengthening the vowel; when you turn the word into two syllables you can be much more emphatic!

Are there ghosts? A possible question might be: Is new technology helping to prove the existence of ghosts? Or helping to prove they don’t exist? One possible answer is: “The only technology that has anything valid to say about ghosts is neurotechnology. [...] Ghosts ‘exist’ when our brain tells us they do. They do not exist outside us” (*Guardian* March 19, 2015). And that seems to be a perfect description of the difficulties the Naremore family finds itself in. It is all in the head(s).

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Dominik Becher

## Neil Gaiman's Ghost Children

People populate the darkness; with ghosts, with gods, with electrons, with tales.  
(Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*, 418)

**Abstract:** The article examines Gaiman's use of the ghost child motif in *The Sandman* (1989–1996), *Coraline* (2002) and *The Graveyard Book* (2008). It outlines the special symbolic tensions that result from the conflicting images of “ghost” and “child” and shows that Gaiman focusses on a liminal space between the two, in the shape of half-ghosts, or “dead boy detectives”. The paper suggests three emotional movements for the ghost plotlines of the analysed stories: from terror to hope, from pity to salvation and from desolation to connectedness. From this it concludes that Gaiman's stories represent the ghost child motif as symbol for a positive relation with Death.

Ghosts and ghost stories are essential to the storytelling of Neil Gaiman. He tells their tales with rhetoric emphasis, savouring the scary moments, evoking an emotional intensity that forcefully underlines the suspension of disbelief. If we are scared of ghosts, how can they not have at least some kind of reality? To give the conclusion at the beginning: one of the hallmarks of Gaiman's use of the ghost child motif is a playful uncertainty, a fanciful desire that there really *should* be ghosts, but (un-)fortunately they exist only in fiction. This leads to the creation of a new type of “half-ghost” in his writing. We can sense this positive sentiment towards ghosts for example when listening to Gaiman's reading performance of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, which is, above all, a joyful performance. Especially significant is the initial encounter between Scrooge and Marley's ghost, in which supernatural fear disrupts and overcomes the banality of the mundane and cold hearted Scrooge. Fear of ghosts is here the first step to redemption:

‘You don't believe in me,’ observed the Ghost.

‘I don't,’ said Scrooge. (Dickens 18)

[...]

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands before his face.

‘Mercy!’ he said. ‘Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?’

‘Man of the worldly mind!’ replied the Ghost, ‘do you believe in me or not?’

‘I do,’ said Scrooge. ‘I must. [...]’ (Dickens 19)<sup>1</sup>

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1 Neil Gaiman's reading from December 2013 in the New York Public Library is available as podcast.

Neil Gaiman gleefully emphasises the supernatural horror in his performance. Generally, he adapts the joyful telling of dark stories to contemporary tastes. He works to reinvent the horror genre, and not only for young readers. To exemplify this, the following article will throw light on how Gaiman uses ghost motives, with special attention to the ghosts of children, in *The Sandman* (1989–1996), *Coraline* (2002) and *The Graveyard Book* (2008).<sup>2</sup> To understand Gaiman’s use of ghost children, the paper presents possible affective reactions of the implied reader and outlines emotional swings or oscillating pairs of emotions as characteristic of Gaiman’s approach.

The profoundly “oscillating” character of fear is obvious: “chill”, “shiver”, “tremble”, “rattle”, “heart-pounding” and so on; many fright related expressions, as well as the corresponding bodily manifestations of fear, imply oscillating movements. Likewise, frightening fiction, and especially ghost stories, embrace different narrative rhythms of tension and relaxation. Typically, the genre’s dramaturgy oscillates between poles such as the known and the unknown, safety and danger, natural and supernatural, past and present, life and death – each associated with a variety of intense emotions. In the second part of the paper, this emotional pendulum is described in three stories: from terror to hope (*The Sandman*), from pity to salvation (*Coraline*) and from desolation to connectedness (*The Graveyard Book*).

First, however, it is necessary to outline the wider significance of ghosts and scary fiction for children, as well as the special emotional contradictions that are implied by the idea of ghost children. Contemporary children’s literature criticism acknowledges that ghost stories, and in the wider sense scary fictions, play elementary roles in growing (up). Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) has argued that especially the dark symbolism of fairy tales – and this includes ghosts – has psychologically positive and necessary functions for the mental development of children. Bettelheim’s work has defended and reinforced a view on the “healthy Gothic” that accompanies the contemporarily widespread acceptance of the elements of horror in fiction for children. Consequently, psychological criticism of children’s horror fiction is a common mode of analysis. For example Karen Coats concludes an analysis of Gaiman’s *Coraline* with the beneficial effects of the Gothic from a developmental perspective:

This may be yet another function of the Gothic for outwardly stable, well-loved children. Their worlds do not provide them with circumstances that adequately represent for them

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2 The original presentation of this paper was done with the focus on the graphic novels to these stories, some references to these texts and illustrations remain.

the violent, bleeding cut that is psychically necessary for them to learn to be alone in the presence of their parents. Their outer lives give them no actual contexts for the fear that accompanies the inner dramas and psychic losses that are an inevitable legacy of growing up. Well-made Gothic can fill in those gaps, giving concrete expression to abstract psychic processes, keeping dark fascinations and haunting fears where children can see them, and mingling the horror with healthy doses of humour and hope. (Coats 91)

Here we see the Gothic as providing a safe simulacrum of otherwise possibly traumatic negative experiences, which modern middle class life seems to be “lacking”. We also see from the above passage that a central affective oscillation of Gothic narrative is fear and humour. Especially in texts for younger children, comic relief is an obvious strategy to contain the negative emotions evoked by the Gothic. Going beyond a simple division of negative and positive feelings, the frequent pairing of the conflicting emotions horror and humour in contemporary children’s fiction has been seen as an expression of “how contemporary life is becoming more uncertain, full of anxieties and complexity” (Cross 65). Coats too reads Gaiman’s emphasis on the coupling of fear and humour as a response to the ambiguities of contemporary life: “Gaiman often combines humour and horror, which has been the legacy of the Gothic since its inception, and indicates the close relation between fear and humour as two affective responses to incongruent stimuli” (Coats 78). Incongruent stimuli relate also to the disruption of reality in the ironic and the affirmative, the realist and the fantastic modes, which often clash in ghost stories. For Richard Gooding, Gaiman’s *Coraline* is technical innovative, which has much to do with the fact that “Gaiman begins to blur these boundaries [between real and fantasy] almost immediately” (393). For Coats on the other hand, Gaiman’s stories are traditional, he does Gothic “old school”, especially from an ethical and gender perspective (*ibid.*), but also with clear cut boundaries between the real and the fantastic levels of his narratives.

Gaiman admits to this playful conventionality, as I would describe it, for example in his insistence on the scariness of evil, the containment of fear and the closed story with a happy end that ultimately overcomes fear. In Gaiman’s own words: “In order for stories to work — for kids *and* for adults — they should scare. And you should triumph. There’s no point in triumphing over evil if the evil isn’t scary” (Popova 2014). This attitude toward children’s scary fiction echoes in the emotional movements that will be outlined, which oscillate from the negative, darker emotions toward positive states mind; from fear to humour, from terror to hope, from desolation to connectedness, and so on.

More often than not, Neil Gaiman stops the swing of his ghost narratives’ emotional pendulum on the “soft” and contained, the familiar side of safety

and comfort. This attitude plays an important part in the cathartic and healing qualities of his writing. Just like Scrooge in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, the emotional exercise, which Gaiman proposes to his readers, leaves them moved and therefore ultimately "softened" and "receptive", but not disoriented and traumatised. Young readers are frequently considered to naturally be "sponges", permanently absorbing all impressions. For Gaiman, scary stories at the right age or in the right conditions are the medium of choice to make an unequalled impact:

Stories you read when you're the right age never quite leave you. You may forget who wrote them or what the story was called. Sometimes you'll forget precisely what happened, but if a story touches you it will stay with you, haunting the places in your mind that you rarely ever visit.

Horror stays with you hardest. If it brings a real chill to the back of your neck, if once the story is done you find yourself closing the book slowly, for fear of disturbing something, and creeping away, then it's there for the rest of time. There was a story I read when I was nine that ended with a room covered with snails. I think they were probably man-eating snails, and they were crawling slowly toward someone to eat him. I get the same creeps remembering it now that I did when I read it. (*M is for Magic*, ixf)

For Gaiman, the emotional impact of stories may leave "ghostly" impressions on the reader, "haunting" her. On the one hand, memory, body and emotion are intertwined: a deeply felt experience will be remembered for a long time, strong feelings create importance, they structure memory and thus frame the future. On the other hand, ghost tales seem to provide something of an archetypical model of storytelling for Gaiman, which connect us with the past.

Gaiman's quote from *American Gods*, which opens this essay, may be read as a commentary on ghost stories and their relation to storytelling in more general, almost anthropological terms. "People populate the darkness; with ghosts, with gods, with electrons, with tales" (*American Gods* 418), Gaiman writes and begins his list with ghosts, as if they belong to the first imaginative inventions of mankind. The telling of ghost tales rooted in human culture is that omnipresent (cf. Briggs 177; "Ghost Story" in Clute 403). Moreover, can we imagine a better, more stereotypical setting to tell a ghost story than that of a small group of people huddled closely together around a campfire, while the wild beasts of the woods howl close by, in the deep dark night? With this picture in mind, Gaiman's phrase can be seen as a history of culture *in nuce*. In the "dark" prehistoric beginning of mankind this same darkness was cause for much fear and thus contributed to the need to tell stories. Ghost stories go beyond the pragmatic invention of language to serve everyday communication. They are



part of those artful tales which create meaning and construct the comfortable zone of the familiar in the world. The illumination of darkness, not only with fire, but also with tales, may be seen as an important factor in the emergence of civilisation, a first step toward enlightenment. Ghost tales, probably in the first place those about ancestors and the deceased, may figure among the oldest, the primordial tales. Gaiman opens a panorama from the magical world view of prehistoric times, which is the basis for the religious world view (gods) to the scientific (electrons) view of enlightened modernity. Most importantly, in the eyes of the storyteller, these three different world-views are not merely seen as a historical sequence of conflicting paradigms of progress; for the storyteller, magic, religion and science essentially fulfil the same narrative function, which is to make us feel at home in the world. The telling of ghost stories itself connects to that primordial tradition and is therefore a “magical” technique. Moreover, it is a technique which we relate especially to children:

The ghost story's 'explanations' do not operate to rationalize or demystify the supernatural events, but rather to set them inside a kind of imaginative logic in which the normal laws of cause and effect are suspended in favor of what Freud termed “animistic” ways of thinking, in which thought itself is a mode of power, in which wishes or fears can actually benefit or do harm – ways of thinking that are characteristic of very small children who haven't yet defined their own limits, but which Western educational traditions have taught us to reject or leave behind. The ghost story reverts to a world in which imagination can produce physical effects, a world that is potentially within our power to change by the energy of our thoughts, yet practically alarming. And of course the ghost story itself lends some degree of credence to the powers of the imagination, since the mere words on the page can, in their limited way, reproduce the effects they describe: once we are in the grip of the narrative, the heartbeat speeds up, the skin sweats, or prickles, and any unexpected noise will cause the reader to jump. (Briggs 178)

This magical intensity and the emotional truth of ghost stories, as has been shown with the help of the initial example by Dickens, may be read as an initiation to deeper, perhaps religious, but certainly ultimate questions. The paradox of the ghost motive (return from the dead) may be seen as an affirmation of the idea of an afterlife, or at least evokes the discussion of the issue. Children have a two-fold relation to these questions. On the one hand, they are innocent and have to learn about death, on the other hand, they are themselves symbols of life and thus oppose death. Kimberly Reynolds writes in the introduction to *Frightening Fiction*:

Flirting with the idea of death can be understood as the beginning of accepting that death is inevitable, an idea which is beyond most young children. At the same time, adolescents frequently believe (or act as if they believe) that they are immortal. Texts which provide vicarious encounters with ghosts, the undead, and others who exist outside the conventional definitions of life may be read as confirming this belief: seeing a ghost is frightening, but it can also be taken as evidence that death is not the end of the self, and even that interaction with the known world remains possible after death. (Reynolds, 7)

To sum up these complexities we may assume that ghost tales for children are a traditional and sensitive topic (nowadays mostly evoking protective instincts by adults in the question of what level of scariness is appropriate for children). Children are supposed to be especially impressionable, and ghost stories can have a deep and therefore lasting emotional impact. Humour is a “natural” emotional reaction to fear caused by ghost stories for children. Ghost stories provide access to the darker elements of the psyche, as well as existential questions and religious imagination. The magical suspension of disbelief, characteristic for fiction and particularly fantastic fiction, is especially easy for children. Ghost stories are primordial tales. The naïve child is oblivious to death, yet ghost stories raise the issue. The child as a symbol is an antithesis to death. Narratives of child death are therefore especially tragic.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the motif of child-ghosts manifests at least a double paradox: it represents the communication with the world of the dead on the one hand and on the other hand the premature death of innocents, who are the symbol of eternal life. Traditional ghosts often return as a consequence of “unfinished business” in life and therefore represent a continuity of the past. Child ghosts represent the denial of life and opportunity itself – their paradox is that of eternal discontinuity.

Neil Gaiman’s mode of choice to deal with the contradictions of child ghosts is, as has been outlined above, comic relief and a happy ending. However, it becomes obvious in stories such as, “Click Clack the Rattle Bag”, with its meta-fictional play on telling scary stories and its inversion of traditional roles, that he is consciously choosing between the many narrative options to represent the motif<sup>4</sup> – here the seemingly innocent child is the monster, and all the scarier

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3 The death of “Little Nell” in Charles Dickens *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) is such an iconic Victorian child death, whose tragic is reinforced through the image of her loving grandfather waiting until his own last breath for her return on her grave; an option that is denied through the realistic mode of Dicken’s narrative, thus underlining the terminal sadness of the old man.

4 A video of Neil Gaiman reading “Click Clack the Rattlebag” on 21.12.2014 in the New York Public Library is available online; see work cited list.

for it. Whatever the role which Gaiman chooses for his child ghost, he tells its story passionately and with empathy, and in the fictional encounter with his ghost children the reader can enjoy an imaginary, impossible communication which bridges the gap between life and death.

### **Ghost Children in *The Sandman*. From Terror to Hope**

The first example of ghost children is *The Sandman*, issue #25, (first published in April 1991) "Seasons of Mist: Chapter 4". The episode carries the subtitle: "In which the dead return and Charles Rowland concludes his education". In the larger plot arc, the issue serves as an illustration of the consequences after Lucifer has emptied and closed down hell and the spirits of the damned return to haunt the places of their past lives. Within this back story, the series' main protagonists and supernatural powers are almost completely absent in issue 25. Instead it focusses on 13 year old Charles Rowland who has to stay as the only pupil at the British boarding school St. Hilarions during the winter break. At the beginning of the story, the protagonist Charles Rowland dies in the school's attic, while his ghostly friend Edwin Paine is holding his hand. The story then retells the last six days of Charles's life. In these days he has been tortured by the spirits which returned from hell to the boarding school, chief amongst them the headmaster Parkinson:

[...] Despite any tribulations we might have experienced, we are all now back at school. At the *old school* [...] You all died here [...] I will teach you what I learned. In hell I learned so many things. [...] You are schoolboys. You are at school. You come to school to study. Therefore you will study'. (*The Sandman* 14 f.)

What really haunts the boy, apart from the demonic headmaster, is the return of a cruel school system, which includes corporal punishment (15), unquestioning obedience (*ibid.*), silent study (*ibid.*), nonsensical rote learning (23), ice-bathing (16) and a group of brutal bullies (13, 18). This "old school" appears as hell on earth and the mortal boy succumbs to the extremely harsh treatment within days, while he is forced to participate in the grotesque re-enactment of a past educational system. His only friend is the ghost of Edwin Paine, another victim of the bullies and their attempts at black magic (12). However, the care of a ghost friend is not enough to save his life and Charles Rowland dies.

*Evil Ghost Child*

In Gaiman's representation, death is the turning point when terror stops. Charles's afterlife begins when he opens his eyes to beautiful Death (20), who is one of the main protagonists of *The Sandman* series, sister to the Sandman, who, in turn, is an allegory of dream. Death appears as a fashionable, caring, 1980s style Goth, who acts slightly exasperated and hasty due to the chaotic state of the afterworld at that point in the story. She permits the two ghost boys to do what they want – until the metaphysical disorder has been resolved (21). The boys' suffering and oppression stops and thus their youthful optimism can emerge: they recognise that "[...] we've learned all we're going to at school. Now: let's see what life's got to offer us..." (24), and hand in hand the two ghostly friends set out to make the most of their remaining time on earth. In the last panel they leave school and step off the asphalted road into untrodden grassland, away from their bleak education, toward an open future. Their future adventures have been detailed in a variety of spin-off series to *The Sandman* in a genre crossover that may be called "boarding school teenage ghost detective stories": *The Children's Crusade* (1993–1994) and *Sandman Presents: Dead Boy Detectives* (Ed Brubaker, 2001). They also have further various short appearances in *The Sandman* universe.

*Dead Boy Detective*

We can discern two types of ghost children in this story: the traditional ghost, which returns and repeats its crime: the bullies, who haunt the school boys. This type suffers a repetitive punishment for mortal sins, which goes so far that they inflict their own tortures on themselves in the absence of victims (23). Furthermore, this type shows no significant difference to conventional adult evil spirits, apart from a heightened sense of the macabre, when the image of an “innocent child” is perverted and serves to represent demonic entities. The second type is perhaps Gaiman’s own invention: the “dead boy detective”. It is a ghost protagonist, which subverts the classical ghost image by occupying the liminal space between life and death, thus examining the border between the two. Just like mortals the dead boy detectives have a limited time remaining on earth. This special condition comes with the possibility to negotiate between the worlds of the dead and the living – a theme that we will see repeated in *The Graveyard Book*. As death liberates the boys, their agency and their child-like qualities it returns, which is here primarily an optimistic, hopeful outlook toward the future. Thus ghost children may even enjoy their undead state – for as long as it lasts.

### **Ghost Children in *Coraline*. From Pity to Salvation**

The child ghosts in *Coraline* are a counter example to the care-free dead boy detectives in *The Sandman*. They are minor characters in Gaiman’s *Coraline*. As the representation of minor characters tends to be more stereotypical, which is the case with the child ghosts in *Coraline*, we see here the conventional, one dimensional

image of child ghosts. Dramaturgically they serve as a warning; as victims, who have to be freed from the clutches of the villain. Afterwards, they serve as helpers.

*Ghost Child Victim*



*Coraline* is a story about a bored young girl, who does not get sufficient attention from her parents and escapes into an otherworld, which is the lair of the story's villain, the "Other Mother". The child ghosts that are locked away in this otherworld are former victims of this demon, also called the beldam, who have been sucked dry of their love. They are described and illustrated as translucent, "pale figures, [...] nothing more than afterimages, like the glow left by a bright light in your eyes, after the lights go out" (101). All that is left to them is the feeling of emptiness: "'Hollow,' whispered the third voice. 'Hollow, hollow, hollow, hollow, hollow'" (ibid.). The child ghosts are represented as Victorian children, playing on the image of the angelic child and its pitiful death. This is exactly the reaction which they invoke in *Coraline* (and the reader). First they warn Coraline of her fate, if she succumbs to the seduction of the beldam:

'She will take your life and all you are and all you care'st for, and she will leave you with nothing but mist and fog. She'll take your joy. And one day you'll awake and your heart and your soul will have gone. A husk you'll be, a wisp you'll be, and a thing no more than a dream on waking, or a memory of something forgotten.' (ibid.)

Later they offer valuable help in the defeat of the insidious beldam (102 f., 116, 128). After Coraline has freed the souls of the ghost children, they are able to interact one last time with the heroine, giving her the strength to leave the demon's realm:

They moved through her, then: ghost-hands lent her strength that she no longer possessed. There was a final moment of resistance, as if something were caught in the door, and then, with a crash, the wooden door banged closed. (160)

Coraline returns to the world of the living, pursued by the animated red right hand of the Other Mother, which she finally buries in a deep well. Thus, the story acknowledges the possibility that Evil may return and that the emotional pendulum may swing back from safety to danger and fear at any time. The ghost children, however, have been positively redeemed and can pass on, probably to a better kind of afterlife. Coraline has a chance to see them on their way in a dream:

And in her dream Coraline saw that the sun had set and the stars were twinkling in the darkening sky. Coraline stood in the meadow, and she watched as the three children (two of them walking, one flying) went away from her, across the grass, silver in the light of the huge moon. The three of them came to a small wooden bridge over a stream. They stopped there, and turned and waved, and Coraline waved back. And what came after was darkness. (174)

This classic representation of a child ghost carries the heroic, triumphant emotions of *Coraline's* plot and its happy ending. The child ghosts represent here the possibility to set right past wrongs and to connect positively with the dead.

### **The Ghost Child in *The Graveyard Book*. From Desolation to Connectedness**

The positive connection to the dead is a central point of the use of the child ghost motif in *The Graveyard Book*. The story begins with the shocking, cold blooded murder of a family. The toddler is the only survivor, who, by sheer luck, crawls away to the nearby graveyard. There he is adopted and raised by the ghosts who inhabit the graveyard.

Motherly empathy is represented as carrying on beyond death – the ghost of the recently killed mother begs the other ghosts to protect her baby (14 f.) and the ghostly foster parents Mr. and Mrs. Owens, who could not have children when they were alive, decide to take care of the boy. From the side of the dead, love and

care for the living is a prerequisite for the survival of the child, called Bod Owens, short for Nobody Owens. From the side of the living, the child's innocence and vitality is a second prerequisite to overcome the initial tragedy: Bod grows up among the ghosts of the dead, as brightly spirited, as if his surroundings were the most natural thing in the world. He is not allowed to leave the graveyard, which becomes his home, his "cozy tomb" (150) even. Humour contains the tragic beginning of the story and creates an ironic narrative voice, which is light-hearted enough to suit all audiences: "You might think—and if you did, you would be right—that Mr. Owens should not have taken on so at seeing a ghost, given that Mr. and Mrs. Owens were themselves dead [...]" (14). The book is full of puns on death and being undead, such as young Bod asking: "Who lives in there?" (37), inquiring about the ghostly inhabitants of the grave next door.

Bod is a playful take on the ghost character, he is alive, but his upbringing gives him ghostly powers: he is given the "Freedom of the Graveyard" (22), a state which protects him from harm and makes him ghostly – he is almost invisible and normal visitors of the graveyard ignore him. Later he learns to consciously fade away from sight and he even masters the power to haunt the dreams of mortals, such as the school bullies Nick Farthing and Maureen Quilling (183 ff., 194–196). Therefore, he is a half-ghost entity.<sup>5</sup> This eccentric state in both the worlds of the death and the living, allows him to examine and negotiate the border between the two, like no other.

The best example for this function is, to my mind, the central fifth chapter of the story, which carries the title "Danse Macabre" and which takes up the medieval tradition of the death dance. It is set on a special day, when winter flowers blossom. On this day the two worlds meet in a folklore carnival: the townspeople and the dead join in a midnight dance: "Rich man, poor man, come away, come to dance the Macabray" (144), goes the tune. The townsfolk do not believe in this event as having any metaphysical significance – to the Mayoress it is a perfectly ridiculous tradition (151). Consequently the living never remember the event (159), but the dead do, and so does Bod. His privileged place between both worlds earns him the honour of the last dance, which is with Death herself, who appears as a sublime lady in grey, clothed in cobwebs, and who rides a white horse. In this dancing union everybody joins in, smiling (160). It is a happy and sublime moment, as the brief dialogue between Death and Bod during their dance illustrates:

'I love your horse. He's so big! I never knew horses could be that big.'

'He is gentle enough to bear the mightiest of you away on his broad back, and strong enough for the smallest of you as well.'

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5 Compare to the half-ghost boy Hemi in China Miéville's *UnLunDun* (2007). Both writers are interested in the in-betweenness of the fantastic grotesque.



'Can I ride him?' asked Bod.

'One day,' she told him, and her cobweb skirts shimmered. 'One day. Everybody does.'

'Promise?'

'I promise.' (161 f.)

This positive approach toward death subverts the horror genre, in which for the most part the greatest source of fear are death and terrible armies of undead. In *The Graveyard Book* there is comfort in the certainty of a sublime and beautiful death – an observation that all too often goes unnoticed in our modern society, which most of the time embraces a lifestyle and adolescent attitude toward death, pretending that we are all immortal.

Neil Gaiman's narratives of ghost children give fictional space to a healthy relation with death, which he examines especially with the liminal, half-ghostly characters that introduce a subtle shade of differentiation between not the living and the dead, but the living and the ghosts. In combination with the positive child-like qualities, these child "half-ghosts" carry closed narratives which we can clearly see in the traditional fairy tale motif after the dance macabre: "When the dance was done the townsquare looked like after a wedding" (162). *The Graveyard Book* is until now the primary example for this new kind of in-betweenness, which centres on the co-existence and connectedness of the living and the (un)dead. As childhood is the most formative phase in life, the protagonist Bod is deeply affected by his positive relation with the ghosts. Although he himself loses his ghostliness in the process of growing up and at the end of the story he walks into adulthood to "leave no path untaken" (306), he will always fondly remember the graveyard as a "cozy", homely place to finally return to (307).

In conclusion, ghost children, as we have seen them in Neil Gaiman's narratives, are ultimately likeable characters, who redeem their frightening undead state in a variety of ways. First, they offer a humorous and therefore humane variety of the ghost motif. Secondly, they serve as mediators between the world of the living and the world of spirits, between past and future. Most importantly, they represent a positive relationship with Death, portraying a child-like perspective on it that is not ignorant of its darker aspects. Rather it is a perspective that results from the conscious choice to stop the stories' emotional pendulum at the right moment and with an optimistic outlook. At least to me, these seem sufficient reasons to wish that there really were ghosts, Gaiman's kind of ghosts.

Half Ghost. Bod Dances with Death



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Julia Kunz

## The Ghost as a Metaphor for Memory in the Irish Literary Psyche

**Abstract:** According to traditional belief, a ghost is an apparition; it is thought to be the spirit or the soul of a dead person haunting the living. In literature, however, I would like to argue that the ghost becomes a metaphor for memory, or as Tabitha King suggests, “the ghost is almost always a metaphor for the weight of the past”. This idea, then, is particularly apt with regard to the Irish literary psyche. Due to Ireland’s battle with the repercussions of a colonial past, its history of emigration, as well as bearing in mind the recent abuse scandals that have come to light concerning the Catholic Church, the struggle with the past is a theme deeply ingrained in Irish culture. In turn, remembering as a means to construct a sense of self via narrative lies at the heart of Irish literature. Anne Enright’s 2007 novel *The Gathering* serves as only one example of the ghost as a metaphor for memory in contemporary Irish literature. The narrator, Veronica, part of the new Ireland and still profiting from the wealth of the Celtic Tiger years, is haunted by the memory of her dead brother Liam; the murky family past is set against Veronica’s neat and middle-class existence, her brother’s tragic fate manipulating the narrator’s present. In the novel, meaning derives only from the context of Liam’s death. Using Enright’s novel as a prime case study as well as briefly discussing other examples of contemporary Irish literature such as Frank McCourt’s memoir *Angela’s Ashes* (1996) and Donal Ryan’s recent success *The Spinning Heart* (2013), this talk will attempt to address the key question of how the idea of the ghost as a metaphor for memory informs Irish literature specifically. My findings will be supported by literary theories connecting the concepts of memory and identity construction, incorporating ideas developed by Esther Peeren (*The Spectral Metaphor*) and Nicola King (*Memory, Narrative, Identity*).

### Introduction

Although Ireland is full of stories about fairies, ghosts, and all sorts of spiritual beings, a host of these, for further reference, neatly assembled and colourfully described in William Butler Yeats’s famous anthology of 1888 *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, I want to approach the topic from a different angle. I would like to suggest that the ghost becomes a metaphor for memory; it is also a metaphor for things hidden and buried, for memories that haunt Irish life and culture today and that are therefore expressed and present in art and in contemporary literature. The kind of ghost I want to talk about is metaphorical. The basis for my paper has incidentally been provided by Tabitha King, who

suggests that “in literature, the ghost is almost always a metaphor for the weight of the past”, an idea that is exceptionally appropriate in an Irish context and occurred to me a few years ago while reading Anne Enright’s work *The Gathering* (2007), the book that will be central to this paper. I bought Enright’s novel at Dublin Airport where I had a few hours to spare before I headed home to Germany. Reflecting on this memory now I think it is a very fitting one as the airport itself is a place of transition and of movement; it is today the departure point for many an Irish emigrant and emigration is an issue that lies at the heart of the things that haunt Ireland. Emigration is one of the ghosts that haunts the Emerald Isle – Catholicism, colonialism, poverty are the other ghosts that still influence contemporary Irish literature. They are engrained in the Irish literary psyche, and memory as represented in Irish fiction is where we can dissect them best. I have picked three works of Irish contemporary literature that I would like to use to underline this idea and I will move chronologically, starting with *Angela’s Ashes – A Memoir* (Frank McCourt, 1996), to *The Gathering* (Anne Enright 2007) and lastly, I briefly want to touch upon Donal Ryan’s work *The Spinning Heart* (2013).

### **1. *Angela’s Ashes – A Memoir* by Frank McCourt**

When one takes the ghost to be a metaphor for memory, questions that arise are: how memory functions, how it is constructed and deconstructed in narrative, and how it contributes toward building up notions of identity? With his portrayal of a childhood in a Limerick rampant with poverty, priests and powerlessness, McCourt succeeds in capturing a distinct Irish identity that has broader repercussions than for merely his own person. He does so by making use of certain techniques that Nicola King explores in her work *Memory, Narrative, Identity* (2000). King argues that identity is rehearsed multiple times in a narrative which is aiming at recovering the self that existed before; so memory really is a rehearsal of different truths; an autobiography or memoir is therefore a “paradoxical knowing and not knowing” (2). Ultimately, this means that an author writes from a perspective removed from the setting of his or her narrative; in the case of *Angela’s Ashes*, the author reconstructs memory to a certain end that I will address in the next paragraph.

McCourt’s account is made possible only through memories. The function of memory is to give the narrator access to the past; it also inevitably means that he can manipulate it. With regard to *Angela’s Ashes*, McCourt revisits the past and reconstructs a sense of Irishness. We can only guess to what end he does this – it may be a reconciliation with the past, or an act of reconciliation with his

mother Angela, whose ghost haunts the narrative as well as both of the author's later books *'Tis* (1999) and *Teacher Man* (2005). But we can, for example, address how the author conjures this particular idea of Irishness by looking at the book's opening passage:

When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I survived at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood. (McCourt 9)

This quotation is an apt illustration of the narrator's memory of his childhood and it is concerned with the narrator's central memory of his childhood: the poverty, that his childhood was a miserable childhood, that the misery of his childhood is somehow very much linked to and rooted in its Irishness, and what makes his experiences even worse is that the Catholic religion of his youth has a particularly repressive strain.

Unsurprisingly, McCourt's memoir has been called an "epic of woe" by the *New York Times*. McCourt constructs a particular Irish identity via his narrative and ponders the question of Irishness in general: At the onset of his memoir, McCourt's parents still live as emigrants in Brooklyn; throughout the book, he refers to episodes of his mother's begging and to the family's poverty, but at the same time he recounts happy memories of his father telling stories about the great Irish heroes, such as Cuchulain. So the three central themes haunting McCourt's memoir can be seen to reflect a collective Irish past, bringing into focus the Famine years of the 1840s, Ireland's long history of emigration, as well as its bleak brand of Catholicism. All of these themes are at the heart of McCourt's memoir; and McCourt uses them in order to create an identity, which becomes very much an Irish identity, at least from the narrator's point of view. And now from here I would like to move on to Anne Enright, whose work *The Gathering* is informed by the same question of Irishness, Irish identity in literature, whether there is such a thing and if so, how it is characterised, and the ghosts that haunt the Irish literary landscape.

## 2. *The Gathering* – Anne Enright

Anne Enright lets her main character address the question of Irishness on a meta-fictional level. Veronica, the narrator of the novel muses:

There is always a drunk. There is always someone who has been interfered with, as a child. There is always a colossal success, with several houses in various countries to which no one is ever invited. (Enright 185)

In the *London Review of Books* Eleanor Birne writes that Enright, as a novelist coming out of an Irish tradition, is aware of the predictability of her family situation and I would suggest that her knowing intervention is a pre-emptive measure against those who may be too rash in judging her to be merely another purveyor of Irish sob stories. *The Gathering*, the Booker Prize winning novel by Anne Enright who is Ireland's first Laureate for Fiction, is exemplary of the ghost as a metaphor for memory. Here, the narrator Veronica, as part of the "New Ireland" and still profiting from the Celtic Tiger years, organises the wake for her brother Liam, who committed suicide. At the heart of the novel lies the theme of abuse, the issue of lives tainted by large families and, in the long run, Catholicism and its repercussions. Veronica goes back and forth in reflecting on her brother's life and death and the event that seems to have triggered Liam's suicide; this particular moment in time that she is unsure of whether and how exactly it happened. She is, essentially, an unreliable narrator and conjures up a story about her grandmother which becomes the frame of the novel and the frame of another untold story about her brother. Veronica is haunted by her brother; by certain memories, all entangled with a collective Irish memory. Anne Enright writes:

I know, as I write about these three things: the jacket, the stones, and my brother's nakedness underneath his clothes, that they require me to deal in facts. It is time to put an end to the shifting stories and the waking dreams. It is time to call an end to romance and just say what happened in Ada's house, the year that I was eight and Liam was barely nine. (Enright 142)

In order to deal in facts, Enright's narrator therefore digs deep into her past and reflects on a memory of a certain event in 1968 that, as she claims herself, may or may not have happened:

'It was as if Mr Nugent's penis, which was sticking straight out of his flies, had grown strangely, and flowered at the tip to produce the large and unwieldy shape of a boy, that boy being my brother Liam.' (Enright 144)

This scene occurs just over halfway through the book and links Enright's narrative method of hinting at events and of going back and forth while tracing an uncertain memory to a model of memory which originates with Freud, an idea that offers insight with regard to the topic of this paper. Nicola King elaborates on this notion and explains that with regard to a "potentially traumatic but 'un-registered' original event, only the occurrence of a second scene can endow the first one with a pathogenic force" (Laplanche and Pontalis qtd. in King 4). This idea is clearly displayed in Anne Enright's work. Here, the narrator's brother dies, which signifies the second scene, and in Veronica's mind this occurrence brings to



light this prior, past scene of 1968, the vague memory of her brother being abused by her grandmother's friend. Hence, memory becomes a process of continuous revision in the light of later knowledge and experience (King 4) and as Benjamin writes "Memory is really the capacity for endless interpolations into what has been" (Benjamin qtd. in King 4).

Notably, this model of memory links Enright's narrative to the post-Freudian concept of *Nachtraeglichkeit* [sic], or 'afterwardness', an idea developed further by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Nicholls and which serves as a tool for the analysis of narrative and in relation to the past. Mainly, this idea denotes that if in doubt, our mind supplements details of events that lie in the past, thus problematising the truth status of the event, which in the case of this novel is the event of Liam being abused as a child. Williams writes: "The child hears or sees something, but the material is only gradually inserted into a narrative or coherent picture as it is actively reworked in memory – a reinterpretation and reinscription of the scene taking place over time in the developed subject" (qtd. in King 18).

In Enright's novel, this concept of *Nachtraeglichkeit* [sic] becomes a successful narrative device as Veronica reflects on the truth status of her brother's abuse and as she constantly questions and reassesses her own memory of the event. With the help of this psychologically coloured narrative device, by digging over the same ground again and again, Enright sets in motion a process of retranscription and active reworking that ultimately transfers the narrator's unreliable memory of abuse to a broader scale – to the excavation of a topic of cultural relevance and to matters deeply engrained in a collective memory, to the issue of abuse, taking the shape of her dead brother Liam and caused by members of the Irish clergy, the weight of this issue reinforced by governmental inquiries such as the Ryan Commission and the Murphy Report of 2009, both of which investigated the extent and effects of abused children in Catholic institutions.

To conclude, Eleonor Birne writes fittingly: "The skeletons are out of the closet. The bones are lined up. The words are on the page. With its resuscitations, *The Gathering* is a ghost story of sorts" (Birne 31). *The Gathering* is indeed "a grounded ghost story, and therefore a better one, made up of clues and facts and memories. It is a story of recollections and reimaginings and piercings together that aims to bring back the dead; to try and see what made them work; to try and see what did for them. Liam isn't coming back to haunt anybody, but the facts of his story haunt his sister. Ada; Nugent; Charlie; Liam. Veronica aside, the most compelling characters in this novel are all dead, brought back to life by the skill and the imagination of the family historian, the family imaginer (cf. Birne 31).

### 3. *The Spinning Heart* by Donal Ryan

This is the most recent of the works I would like to draw upon; released to widespread critical acclaim, *The Spinning Heart* is set in an Ireland that would be familiar to a reader of *The Gathering*, although with the marked difference that it is a rural novel in a country where the previous predominance of the rural as an ideal and an idyll has ebbed away. Ryan's debut seizes on the atmosphere prevalent during the Celtic Tiger and subsequent recession years. In Ryan's novel, the catalyst for the local community's present circumstances is the collapse of Pokey Byrne's building firm, after which Byrne flees the country leaving a so-called ghost estate in a state of semi-completion and his employees at a total loss. Ryan enlists a disparate group of twenty-one individuals to recount the psychic shock resulting from the wider economic turmoil. Each voice offers its own rendition of the boom and burst narrative.

Here, there seems to be no escape from Ireland's old ghosts; their old haunts may be transformed by the ruptures to the physical landscape wrought by the Celtic Tiger's reconfigurations of capital and values, but their targets remain as susceptible at the pressure points of the Irish psychology. There is a novelty in the poverty, repossessions and returning patterns of emigration, but they are themes that have been rehearsed *ad nauseam* and which leave the protagonist with a bitter aftertaste. The escape from these tired tropes of the Irish existence was transmuted into building edifices which lie empty in the ghost estates while their intended inhabitants return to escape's more familiar routes. In the novel, the ghost estate becomes symbolic for a tension between the old and the new Irelands and again, it is a novel that draws the reader's attention to Irish issues. There seems to be no escape from Ireland's old ghosts; despite the wealth of the Celtic Tiger years, Ireland seems to be in an ongoing rehearsal of the past due to its recent recession, which for many Irish seemed like the past coming to haunt them and which created a new kind of poverty, a new kind of emigration – the old ghosts seem to appear in different guises, the old country in a period of transition with an outcome just a little too familiar.

### Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to return to the idea of the ghost as a metaphor for memory; I would like to conclude that this idea is especially appropriate in the context of Irish literature. Irish contemporary literature and especially the examples I have chosen are narrations whose central characters live from revisiting the past over and over again and by so doing they create an identity; Frank McCourt's

narrator seems to attempt to reconcile with the past, looking back from America. Veronica, Anne Enright's central character, is an inhabitant of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, whose comfortable middle-class life is unsettled by her brother Liam's suicide and the memory of childhood abuse. Donal Ryan's characters inhabit post-recession Ireland but live their own ghostly tales, with the image of the ghost estate bringing to light a new kind of poverty as well as emigration. All three novels are exemplary in making use of the dead, and of memories of the dead that haunt the narrations and build towards what may be a collective Irish memory.

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Sophie Thiele

## “I Know not who these Mute Folk Are” – Ghostly Houses in Early Twentieth Century English and American Poetry

**Abstract:** The purpose of this research is to gain insights into ghostly poems of the twentieth century. Poetry is not the preferred medium to portray ghostly occurrences. Still, Edward Thomas as well as Robert Frost describe ghostly houses in the poems “Gone, Gone Again” and “Ghost House”. Freud analysed what is frightening in his study “The ‘Uncanny’”. This and other articles on ghost houses and ghostliness serve as a basis for the analysis of the two poems. Both poems were written at the beginning of the twentieth century. Time was then valued in a new way. Through modernity a different perception of time was introduced. Thus, these changes might be visible in the poetry of the period. This paper argues, that the speakers of the two poems do not fear supernatural occurrences but the past, present or future, in short: time. Both poets describe ghostly and empty houses. However, what they actually fear is time changing. Thomas, in his status as a soldier, expresses a fear that he will die soon and his belongings will be abandoned like the house he describes. Still, writing poetry gives his speaker comfort and the thought that after his death the English countryside will survive, comforts him. Frost also fears time but he is looking back to the past. He sees the ghosts as company and thus, embraces life.

Poetry may be an unusual genre for ghost stories. The short story may be more common. Still, poets of different periods, for example John Donne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Thomas Hardy, Robert Frost and Edward Thomas chose to describe ghostliness in verses. The house is often the subject of eerie poetry. As Sigmund Freud puts it in his essay “The Uncanny”, “it is in the highest degree uncanny when inanimate objects [...] come to life” (16). One reason for a house or in general an object, to come to live metaphorically is that it has outlived the people it belonged to and therefore could tell secret stories about their former owner. Houses contain invisible lives. They are haunted, haunted with ghosts of the past.

Edward Thomas and Robert Frost write about haunted houses in their poems “Gone, Gone Again” and “Ghost House”. Both poets lived in an age, the beginning of the twentieth century, which saw great changes. These changes are now associated with the term Modernity. The term is here used defining the transformations of a society from predominantly rural and agrarian to predominantly urban and industrial forms of living. These changes occurred in Britain from the

18th century. With the industrialisation a different perception of time was introduced because the importance of clocks rose and the workers had to be at their workplace at a certain hour. Additionally, trains were leaving at an accurate time. Life became faster, more regulated and time became more terrifying. Another important aspect is World War I. Thomas became a soldier and the threat the war evoked is visible in his poems. Thus, it could be argued that the speakers of the poems do not express a fear of supernatural occurrences but they feared the past, present or future, in short: time.

Theories on ghostliness and more specific ghost houses such as Sigmund Freud's will be the basis for the analysis of the two poems. The works will be scrutinised concerning the way they engage with ghostliness and how time is treated. For Thomas' poem it is important to scrutinise his prose, especially *The South Country*. With that, insights into the poetry of the twentieth century and the poets' treatment of ghostly appearances will be gained.

Freud demonstrates in his paper "The Uncanny" the origin of the word. He states that *unheimlich* is the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, which means "familiar", "native" or "belonging to the home" (Freud 76). The house is the basis for the German *unheimlich*. Houses and homeliness evoke something, and Freud states that houses are "[f]riendly, intimate, homelike" (77). Ernst Jentsch even states that "this word appears to express that someone to whom something 'uncanny' happens is not quite 'at home' or 'at ease' in the situation concerned" (Jentsch 8). Thus, the origin of *unheimlich* connotes an importance of houses in connection with ghostliness.

Houses themselves may become uncanny. This concept is according to Nickolas Royle, "a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property" (Royle 1). Thus, a house becomes eery through being without an owner or being with new owners, which certainly includes ghosts. The term derives from a "commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar" (Royle 1). The house may still be familiar, but as it is not used anymore, it is unfamiliar at the same time. Freud underlines, as quoted before, another factor for the concept: "it is in the highest degree uncanny when inanimate objects [. . .] come to life" (16). A reason for an object, to come to live metaphorically is that it has outlived the people it belonged to. Thus, time had taken away its use by robbing it off its owner. Change is a very important factor. Change always comes through time. Time destroys memories, things and eventually it kills everything. Fear might often not evoke from supernatural occurrences such as ghosts, but time as the destructive element.

## Edward Thomas: “Gone, Gone Again”

The poem “Gone, Gone Again” is one of the last poems by Edward Thomas, written in 1916. Edward Thomas enlisted in 1915 and he went to France in 1917. He was killed in action on Easter Monday of the same year. Michael Kirkham describes the circumstances of the time Thomas produced his poetry as such:

Thomas wrote all his poems on war-time and nearly half of them as a soldier training and instructing in various English camps and barracks; he seems to have written no poems during his few weeks of active service in France. Apart from the three epitaphs there are no war poems in the usual sense of the word: no poems written in anticipation or from experience of battle. Many of his poems draw on moods and scenes recollected from his pre-war travels in the southern English countryside. Yet these are not exercises in memory for their own sake; he was not trying to forget the war. (120)

In all his poems the war is perceivable through a melancholy undertone, as he wrote his poetry in wartime. Thomas’ reason to join the war was to protect his beloved country. He feared that through the war the countryside would change. In 1916, when the poem was written, he was “an officer cadet with the Royal Artillery in London” (Longley 309). Thus, the poem is certainly influenced by the war. The melancholy undertone is discernible in the first line, if not in the first word. “Gone” (1) alone already shows loss, being alone, mourning. The word is repeated four times in the first stanza:

Gone, gone again,  
May, June, July,  
And August gone,  
Again gone by. (1–4)

The repetition underlines the speaker’s feelings. “Gone” (1) also refers to time and change, and the next word “again” and the list of months accentuates this aspect. The rhyme with “by” (4) also shows that the river represents time, as something passing. Time, is clearly an important aspect of the poem. Autumn and winter are to follow. This time stands for a hard time, for cold and dark days. For Thomas, who was soon to go to France, winter represents war. The second stanza ends with an image of flowing rivers:

Not memorable  
Save that I saw them go,  
As past the empty quays  
The rivers flow. (5–8)

A river is something moving and relentless. The rhyming pattern of the poem itself is irregular. In the beginning in the first two stanzas, when he recollects the change, it is consistent: abcb. In the third stanza, the words flow like the river.

And now again,  
 In the harvest rain,  
 The Blenheim oranges  
 Fall grubby from the trees. (9–12)

“[A]gain” and “rain” are imperfect rhymes. The “grubby” oranges also indicate the end of summer, rot and, thus, time passing unstopably. The “lost one” in the fourth stanza can be an old friend who died and, thus, might be a ghost now.

As when I was young—  
 And when the lost one was here—  
 And when the war began  
 To turn young men to dung. (13–16)

The speaker mourns for his childhood. The things he encounters now have always been like this. The oranges then did become “grubby”. Martin Bidney identifies in Thomas’ poems “resentment and nostalgia [and] melancholic mourning” (292). These sentiments are also reflected in “Gone, Gone Again”. The words “young” and “dung” are the rhyming words. The passage implies that the young men’s lives are wasted in the war. The attention is turned to the last two lines of the stanza. It is unusual for Thomas to mention the war itself in his poems. As seen before, it was often discernible through an undertone. In “Gone, Gone Again” he directly addresses the topics war, death and loss. In the next stanza, Thomas turns to the old house:

Look at the old house,  
 Outmoded, dignified,  
 Dark and untenanted,  
 With grass growing instead. (17–20)

John Lucas sees the house as “the house at the heart of England [. . .] but [it is] no longer seen as a symbol of survival, of continuity, but as a finished way of life” (92). Thus, he interprets the house as something that time has stopped from being used. The way of life it represents discontinues. Edna Longley found that “[t]he house is central to Thomas’s metaphysics of inhabiting the earth and the body” (255). In *The South Country*, a collection of Thomas’ prose, he writes about houses: “The other house is not so high; nor has it eyes; nor do an old man and a girl and two children go in and out of it; it is, in fact, not a house of the living, but of the dead, a round tumulus at the edge of the hill” (197). Thus, the house in the poem



is a house for the dead. It is “[o]utmoded, dignified, dark and untenanted” (18). Thomas connects the inhabitants with their houses. A house is a body for the inhabitants. The object, the house is deserted and only the dead can use it. Change and time have made the house a ghost house.

Thomas also sees houses as such: “[a] house is a perdurable garment, giving and taking of life. If it only fit, straightaway it begins to chronicle our days. It beholds our sorrows and joys; its untalebearing walls know all our thoughts” (Thomas, *The South Country* 238). A house can tell stories about an owner. They are perceived as uncanny or ghostly because they come to live. Thus, in “Gone, Gone Again” the dark house clearly bears uncanny elements. The line twenty-one “[o]n the footsteps of life” indicates the traces everybody leaves behind. That refers to what Thomas has written in *The South Country*: everything one touches has a story to tell about one. In the sixth stanza a regular rhyme scheme occurs: abab:

Of the footsteps of life,  
The friendliness, the strife;  
In its beds have lain  
Youth, love, age, and pain. (21–24)

It is the first time in the poem that all ending syllables rhyme. The insight that something stays, even when one is dead, has a calming, a regulating effect. The form of the stanza represents this. Thomas may have thought of his going to war and reflect on the purpose, namely to protect his beloved country. Andrew Webb found that Thomas’ death “as a soldier shows that his appreciation of th[e] beauty [of the English countryside] was so heartfelt that he felt it worth joining the army and dying for it” (Webb 64). Louis Untermeyer states that Thomas was “fighting not merely for England, but for the English country-side which he loved in that queer blend of brusqueness and passion” (266). Thus, he, as seen before, does fight for his country. The speaker realises that even when he is dead, the country and its stories will survive. The next stanza has no regular rhyme scheme. The poetic “I” sees him as “that”:

I am something like that;  
Only I am not dead,  
Still breathing and interested  
In the house that is not dark:—. (25–28)

The “that” refers to what stays in a house, the stories. Longley states that “he [even] speaks as the ghost of haunted houses” (310). He sees nothing but himself as an unnatural occurrence. He, although still alive, considers how it is when he is dead. His house is not dark and untenanted yet. However, he will leave the house in the future. Thus, he fears that his house is going to be empty.

The last stanza begins with a repetition of the first line of the seventh stanza:

I am something like that:  
 Not one pane to reflect the sun,  
 For the schoolboys to throw at—  
 They have broken every one. (29–32)

The schoolboys destroy the windows of the empty house. The speaker himself was once such a schoolboy. Still, now he sees the destruction of the windows as purely negative. There is nothing there to destroy anymore. The boys just played and, through playing, destroyed something that was important to someone, namely the speaker. Thus, the poem ends sorrowfully. The speaker expresses hopelessness, even after trying to be comforted through poetry.

### Robert Frost “Ghost House”

Robert Frost’s poem “Ghost House” was written in 1901. It draws on the topic of ghostliness in a concrete way. The American poet published this work as part of the series “A Boy’s Will”. The work was written before he came to England and, in contrast to Thomas’ poem, long before the war. The ghost house is an American house. By the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, as Robert Faggen found, many houses in America were abandoned because “farm populations were dwindling rapidly” (52). Therefore, Faggen suggests that the house is a farmhouse and the poem is about life in the countryside. Deirdre Fagan states that the “opening stanza concerns itself with absence” (136):

I dwell in a lonely house I know  
 That vanished many a summer ago,  
 And left no trace but the cellar walls,  
 And a cellar in which the daylight falls,  
 And the purple-stemmed wild raspberries grow. (1–5)

The house in the poem does not exist. They have “left no trace but cellar walls” (3). Faggen states, that “life in the country bears a *memento mori*, a remembrance of death” (52). For Faggen, “[g]oing back in time imaginatively to a time made simple may seem a pastoral gesture of retreat [but i]n Frost, however, it often signals a history of loss and decay, as it [does] in ‘Ghost House’” (148). Thus, loss, decay and even death alongside expiration play an important role in the poem. The speaker remembers the house that was there and “dwell[s] with a strangely aching heart” (11). He mourns something, possibly the past. Andy Duncan identifies “the house as a metaphor of the speaker’s childhood” (133). Therefore, childhood, which stands for the past, is mourned. Here, the two findings of Faggen and

Duncan contradict each other. Robert Frost’s childhood did not take place in the countryside. Still, both assumptions lead to the same conclusion: the speaker is mourning a time bygone. The place is overgrown and the speaker is lonely. Still, daylight falls in the cellar walls. The poetic “I” dwells there at daytime. In contrast to Thomas’ poem, it is summer. Nature is taking back the place, as described in the second stanza:

O’er ruined fences the grape-vines shield  
 The woods come back to the mowing field;  
 The orchard tree has grown one copse  
 Of new wood and old where the woodpecker chops;  
 The footpath down to the well is healed. (6–10)

When night comes, bats and birds fly through the air:

The whippoorwill is coming to shout  
 And hush and cluck and flutter about:  
 I hear him begin far enough away  
 Full many a time to say his say  
 Before he arrives to say it out. (16–20)

The fast movements make unusual sounds when the animals “hush and cluck and flutter about” (17). The bird, the whippoorwill, a bird that is only to be found in North and Central America, is personified, as it speaks. The darkness, the sounds, the bats and birds make this place uncanny. It is unfamiliar, because in the darkness, the movements are not visible. Timothy D. O’Brien identifies that “this ‘I’ speaks of his surroundings more as if he were a ghost” (106). Fagan also interpreted that “[t]he house is a ‘ghost house’ not simply because it is abandoned but because it houses a ghost [and t]he speaker is a ghost who is unable to read the names on the stones” (136). Hence, both identify Frost’s speaker as a ghost, just as Thomas’ speaker does:

In stanza five, the ghosts appear in the poem.

It is under the small, dim, summer star.  
 I know not who these mute folk are  
 Who share the unlit place with me--  
 Those stones out under the low-limbed tree  
 Doubtless bear names that the mosses mar. (21–25)

Even as “these mute folk” appear, the rhyme scheme remains regular. Thus, the speaker is not frightened, maybe because he is one of them. Fagan states that “[t]he couple may have been the owners of a house that once stood there, and this may be a family plot” (137). The subtitle of the poem, “He is happy in society of his choosing”, indicates that the speaker has chosen the ghosts as a society. Thus,

he is definitely not frightened of the ghosts. They share the unlit place with him. He does not know who they are. As the stones, that bear names, seem to belong to a cemetery, the setting has changed. The ghost house may never have been a house but a catacomb, maybe a part of a mausoleum. Fagan interpreted the poem in the same way. She states that “the ghost house is a burial place” and “perhaps the ruin of a crypt or mausoleum, in a cemetery” and “the cellar walls are like a tomb” (136). Thus, the change that happens in the poem is from light to darkness, which changes the appearance of things. Time is recognised as the ever-changing element, even within a day.

The ghosts only appear by night, which is an uncertain time of the day. It is dark, obscure. Thus, the changing time they represent may be something bad. Nevertheless, the speaker does not fear the ghosts. He decides, that they are good companions. Fagan states that the “poem also in many ways embraces life” (137). She sees “comfort in knowing that life goes on after our individual deaths” (147). The coherent rhyme scheme of the poem aabba, underlines this assumption. It expresses composure and regularity. Thus, the ghosts give the speaker hope. That means that the he has learned to accept change and even finds good aspects in it.

## Conclusion

Both poems compare houses, ghostly houses, with graves. For Frost the house denotes mourning for the past. He is not occupied with the future, as Thomas is. The poems were written at different times. Frost wrote at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while Thomas wrote his poem shortly before he went to France to fight in World War I. Frost is full of hope but melancholy, while Thomas is hopeless and tries to console himself with his poetry. The houses serve as a symbol for this reassurance. Concluding, both poets describe a certain fear of time and the ghosts are the speakers themselves in the future. The ghosts have a calming effect. Thus, both speakers do not fear supernatural occurrences but find comfort in the thought of them.

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Johanna Grabow

## Haunting the Wide, White Page – Ghosts in Antarctica

**Abstract:** Antarctica is not only the coldest and most desolate place on earth, it is also the most haunted one. According to statistics, for every 9.62 inhabitants (albeit temporary) in the Far South, there roams one ghost to haunt them. The ice sheets of Antarctica serve as an enormous freezer, not only safeguarding thousands of years of history in its numerous layers, but also preserving deserted huts and stations as well as the bodies of unfortunate explorers. By investigating abandoned places, heroic-era horror stories and real-life accounts, it becomes apparent that Antarctica is a repository for human's deepest fears and its hidden, forbidden desires. Ghost stories therefore entered the continent as one way of dealing with the spatial and perceptual isolation man is inevitably confronted with on the ice. With the help of allegedly haunted places such as Whaler's Bay and Scott's Hut, literary examples like "Bride of the Antarctic" and *The White Darkness*, as well as real-life accounts by Morton Moyes and Sir Ernest Shackleton, this paper traces the short – but nonetheless "lively" – history of ghosts at the bottom of the world.

Antarctica is the coldest, the windiest, the driest and the highest continent on earth. It is a continent of scale and superlatives, but not a place one might immediately associate with ghosts and their stories. At a closer glance, however, the stereotypical pictures – icebergs, penguins, ice floes – might just as well be replaced by other images – failed expeditions, frostbite, snowbound tents – to evoke the uncanny and uncertain atmosphere typical of a ghost story. It is therefore no wonder that the spirits of the dead entered the continent in the form of ghost towns, ghost hunters and spirits haunting or even helping unfortunate explorers both on the written page and in real-life expeditions. This paper aims to trace the relatively short history (Antarctica was discovered 200 years ago, a mere 100 years ago man sat first foot on it) of ghosts on the seventh continent.

Advertised as the "most haunted place on the planet" (Hotchkiss, par. 1) by cruise lines, Antarctica's ghosts can indeed withstand mathematical calculations: Although the continent has a permanent human population of zero, there are approximately 3,000 scientists, researchers and personnel from around the globe staying in facilities through the Antarctic summer and a smaller number even throughout the Antarctic winter (The World Factbook). Zhang Xin estimated that 312 people have died on the continent ever since its discovery (17). This means, if death equals the existence of a ghost, Antarctica could indeed come up with one

ghost per every 9.62 inhabitants. Intended for a target audience, namely cruise ship passengers, these tongue-in-cheek statistics nonetheless gives evidence of how humans perceive this place.

In European and Western imagination Antarctica has always been a strange and beautiful place, a land that is actually frozen water. The continent is located just off the edge of our maps, but “a space at whose heart there is one six months day and one six months night cannot quite seem like part of humanity’s planet” (Moss 1). Antarctica is, in contrast to its counterpart on the other pole, the only continent without an indigenous population and their corresponding creation myths. It is therefore a place without its own language, its own culture, legends or history; a blank canvas, so to say, that can be filled with our ideas, dreams and (ghost) stories. With terms like ice, exploration and sublime wilderness humans draw upon long-held associations and might think of places of enchantment and magic. McCorristine therefore noted that the poles “were strange places where strange things could happen [...] unearthly dreamscapes, [...] places of uncanny solitude” (86–7). The vast and perpetual ice sheets of Antarctica literally safeguard thousands of years of history in their layers; never melting, never forgetting. Antarctica thus serves as a repository both for our deepest fears, but also as a projection to live out their hidden, forbidden desires. Strange things indeed seemed to have happened on this unearthly dreamscape and every once in a while the blank canvas is filled with a ghost story.

## **Antarctic Ghost Towns and Human Angstlust**

Abandoned towns, buckling buildings and crumbling walls evoke a feeling of both fear and curiosity in humans. Denoted ‘Angstlust’ in psychology<sup>1</sup>, man is both drawn and repulsed by places that are no longer populated by the people who once built them. Antarctica consists of a multitude of these abandoned places. Faced with the choice of either discarding a location and all its appertaining equipment, or trying to minimise the human influence on such a pristine environment as much as possible, explorers and scientists face the horns of a dilemma. Hans-Ulrich Peter, an ecologist of Friedrich Schiller University Jena, even went as far as to attach a veritable rubbish problem to the frozen continent (ii). Despite the efforts to introduce standard guidelines for waste disposal in the region, extreme weather condition as well as infrastructure problems hinder a strict enforcement time and again. As long as these guidelines are not strictly adhered to, however,

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1 For a detailed discussion of the phenomenon see, for instance, Apter and Warwitz.



ghost towns and abandoned places inspire visitors, research personnel and authors alike. The clear remnants of human's earlier and current ventures make Antarctica, on the other hand, also the first continent where man's first dwellings still survive. Their preservation should be, according to Pearson, considered of global importance (45). 34 historic sites, containing over 8,000 inventories artefacts, now pose the question of how to solve conservation problems on the continent (*ibid.* 45–6).

The two most famous and disturbingly well-preserved abandoned places are Whaler's Bay on Deception Island and the camp built by Sir Robert Falcon Scott and his party on the north shore of Cape Evans in 1911. After their ship drifted away, the hut was inadvertently occupied by the Ross Sea Party under leadership of Sir Ernest Shackleton from 1915 to 1917 (Antarctic Heritage Trust). Nowadays Scott's Hut epitomises the Heroic Age of (failed) Antarctic exploration.<sup>2</sup> Due to the dry climate and the freezing temperatures, the hut remains in a remarkable state of preservation. Visitors and photographers can be sure to take pictures of rusty bean cans and scientific equipment covered with dust. A cross near the cabin moreover commemorates the three men who died there in 1916 (Legler 12). Scott's Hut is thus a place where events are frozen in time; a place where past, present and future mingle. Spatial isolation and even the absence of familiar patterns such as day and night, normally an important way of maintaining a sense of control, add to the factors of why humans perceive the camp as strange, uncanny and haunted.

Moving further north along the Antarctic shoreline, Whaler's Bay on Deception Island poses another ghostly place. The deserted town is noteworthy not so much because of the tragic fate of its inhabitants, as was the case with Scott's Hut, but because of the sheer feeling of isolation and loneliness it exhales. Whereas the name Deception Island alone evokes trickery, intrigue and concealment, the visitor is confronted with barren volcanic slopes and a desolate coastline upon approaching the horseshoe-shaped Antarctic outcrop (Fabricius, par. 1). First populated in 1906 by a Norwegian-Chilean whaling company as a base for factory ships, Whaler's Bay was abandoned in 1931 after a decline in market for whale oil (Avi Abrams and Constantine von Hoffman). The Great Depression forced the approximately 150 people working in the bay during the austral summer to leave the place and seek literally greener pastures elsewhere. Even the old cemetery perished, having been destroyed in a 1969 volcanic eruption, and a newly erected memorial cemetery is all that remains nowadays (Fabricius, par. 10). Visitors are

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2 The Heroic Age refers to the time when Antarctica was mainly explored by foot, ski and dog sledge and roughly covers the years from mid-1890s to the early 1920. For more information see, for example, Leane 186.

both fascinated and appalled by the horrific scene of whale skeletons, rusted out buildings and big boiling vats sunken into the ground. Whalers's Bay elucidates like no other place mankind's impact on nature and the feeling of emptiness and misplacement humans leave behind once they are gone.

The rest of Deception Island, paradoxically, can be considered a hotspot in Antarctic scales; a factor that might actually add to the reason why Whaler's Bay is regularly listed on the 'Top 10 Haunted Places' all over the world (News.com.au). The island hosts both an Argentinean and a Spanish science base and can be reached easily by cruise ships. Shooing its guests over the barren rocks, visitors perceive the feeling of (paid) accessibility and extreme isolation at the same time. It is therefore no wonder that Whaler's Bay was eagerly taken up as the perfect location for paranormal activity. "Ghosts of Antarctica," an 2011-aired episode of the American TV-series *Destination Truth*, immersed itself with the ghost settlement and hosted a 60-minutes feature replete with images of shaky hand cameras, infrared visions, random lights and strange noises.

## Heroic-Era Horror Stories

Antarctica is probably the most extensive and far-flung wilderness on our planet. It provides, as Leane puts it, "a site remote from civilisation, on the edge of established social conventions" (59). The continent is on average three times higher than any other, one-and-a-half-times the size of Europe, where it never rains and rarely ever snows; in short, a sublime landscape that might bring our rational mind up against its limits (Wheeler 7; Leane 59). It comes as no surprise that the earliest stories featuring the Antarctic are full of whirlpools and abysses, fearful and dark spaces typical of gothic horror stories (Leane 59). The best-known example of early Antarctic literature, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, most explicitly uses gothic images such as a demon ship, a figure of death-in-life and zombie sailors to confer a sense of horror on the reader. The mariner eventually leaves Antarctica, but can never escape "the South Pole of the mind" (Wilson 174).

Authors such as Coleridge, E. A. Poe and Jules Verne, writing in a time when Antarctica was still an untrodden and uncharted land, capitalised on the sense of metaphysical horror on the ice, "thereby laying the foundation of a sub-genre of Antarctic science-fiction, most notably carried forward by H.P. Lovecraft's 'Mountains of Madness' (1931)" (McCorristine 86). Even when the continent was finally accessed and slowly discovered, the Heroic Age suffered from a fair share of horrors. Beginning with the obvious physical dangers of a sledging trip, early explorers also suffered heavily from the psychological trials in claustrophobic

base camps (Leane 68–9). “One had the impressions of fighting, always fighting, a terrible unseen force” (31) recalls the Antarctic explorer Charles Laseron vividly. This terrible unseen force, a feeling shared by a number of explorers, is eventually given literal and visual presence in literature and film (Leane 69).

In John Martin Leahy’s short story “In Amundsen’s Tent” (1927), it is a ‘thing’ escaping from Amundsen’s tent to attack a team of explorers on their return from the South Pole. While the narrator exclaims that “The thing itself [...] can’t be any worse than this mystery and nightmare of imagination” (qtd. in Manhire 125) his fellow companions suggest the entity in the tent might be “a demon, a ghost materialised. I can’t say incarnated” (ibid. 128). The thing continues to follow and haunt the explorers, eventually driving the last surviving member of the team on the brink of madness. While the thing’s first and foremost purpose seems to be to spread horror, the nameless entity also embodies the disappointment and dangers of Scott’s failed race to the South Pole in 1912.

Another ‘thing’ appears in John Carpenters famous movie “The Thing” (1982), based on John W. Campbell, Jr.’s science fiction novella *Who Goes There?* (1938), and haunts both scientists and cinema audience. A 2011-sequel with the same title suggests that even after nearly 85 years, the notion of an unseen and untitled force in a hostile environment is a spine-tingling one.

A completely different entity, namely the ghost of an explorer’s wife, haunts the men in Amelia Reynold Long’s short story “Bride of the Antarctic”. Published under the pseudonym Mordred Weir in 1939, “Bride of the Antarctic” recounts the story of three scientists overwintering in an Antarctic hut. As in any prototypical ghost story the hut was cursed by the death of a number of members of an ill-fated expedition the season before, amongst them the wife of the commander. The setting, however, is a completely new one. Interestingly, the short story was published four years after the first real-life woman, Caroline Mikkelsen, had set foot on the continent (Dodds 41).

Soon the story unfolds and the three overwintering men encounter strange incidents. A skull is seen while burning an old box and the approaching Antarctic winter ultimately seems to be the harbinger of doom:

By the end of the first month, the blackness was complete even at midday. Strange stars hung from an ebon sky, so large that their apparent nearness was frightening. [...]

In the vivid, unearthly glare, we could see the white crags of the Admiralty Range, at whose feet we crouched; and in the distance, rising above them, the steep black sides of Mt. Erebus, a lazy cloud of grey ash drifting about its crater, like the smoke from a funeral pyre. The sight was like a harbinger of evil; and we crept back into the house and fastened the trap above us.

It was shortly after this that the noises began. (Weir 73)

While the men try to dismiss the scratching and wailing noises in the beginning – “What you heard was the timbers creaking under the weight of snow on the roof” (Weir 74) – they become more persistent and a ghost eventually appears:

Something was in the room with us. It had come up through the open trap, and was taking form out of the mist. We saw it take shape. Afterwards, Farrell and I tried to tell each other that what we had seen had been a trick of the light and the damp air let up from the cellar; but we both knew that the thing had assumed the almost nude form of a woman draped in a long white bridal veil. (Weir 75)

The bride’s frozen corpse emerges to confront the men, forcing her killer, the third member of the party, to leave the hut for the deadly space of Antarctica. The notions of insides – the safety of the hut – and outsides – the vast space of the continent – become acutely prominent in the short story. Ultimately, it is the thin border between them that provide the source of terror (Leane 59). The ghost is moreover a female one, an entity that seems to belong ‘out there’ not ‘in here’, in the back-then masculine space of a heroic-era hut (ibid. 65).

### **Sensory Deprivation and Helping Hands**

All places are more than their mere physical components, and especially so in Antarctica. The continent exists most vividly in the mind, it is “a metaphorical landscape” (Wheeler 3). In “Bride of the Antarctic” it is not only the freezing isolation, the vast landscape and endless darkness the characters have to cope with, but their psychological trials are additionally aggravated by the presence of a spirit. Even under normal conditions most people would agree that Antarctica wields a profound effect on personality and characters. Few men are the same after a stay on the frozen continent and the effect of the hostile environment was most certainly not only experienced by fictional characters but also by real-life explorers and researchers.

Morton Moyes, for instance, had to spend ten weeks alone in an isolated hut in Queen Mary’s Land in 1912 (Griffith 189). Moyes was a scientist of Douglas Mawson’s Australasian Antarctic expedition and despite attempts to keep up routine meteorological observations and remain calm, his imagination started to play tricks on him after a while (Leane 53). In “Season in Solitary”, Morton recounts his experience and vividly describes his emotional deterioration until he feared his comrades might find him “raving mad or dead in this pit of ice” (Moyes 23) one day. Elizabeth Leane summarised Morton’s encounter with the vast ice sheets of Antarctica with the following words:

The silence that surrounded him quickly came to seem ‘oppressive and unnerving’, the creaking of the glacier ‘ominous’ and his own laughter ‘uncanny’. He began to think of the glacier as ‘something alive’ [...]; the space outside his hut was a ‘creeping waste’; his solitude was like ‘an unseen presence.’ (53–4)

In his account Moyes impressively portrays the changeable and moving capacities of the ice, but also points at a phenomenon that has been the focal point of psychological experiment and research ever since the 1960’s: sensory deprivation. The term describes the reduction or even removal of stimuli from one or more of the senses and suggests that perceptual isolation might eventually lead to (irreversible) psychological damage (Suedfeld 4). “Deprivation can lead to behavioral decrements, particularly in perception” (ibid.), noted Suedfeld and thereby encapsulates the trials long-term visitors of Antarctica almost always inevitable have to suffer. There is hardly any Antarctic diary that does not reflect on the mirages and illusions encountered on the ice: the strange way the sound travelled, the shifting shapes of the ice or how small things in the distance all of a sudden seemed enormous frequently dazzle these travellers. The three-dimensional capacities of the ice are, together with atmospheric phenomena that could call the reliability of perception, even that of the most seasoned commanders, into question, therefore the starting point for a number of putative ghostly encounters. Ghostliness is furthermore closely linked (or precisely not linked) to the body and “the weird things that could happen to it at the Poles” (McCorristine 88).

Spirits roaming the Antarctic ice, however, do not always haunt the explorers and play tricks on them, they can also guide them. The most famous incident of such a helping ghost is given by Sir Ernest Shackleton himself. In *South*, he describes the intense feeling of an extra member in his party while crossing the snow-capped mountains of South Georgia: “I know that during that long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia it seemed to me often that we were four, not three” (120). Eight years later T.S. Eliot transmitted Shackleton’s feeling in poetic form and thereby helped the march across South Georgia gain literary immortality. In “The Waste Land” it reads: “Who is the third who walks always beside you? / When I count, there are only you and I together / But when I look ahead up the white road / There is always another one walking beside you” (Eliot 359–62). Although Shackleton’s extra member has become a third, instead of a fourth in the poem, Eliot allegedly just remembered the gist and not the exact details of the story<sup>3</sup>, the invisible

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3 Eliot himself stated in the notes included in his work how he was inspired by Shackleton’s encounter. Jarold Ramsey furthermore examines how part five of “The Waste Land” was inspired by *South*.

person is clearly a positive and helping one. Interestingly, this fourth – or third – man was not only experienced by Shackleton but also by other Antarctic explorers and extreme athletes in general. In fact, there were so many of them that the term ‘The Third Man Factor’, after Eliot’s line, was coined and scientific and psychological explanations for the phenomena were henceforth sought. The findings so far range from a coping mechanism of the brain and the aforementioned sensory deprivation to questions as to how we actually perceive the presence and place of our body and this of other persons in traumatic situations.<sup>4</sup>

In Geraldine McCaughrean’s young-adult fiction *The White Darkness* (2005), the Third Man comes in the form of Titus Oates, the epitome of British gallantry in the early days of Antarctic exploration.<sup>5</sup> In the novel the protagonist creates Titus as her imaginary friend and helper, drawing on her knowledge of the real Antarctic explorer. While the imaginary Titus is affectionate, honest and endlessly supportive, the Antarctic terrain is a perilous and indifferent place, frequently haunted by mirages. The final agonising trek of the protagonist ultimately mirrors her difficulty and pain at detecting the lies she has been told.

By using Titus Oates as the protagonist’s alter ego, McCaughrean harks back to the heroic-era, “for the days when polar exploration was, and celebrated being male, white and frequently dead” (Moss 23). Sym, the protagonist, is obsessed with Antarctica and the romantic figure of Captain Oates: “I have been in love with Titus Oates for quite a while now – which is ridiculous, since he’s been dead for ninety years. But look at it this way. In ninety years I’ll be dead, too, and the age difference won’t matter” (McCaughrean 1).

The actual bodies of the five members of Scott’s party are still encased in the Antarctic ice. The remains of Evans and Oates, the first casualties, were never found; Scott, Bowers and Wilson died later in their tent. The bodies are very likely to remain in the ice for several hundred more years, although “inexorably making their way towards the coast, and presumably will one day leave the continent inside calved icebergs” (Leane 169). A completely different kind of ghost is created with the myth of a slumbering hero, slowly completing his journey north. Getting in line with narrative traditions like King Arthur and other heroes just waiting to return, the fate of Scott and his companions thus both reassure and soothe the readers of tales such as *The White Darkness*.

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4 Both John Geiger and Peter Suedfeld did extensive research on the ‘Third Man Factor’ and published their ideas and findings in a number of articles.

5 The real Lawrence ‘Titus’ Oates became engraved in the British cultural memory by allegedly uttering the words “I’m just going outside and may be some time” before he left into the blizzard (Leane 87).

On a continent where volcanoes are called Erebus and Terror, and the so-called Ghost Mountains lie buried beneath its middle, ghosts have most certainly plenty of room to wander the ice. Antarctica is a metaphorical landscape and exists most vividly in the mind. The continent, however, offers more than just a conveniently large space on the map and more than just a generically hostile setting: it signifies instead an instability of the margins of the world that humans are both drawn to and repelled from. It is a place that elucidates how people and their imagination act and react in extreme environments. Antarctica is thus indeed a repository for human's deepest fears and its hidden, forbidden desires.

Ghosts usually appear during the night, at dark and the temperature usually drops upon their arrival. Temperature can hardly drop any further in Antarctica, but what is striking in the discussed literature and media – with the exception of “Bride of the Antarctic” – is that Antarctic ghosts tend to appear in the Antarctic summer. 24 hours of complete daylight, the complete absence of darkness, a ‘White Darkness’ in McCoughrean’s words, is unsettling.

In summary, the Antarctic landscape has not only inspired authors but also deeply shaped the people actually venturing there. A sublime landscape indeed that draws our mind against its limits, whether in abandoned places such as Whaler’s Bay or Scott’s Hut, in horror stories featuring frozen brides or in unseen spirits guiding us. No place, to put it in a nutshell, can be hostile, remote or cold enough for a proper ghost to heat up our imagination.

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Julia Pfeifer

## The Loa as Ghosts in Haitian Vodou

**Abstract:** Loa, ghosts in Haitian Vodou, coalesce African and Creole gods, with the imagery of Catholic saints, all rooted in Haiti's colonial history as a Spanish and later French colony with slaves of different ethnicities from the West Coast of Africa. Although the Vodou belief system rests upon a firm belief in a supreme being, vodou serviteurs<sup>1</sup> pray to, serve and ask for guidance from their loa. In order to understand loa and possession by a loa, the concept of the soul in Vodou will be observed. At Vodou ceremonies a loa will manifest him- or herself through possession into a head of a serviteur, becoming now the "horse", which is being "ridden" by the loa. The distinction which kind of loa is riding a person is made visible by a loa's unique dance rhythm, song, clothing, colour, talk, sacrificial food and drink.

### Historical Background

Vodou as a religion in Haiti originates in the turmoiled history of slaves brought from the Western coast of Africa to the island by Spanish and French colonialists.<sup>2</sup> This heterogeneous group of slaves mainly originated from the west coast of Central Africa and the Bight of Benin and was mainly made up of ethnicities such as the Yoruba, Fon and Ewe.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, they brought their own religious beliefs with them to the New World. Although slaves were decreed to be baptised and Christianised, Roman Catholic missionaries generally adopted a policy of "guided syncretism" (Fernández Olmos 8) during the colonial period. Catholic priests tolerated the interpretation of Christian saints into polytheistic African belief systems of gods and ghosts, with the eventual goal that Christianity as the true faith would lead to the death of African gods and ghosts. However:

[T]he heritage of Guinea maintained in Haiti by serving the gods. Those who live are reclaimed by the ancestors who do not die – who return as vengeful revenants if not

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- 1 A serviteur is someone who serves the loa. See Deren 336.
  - 2 For a more detailed account of historical and political background see Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 13–23.
  - 3 There is consensus in literature about the main groups of ethnicities and their geographical origin that have influenced Haitian Vodou. Most commonly the people of Fon, Ewe and Yoruba are mentioned, as well as their geographical origin in the kingdom of Dahome, Mahi and Nago. Slight divergences occur as to the number of each group of people brought to Haiti, as well as which smaller groups influenced Vodou as well. See Métraux pp 23–27 and Fandrich 775–791.

properly served – and by the gods who cajole, demand, and sometimes oppress the mere mortals [...]. The gods are not only in your blood but in the land. (Joan Dayan 1998, 33)

Vodou religion among slaves under Spanish and French rule was not given much thought by colonialists and slave owners until slaves revolted against French rule in Saint-Domingue from 1791 onwards. Their leaders were said to be *houngan*<sup>4</sup> and their means of winning the revolution was believed to be due to Vodou practices. The exceedingly bloody revolution, mirroring decades of “ruthless exploitation” (Fernández Olmos 101) of slaves in the plantations, struck fear into colonialists worldwide. Furthermore, a supposed “knowledge” of Vodou and its practices triggered fears<sup>5</sup>, which spread like wildfire throughout the world. The Haitian Revolution ended with the abolition of slavery and the founding of the first republic in the West Indies in 1804, the Republic of Haiti. Afterwards, Vodou largely flourished throughout the nineteenth century in Haiti and practitioners were only persecuted again by the Catholic Church through so called anti-superstition campaigns from 1896 onwards (Fernández Olmos 104). Today Vodou is practised alongside Catholicism and Protestantism and is even incorporated into Rara festivities in the Holy Week before Easter (McAlister).

## Vodou Belief System

“Vodou with its pantheon of ghosts, called loa – represents a fusion of African and Creole gods, the spirits of deified ancestors and syncretized manifestations of Catholic saints” (Fernández Olmos 102). The word *vodû* is of Fon origin and means “spirit” or “sacred energy” (Métraux 25 f.)<sup>6</sup>, as well as “image” and “god” (Dayan 1999, 13). Literature on Vodou is not concordant about usage of the words god, ghost and spirit when describing loa.<sup>7</sup> Both the definition of ghost in the *OED* as well as the definition of spirit ascribe to the concept of loa. Ghost, as defined

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4 *Houngan* – priest, minister and doctor of a Vodou community – see for a more critical argumentation of a definition in Deren 17, 330 and Métraux 425.

5 “Since slavery, Voodoo accounts had helped ‘authenticate’ fundamental rationalizations of white supremacy [... and] tales of Voodoo helped establish black criminality as a social fact.” See Gordon 769.

6 The word Vodou has many versions of spelling, among many others: Voodoo, Vodun and Voudoux. For Haiti most authors have seemed to settle for Vodou as it is closest to the original spelling. The popularized version of Voodoo associated with black magic and witchcraft has been largely created through literature and Hollywood movies. See for different spelling and definition Fandrich 779 f.

7 For example, Métraux states that loa is translated to deity, but can be rather understood to mean ghost or demon (426). Deren’s definition of *loa* is deity (332), *gros-bon-ange*

in the *OED*, mirrors to a great extent the concept of *gros-bon-ange*:<sup>8</sup> “[t]he spirit, or immaterial part of man, as distinct from the body or material part; the seat of feeling, thought, and moral action” (492). On the other hand, the *OED* defines spirit as “that which gives life to the physical organism, in contrast to its purely material elements” (251 I1a) or “in contexts relating to temporary separation of the immaterial from the material part of man’s being” (251 I1c). These definitions can be linked to the Vodou concept of *ti-bon-ange*.<sup>9</sup>

Haitian Vodou is based on a belief in a unique supreme being as creator of the universe. Contrary to the Christian god, the supreme being is believed to be a distant god. This god is supposed to have transferred some of its power to a pantheon of deities, called loa. A serviteur always serves the loa, not the supreme being. Therefore, Haitian Vodou is a religion with a monotheistic head and a polytheistic body. Leaders of a Vodou community, which often make up the core of a social community, are either called *houngan*<sup>10</sup>, describing a male priest and healer, or *mambo*, describing the female counterpart.

## The Loa

Loa, also spelled lwa, are also often called “*mystères, anges, saints, or les invisibles*” (Dayan, 16, Fernández Olmos 105) in literature and are grouped into different “nations” (Deren 82 f., Fernández Olmos 105 f.). These nations are often roughly compared to the nations Haitian slaves came from (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 102). The most common of these nations are Rada and Petro/Petwo. The Rada nation is representing African loa and the Petro nation the Creole or Haitian born loa (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 217 and Deren 82 f.). According to Deren, the Rada nation unifies African originated loa from kingdoms such as Dahomey (Fon nation, nowadays Benin, Togo), Nago (Yoruba nation, nowadays Nigeria) and Ghede (82 f.). The Petro nation links Creole loa and rites with beliefs and ritual practices from central and south-

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soul (330) and *ti-bon-ange* (336) means spirit. These definitions as defined in the glossary are not at all precise in her book, especially when loa mount serviteurs in rituals their description fits ghosts or spirits.

8 See for definition of *gros-bon-ange* under ‘Spiritual Concept of The Soul’ (McAlister 102 f., Deren 26 and Sommerfeld 83).

9 See for definition of *ti-bon-ange* under ‘Spiritual Concept of The Soul’ (McAlister 103, Sommerfeld 84).

10 *Houngan* – priest, minister and doctor of a Vodou community – see for a more critical argumentation of a definition in Deren 17 and Sommerfeld for the role of houngan and mambo as opposed to a doctor of western medicine.

west Africa arriving with people from Congo or Angola<sup>11</sup> (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 217). This organisation is based on attributes ascribed to loa, Rada loa are supposed to be benevolent and kind, as opposed to Petro/Petwo loa, which are malevolent and even violent or have (dark) magical capabilities. Further attributes follow along this dichotomy. The colour white or light colours are often used for Rada loa, black and red for Petro/Petwo spirits. Food and drink that is offered to the loa, speech and demeanor of serviteurs when they are possessed by ghosts, and *vèvè*<sup>12</sup> of a loa, are grouped according to this dichotomy<sup>13</sup> (Deren 82 f. 86–150).

As stated above, each loa belongs to only one of the nations, but many loa exist in at least two cosmic spheres – most often it is stated that they serve in both Rada and Petwo rituals (Deren 82 f., 137–145, Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 115 f.). If they appear in a Vodou ceremony the nation they belong to will be visible by their attributes.<sup>14</sup>

Métraux also opens up the discussion about belief in animism in Haitian Vodou<sup>15</sup>, as loa may change their habitat, they can live in trees, elements, animals and humans. Deren argues that loa may reside in trees and other natural objects, but they are not “spirits of the trees” (Deren 86), but rather independent of any vessel (86 f.).

## Spiritual Concept of the Soul

To fully understand the concept of loa, the intrinsic spiritual concept of the spirit in Vodou needs to be explained. In Christian belief body and soul<sup>16</sup> are linked to the spirit. The body functions as vessel of soul and spirit and the soul is a seat for a person’s personality, consciousness and unconsciousness. In Vodou belief the

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11 Generally social anthropologists disagree on the percentage of slaves that came from each of these kingdoms to Haiti.

12 *Vèvè* – “Symbolic, caballa-like designs drawn on the ground to invoke the loa at ceremonies, made of wheat or maize flour or ashes.” (Deren 337, Métraux 427).

13 See, for example, ‘Loa Possession in Vodou Ceremonies’.

14 See Erzuli under ‘Loa Possession in Vodou Ceremonies’.

15 Here Métraux talks about *nanm* – which is a power or holiness which resides in everything and is believed in besides loa and the Divine Being (174–177).

16 *Nanm* – a soul in Haitian Vodou, according to McAlister (103), a power, or sanctity, according to Métraux (174 f.) or an animistic spirit, able to inherit anything from human beings to animals and plants (Sommerfeld 83). Not to be mistaken as concept of soul in Christian belief system (Métraux 174).

soul is split again into two aspects. On the one hand, *gros-bon-ange*<sup>17</sup> or “good big angel” (McAlister 103), is closely bound to the physical body and can be perceived as “the metaphysical double of the physical being, [...] it is the immortal twin who survives the mortal man” (Deren 26). This good big angel keeps the body alive from birth to death, is seen as a person’s “own memory, intelligence, imagination and invention” (35). When a person deceases the *gros-bon-ange* will stay at the cemetery and can consequently become a loa or a *zonbi*<sup>18</sup> (Sommerfeld 83, McAlister 102).

On the other hand, *ti-bon-ange*, the “good little angel” (McAlister 103) functions as a guardian angel and moral guide. While a child is protected unconditionally by its *ti-bon-ange*, adults have to lead an upright life so their good little angel can protect them. As opposed to the *gros-bon-ange*, which is bound to the physical body, the *ti-bon-ange* is mobile and can move away from the individual during dreams and trance. The good little angel is very easily scared away from the body and harmed by magic. Whenever a person’s good little angel is weak, a bad spirit or loa can easily harm the individual.<sup>19</sup> During a Vodou ritual, in order for a loa to enter a serviteur’s head, the person’s *ti-bon-ange* will temporarily leave and make space for the loa, so it can dance in the serviteur’s head. While the loa rides its “horse”, the *ti-bon-ange* acts as a protector over the body from a distance, as it also does during dreams. With the death of a person the good little angel will leave the physical body forever, and will either be judged by God (Sommerfeld 84) or will “go [...] under the water to Ginen [Africa] to be with the *lwa*” (McAlister 103), while the good big angel “lingers near the grave” (ibid.).

### Reviving or *retirer d’en bas de l’eau*

Nowadays, reclaiming a loa happens only with family loa, which are still subjected to constant change<sup>20</sup>, and which guard family property and members if constant sacrifices are made to them. The ceremony to retrieve a loa is called *retirer d’en bas de l’eau*<sup>21</sup> (Deren 46 f.) and has to take place one year and one day after a family

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17 While all writers are concordant about the distinction and broad definition of *gros-bon-ange* and *ti-bon-ange*, Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert state the exact opposite definition of these two concepts of soul (214, 217).

18 “*Zonbi* are spirits of the recently dead who are captured and then owned by a ‘master’ and obliged to work.” McAlister 102, see more about perceptions of death in Haitian Vodou – Sommerfeld 88 ff. as well as Métraux 307 ff.

19 For more in-depth description of sickness through loa as well as other sources of harm see Sommerfeld 90 ff.

20 As opposed to older African and Haitian loa.

21 An account of a whole ceremony is found in Maya Deren, pages 46–53.

member's death (*ibid.*). To reclaim a *gros-bon-ange* is generally advised, as a soul not bound to its land and family of origin can according to common folklore haunt its family and lead to disease by itself (Métraux 307 ff., Sommerfeld 90–96), or can be set upon a someone as a *zombi* by a houngan or mambo (McAlister 98 f., 102 f., Métraux 324 ff.). Although it is advised, the ceremony is often not performed at all or sometimes years later, because large sums of money need to be paid to the houngan or mambo who retrieve loa. Rural families in Haiti are generally poor. *Retirer d'en bas de l'eau* is often performed in a community for several souls to be retrieved at one single ceremony.

The ceremony *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* is seen as a third birth, “the rebirth of the soul from the abysmal waters” (Deren 49). During this ceremony the *gros-bon-ange* is called upon to appear and is eventually bound to an earthen vessel called *govi*<sup>22</sup> (330). After songs, dances and prayers to major loa such as Legba<sup>23</sup> and Baron Samedi, the *gros-bon-ange* enters from the abysmal water<sup>24</sup> into the peristyle<sup>25</sup>, communicates with his or her family about any pressing matter and is subsequently lured into the *govi* on the head of the initiate by houngan or mambo.<sup>26</sup> The *govi* is the new residing place of a family loa and is now again part of the social world of the living, called upon whenever important family decisions are to be made or council for illness or complications is needed (Deren 46). Some family loa can rise to become local, regional or even great Haitian loa, called upon or appearing in Vodou ceremonies throughout Haiti.

## Loa Possession in Vodou Ceremonies

Essentially all loa can appear in Vodou ceremonies, although a hierarchical order of appearance seems to exist, according to literature, as well as communities' favourites or local loa might appear as well (Métraux 110–111, Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 110, 113, Deren 37 f.). While Legba, also called “old man at the

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22 *Govi* is a red earthen vessel or a clay jar.

23 Legba is loa of the cross-roads, the first loa to be called upon in any Vodou ceremony, as he establishes a connection between this world and the world of *Les Invisibles*, the loa.

24 The abysmal water is represented in this ceremony by a nearby stream, pond or, lacking these, a trough of water (Deren 47).

25 Peristyle is a “structure, part of the hounfort [temple, surroundings and ceremonial altar of Haitian Vodou], in the middle of which is the *poteau-mitan*, or centre post, which reflects the traffic between heaven and earth” (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 217).

26 The appearance of the loa in the description by Maya Deren seems only to appear as a voice and only the shudder of the initiate when the loa enters the *govi* on its head shows a visible sign of the loa during the ceremony.



gate” (Deren 96) and loa of the crossroads, appears first to establish the connection between the worlds of the living and the dead, other major loa appear afterwards. Baron Samedi, loa of the cemetery, often appears last in a ceremony (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 113).

A Vodou ceremony involves song and dance for hours and is used to serve and offer the loa food and drink, receive council from them and keep the social fabric functional. It may take hours for an initiate to dance him- or herself into trance (Métraux 134 ff.), a prerequisite for a loa to appear in the head of a serviteur by possession. Whenever a loa rises up through the feet of a serviteur, the person being ridden by the loa will change cadence and speech pattern, the style of dance, gestures and countenance to the appearance linked to the loa. The serviteur will also ask for clothes, food, drink and luxuries ascribed to the loa according to its ascribed nationality (*ibid.*, Deren 86–150). Legba, being an African born loa (Rada) and the first to be called upon in a Vodou ceremony, will ask for a cane, a hat and a pipe, and will walk bent over and talk slowly as he is portrayed as an old man. He inherits the most important place in a Vodou ceremony as he establishes the connection between the world of the living and the world of the loa (96 ff.). Erzulie, the goddess of love, appears in both cosmic spheres. Erzulie as Erzulie Freda Dahomey is of African origin (Rada) and represents femininity, mother of life and beauty and is viewed as the Vodou version of Virgin Mary (138) or Aphrodite (Métraux 121). This version of Erzulie is fair skinned, loves luxuries such as perfume, expensive clothing and jewellery, flowers, cakes all of which have to be white, rose or light blue. A serviteur will call upon any of above mentioned objects when Erzulie is riding him or her<sup>27</sup> (Deren 137–145). Another version of Erzulie, Erzulie Ge-Rouge also called Erzili Danto (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 116), portrays a Haitian version of the goddess of love. Erzili Danto is clearly a Petro loa, who appears dark skinned, is a hard working peasant woman and has a racy humour. She loves rum and cigarettes and is dressed in red or otherwise colourful attire (*ibid.*). Baron Samedi<sup>28</sup> belongs to the Ghede nation of loa, which is a marginal nation, as these loa are connected with death. According to Deren, Baron Samedi is closest to the Petro nation, while Métraux lists him as belonging to the Rada nation. Baron Samedi is the guardian of the cemetery and the dead, and therefore takes on the attributes of Petro loa. He is dressed in black, wearing sunglasses, and carries around gravediggers’ tools, shovel, pickaxe

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27 A male serviteur can be ridden by a male or female loa, the same holds true for female serviteur.

28 According to Métraux, Baron Samedi is part of a triad, always linked to Baron-la-Croix and Baron-Cimetière (126).

as well as a hoe. The serviteur mounted by this loa sings racy songs and dances in obscene ways (Métraux 126 f., Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert 113 f.). The Ghede loa generally complete a Vodou ceremony (Deren 37 f.). A possession can go on for hours, but whenever a loa leaves a serviteur, he or she claims to remember nothing. The loa will leave having aided the community of the living.

## Conclusion

Vodou religion with its ghosts called loa is a complex matter. The religion itself being of African origin and evolving under Christian influence and slavery retains the original idea of ghosts that keep the link to its countries of origin, brutal past and immediate family alive. These loa are still very much a part of Vodou religion and Haitian society today. Especially in Vodou ceremonies and ceremonies to reclaim a family loa, the ghostliness of the loa is (just barely) visible.

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Minwen Huang

## From Cultural Ghosts to Literary Ghosts – Humanisation of Chinese Ghosts in Chinese *Zhiguai*

**Abstract:** In attempting to explore the role of ghosts, ghost beliefs, and ghost narratives, as an absolute but intimate “other” in mirroring Chinese people and society, this article will examine the process of humanisation of Chinese ghosts in two realms. The first refers to the humanisation of cultural ghosts, i.e. a brief history of Chinese ghost beliefs till roughly around the Six Dynasties. The second realm locates the humanisation of literary ghosts in *zhiguai*, with a specific focus on the literary birth of ghosts and ghost narratives in the Six Dynasties.

*Once upon a time there was a traveller drawing for the King of Chi. “What is the hardest thing to draw?” asked the King. “Dogs and horses are the hardest.” “Then what is the easiest?” “Ghosts are the easiest. Indeed, dogs and horses are what people know and see at dawn and dusk in front of them. To draw them no distortion is permissible. Therefore they are the hardest. On the contrary, ghosts have no shapes and are not seen in front of anybody, therefore it is easy to draw them.” – Han Feizi (32.22)*

### Introduction

This is a story from *Han Feizi* written in the end of the Warring States Period (c. 260–233 BCE), a fable told by Han Fei, a legalist, to illustrate the weight and importance of the reality and to criticise and dispel fantasy, imagination, and superstitions. The lesson is that faithful and realistic imitations and representations are favoured over fictional and imaginary ones, a thought that still exists solidly nowadays in Chinese society.

However, is it genuinely valid to claim that ghosts are the easiest to be drawn, to be talked about and to be represented in Chinese culture, society, and literature? Surely the answer is no, for ghosts belong to the realm of the unspeakable and the unrepresentable. Confucius said in *The Analects* that “Master wouldn’t talk about extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings” (7.21) and that “while respecting ghosts and gods, keep aloof from them” (6.22). The task of this article, thus, is to speak about the unspeakable and to represent the unrepresentable, to see how Chinese ghosts, both cultural and literary ones, have been talked about and represented and have gained their material and linguistic

weight tangibly along the progression of Chinese civilisation, a development that I would like to propose as a process of humanisation of Chinese ghosts.

In attempting to explore the role of ghosts, ghost beliefs, and ghost narratives, as an absolute but intimate “other” in mirroring Chinese people and society, this article will examine the process of humanisation of Chinese ghosts in two realms. The first refers to the humanisation of cultural ghosts, i.e. a brief history of Chinese ghost beliefs till roughly around the Six Dynasties (220–589 CE), to illustrate how an abstract concept of ghosts had been concretised and expanded into some complicated ghost belief systems as a result of an extensive and lively interaction between traditional Chinese religion, Taoism, and Buddhism. Grounded on and nourished by the solid materials of cultural ghosts, the second realm locates the humanisation of literary ghosts in *zhiguai* (“records of the strange”), a literary genre where Chinese ghosts and ghost narratives dwell, with a specific focus on its generic birth in the Six Dynasties to portray how the new-born literary ghosts and ghost narratives came into existence and were endowed with a heavy human form and traits.

## **Humanisation of Cultural Ghosts: A Brief History of Chinese Ghost Beliefs (Roughly Till the Six Dynasties)**

The humanisation of Chinese cultural ghosts from an abstract concept to some complicated belief systems is a process corresponding to the historical progression of Chinese civilisation from a primitive society to a multi-cultural one in terms of the involvement and integration of different philosophical and religious thoughts on the conception of ghosts. In order to grasp a general understanding about cultural ghosts and their meanings in Chinese society, we will examine this historical transformation in the following three stages, including the primal status of ghosts, the etymology of the character 鬼 (*gui*), and the building-up of human-ghost worlds.

### **Primal Status of Ghosts**

In China, the primal status of ghosts was one like creational chaos, in which resided multiple life forces or spirits that couldn't be clearly differentiated from one another. It was a concept whose birth was intimately related to the primitive animistic worldview and to the ancient ancestor worship in order to grasp a faint understanding and to explain the mysteries of the physical world via the invisible. At this primal status, no distinction was drawn yet to set the concept of ghosts apart from that of gods (Zheng 45). Both of them were enclosed and mingled in

this one broad concept of ghosts, as well as other concepts, such as souls, spirits, demons, or monsters.

Along with the progression of human civilisation, this broad concept of ghosts had undergone a process of division and categorisation. It was until much later, i.e. roughly around the Shang dynasty (c. 1600 – c. 1046 BCE), that a more precise and definite concept of ghosts directly referring to the death of humans started to gain its firm shape in the development of Chinese ghost beliefs. As this was also the very period of time when the ancient Chinese character of ghost, 鬼 (*gui*), was first found on oracle bones used in divination in the late Shang dynasty (c. 1200–1050 BCE), the examination of its etymology based on its graphic formation in different script styles will help to reveal the materialisation of this abstract broad concept of ghosts into one concrete single character 鬼 (*gui*).

### Etymology of the Character 鬼 (*gui*)

Chinese characters are logograms whose word-formation graphically embodies and preserves the archaic thoughts and meanings that they were endowed with at the time of their birth, including the way of thinking, cultural and social reality, and have in reverse exerted effects on shaping the Chinese mind and culture (Jia and Jia 151). Through tracing the etymology of 鬼 (*gui*), two main meanings can be read and deduced from its graphic variants of this ancient character found in oracle bone script and in seal script. One refers to living, human-like creatures as material others and the other to human ghosts as immaterial others.

Table 1: Variants of the character 鬼 in Chinese script styles

Oracle bone scripts		Small seal script	Standard script
甲	𠃉	鬼	鬼

#### (1) 鬼 as Living Human-Like Creatures or Material Others

The Chinese character 鬼 was written variably in oracle bone inscriptions, the earliest body of Chinese writing, as illustrated in Table 1. The first meaning as living, human-like creatures can be seen visually when the variants are read as pictograms, i.e. characters whose graphic forms are realistic imitation of physical objects. According to *Jiaguwen Zidian (Dictionary of Oracle Bone Script)*, 鬼 is defined based on its graphic form as “human-like creatures with giant heads [...]

to represent something radically different from living human beings” (1021). As a result of modern etymological researches, Shen argued that the primitive meaning of 鬼 was very probably a name given to some simian or anthropoid animal living in ancient China (1–2). Besides, G. Wang explicated that *guifang* 鬼方 was a name given to a foreign tribe located in the northwest of ancient China that was at war with the kingdom of Shang in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE (586).

Either read as some anthropoid animal or barbarian, the first meaning of the character 鬼 as living, human-like creatures or material others is attached with a solid physical existence and a strong sense of otherness in contrast to (Chinese) humans, as its graphic form visually pronounces. Developed from the primal status of ghosts as creational chaos in lack of any distinctiveness, the physical properties conveyed in the graphic form of 鬼, including human shape, materiality, and otherness, have been maintained and carried into the further conception of ghosts, i.e. the integration and development between the abstract concept of ghosts and the concrete pictographic character 鬼, into human ghosts or immaterial others.

## (2) 鬼 as Human Ghosts or Immaterial Others

The second meaning of 鬼 as human ghosts, or immaterial others, can be seen and deduced from reading the word either as a pictogram or a compound ideograph in terms of word-formation. When it is read as a pictogram to mean immaterial human ghosts in oracle bone script, its graphic form does not represent some anthropoid animal literally but a man wearing a horrible, giant, symbolical mask, i.e. a shaman or *wu* 巫, impersonating a *gui* to carry out a rite of exorcism in traditional Chinese religion. In doing so, some physical properties are attributed to the abstract concept of ghosts and render the invisible ghosts visible both in the traditional folk rite and in the graphic form of 鬼. Moreover, it is due to the inclusion of further philosophical and religious thoughts concerning the abstract concept of ghosts into the graphic form of 鬼 that the character in small seal script is read as a compound ideograph to represent specifically human ghosts as immaterial others in the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) and mostly so ever since.

In Xu Shen’s (c. 58 – c. 147 CE) *Shuowen Jiezi* Dictionary (100 CE), 鬼 in small seal script, i.e. the national script standardised under the reign of the first Chinese emperor, Qin Shi Hungdi (221–210 BCE), is read as a compound ideograph and defined as “what humans return to (after death);” that is, human ghosts (5789). It is a word composed of *ren* 人 (human), *guitou* 田 (head of ghost), and *si* 厶 (private, evil). The first two components harken back to the reading of 鬼 as a pictogram to mean either material or immaterial others with human shape, and the third is used to indicate that ghosts as manifestation of the Yin energy are capable



of hurting people. While 𤟎 is a new note added to the graphic meaning of 鬼, it tells about how 鬼, i.e. human ghosts specifically here, were generally perceived with a touch of malice and, thus, with a heavy accent on a proper return of humans after death in the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE). This is a result following all sorts of philosophical and religious thoughts on human ghosts that had been discussed and accumulated since the Shang dynasty to explicate this post-human or post-living condition, which further shaped the building-up of human-ghost worlds that were launched from the late Han and Six Dynasties onwards and still have their effect on our perception of ghosts today.

## Building-up of Human-Ghost Worlds

As “what humans return to” is the core of Chinese thoughts on the confinement and development of the concept of human ghosts, we will examine the philosophical and religious discourses on “what humans return to” from classical texts to delineate the intimate relation between humans and ghosts first, and then on the building-up of human-ghost worlds or that of the afterlife manifest in the integration of diverse ghost belief systems in Chinese cultures, i.e. “where ghosts return to”.

### (1) Human Ghosts, “What Humans Return to”

The Chinese character of “ghost” (*gui* 鬼) partakes of the connotation of “return” (*gui* 歸) based on their being near-homophones, and is interpreted in the *Erya*, the earliest Chinese glossary compiled c. in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, hence: “the meaning of ghost is ‘that which returns’” (3.123) and then in *Suowen* as “what humans return to” (5789). This definition illustrates an intimate relation between humans and ghosts: a transformation and continuation of living existence from humans to ghosts or that from material selves to immaterial others without shaking off the strong physicality that was once endowed both on the character formation of 鬼 and in the bodily vitality of humans.<sup>1</sup> Chinese ghosts, transformed from humans after death, as the ancients called the dead the returned, live on in another form in another realm, which is where ghosts return to.

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1 This strong physicality plays an essential and decisive role in the conception of Chinese ghosts, which renders Chinese ghosts different from other ghosts based on their strong physical and material needs that pronounce their intimate relation to this worldliness, a key concept that will be discussed further in this article. Other reference to this topic could be found in Yunheng Gong’s *Liang Han ling ming shi jie guan tan jiu* (*Investigation on the other/underworld worldview in Han dynasty*; Taipei: Wenjin, 2006).

The relations between “ghost” and “return” in terms of “what humans return to” and that of “where ghosts return to” are illustrated in classical texts from different schools. *Liji* (the *Book of Rites*), one of the five classics of Confucianism, dictates that “all living creatures must die, and all the dead must return to earth. This is what is called ‘kuei.’” (qtd. in Yu 403). In *Liezi*, a Taoist book, we read: “When spirit and body separate [in death], each returns to its true [place or nature]. This is therefore what is referred to as a ghost. A ghost means to return, that is, to return to its true home” (qtd. in Zeitlin 4). *Zuo zhuan*, one of the earliest Chinese narrative histories, states that “if ghosts have an abode to return to, they won’t cause terror” (qtd. in D. Wang 267). Either to earth or to a true home, “return” in this context indicates a “return home,” an essential anthropological need that cannot be easily suppressed or pacified and can be further referred to as the restoration of order and balance or of humanity. In other words, this returning home is what determines ghosts as what they are in terms of their relation to humans and further leads us to the building up of their cultural whereabouts, i.e. “where ghosts return to,” in Chinese ghost belief systems.

## (2) Human-Ghost Worlds, “Where Ghosts Return to”

As the concept of “returning home” is essential to define and confine Chinese ghosts, what kind of home or abodes do they return to in Chinese culture? Being a manifestation of the humanisation of cultural ghosts, the building-up of human-ghost worlds, attributed with strong physical and human features, has involved and therefore shaped many philosophical and religious reflections upon the historical development of Chinese society. It is a process that has progressed along with the building-up of some complicated ghost belief systems through time, a result of extensive and lively interaction and integration between traditional Chinese religion, Taoism, and Buddhism.

Echoing the primal status of ghosts, multiple life forces and spirits co-existed spatially on the same level, i.e. on earth, though the life-death separation started to be manifested in the physical separation between human habitations and cemeteries nearby almost as early as ancestor worship appeared in Chinese culture (Liu 5).<sup>2</sup> It is roughly until the Qin and Han dynasties that a more definite demarcation between the human world and the human-ghost world was drawn with the appearance of *Tai-shan* and *Song-li* as the actual geographical

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2 The spatial separation of living residence and cemetery could be found as early as in Neolithic cultures of China, such as in the Yanshao culture, which is dated from around 5000 to 3000 BCE.

names for the earliest human-ghost worlds developed in Chinese folk religion, in which the setting up of a household registration system for ghosts was included (Liu 6). However, the systematic building-up of distinct (imaginary) human-ghost worlds underground, i.e. *Diyu* from Buddhism and *Difu* from Taoism, was launched only after the introduction of Buddhism to China and the popularity of Taoism as the major religious rival against Buddhism in the late Han and Six Dynasties, a period severely troubled by long-term social and political disturbances. Built upon and along with the two main ghost belief systems in Chinese culture, both *Diyu* and *Difu*, usually translated into “hell” in English, can be seen as expanded and transformed imitations and copies of the human world, whose formation consist of many bureaucratic and legal systems originating in Chinese society and were more or less completed only in the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE).<sup>3</sup>

After acquiring a brief history of Chinese ghost beliefs illustrated in the humanisation of cultural ghosts from an abstract concept into some complicated belief systems in three stages, we will examine the humanisation of literary ghosts in *zhiguai* with a specific focus on its generic birth in the Six Dynasties, as it is the particular time when the two main ghost belief systems in Chinese culture launched their epic construction and competition, which, along with the difficult political and social upheavals at that time, brought about the literary birth of ghosts and ghost narratives.<sup>4</sup>

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3 The building-up of a human-ghost world, evolving along with the building-up of a belief system, is a long-term work. It involves complicated and constant repetitions and revisions of concepts and images which are adjusted to the historical and social progression of the human world. The construction of *Diyu*, the Chinese Buddhist hell, is a result of the integration of the concept of the otherworld in traditional Chinese folk religion and that in Indian Buddhism. The construction of *Difu*, the Taoist hell, is an imitation and transformation of the Buddhist *Diyu* and a result of religious competition starting in the late Han dynasty. Thus, the (rough) completion of the building-up of *Diyu* and *Difu*, along with the two ghost belief systems, only occurred almost one century later in the Song dynasty.

4 There were basically no literary ghost narratives but cultural, religious, or philosophical “ghost discourses” existent until the late Han dynasty, which is to say that the birth of literary ghosts and ghost narratives is a cultural and historical production that happened in the Six Dynasties, though surely it was impossible without the previous long term formation of Chinese cultural ghosts and ghost beliefs. Reference can be found in Changyu Shi’s “Lu weijin ziguai de guimei yixiang” (On the imagination of ghosts and goblins in the fantasies of the Wei and Jin Periods), *Wenxue Yichan (Literary Heritage)* 2 (2003): 15–24.

## Humanisation of Literary Ghosts in *zhiguai*: Literary Birth of Ghosts and Ghost Narratives in the Six Dynasties

Literary ghosts and ghost narratives in Chinese literature first came into existence in the Six Dynasties and were bestowed with very physical and human forms and traits according to the cultural ghosts and ghost beliefs at that time and have remained so till now. Nourished by this strong physicality intimately entwined with human bodiliness and worldliness, literary ghosts started to appear in ghost narratives and to take up time and space in history, narrative, and life. The humanisation of literary ghosts in *zhiguai*, which centres on the literary birth of ghosts and ghost narratives in the Six Dynasties, will be examined concerning three aspects: historicising ghosts, poeticising ghosts, and humanising ghosts.

### Historicising ghosts: literary birth of *zhiguai*

Historicising ghosts is the birthmark of literary ghosts that indicates the first step of their humanisation at the generic birth of *zhiguai* in the Six Dynasties. *Zhiguai*, which literally means “records of the strange” or “records of the supernatural”, is an original Chinese literary genre defined as “short fiction written in classical Chinese (*guwen*), which depicts all events about supernatural, strange, improbable, or abnormal phenomena” (Chen 239). As its name relates, *zhiguai* was both read and written as authentic historical and factual recordings of the strange and supernatural, which reveals and proclaims a method of historiography that Gan Bao (286–336 CE), a historian and a great *zhiguai* writer at all times, took in compiling *Soushenji* (*In Search of the Supernatural*, c. 350 CE), a seminal work in the *zhiguai* genre.

In this way, ghosts and ghost narratives were historicised and testified with physical material properties in time and space, as historicity and accounts of the strange and supernatural were attributed to *zhiguai* at its generic birth. After all, the Six Dynasties, due to the incessant social and political disturbances and discontinuities in reality<sup>5</sup>, was a time when the strange and supernatural were perceived as real and factual, when the existence of ghosts was not questioned at all, and when *zhiguai* was categorised into the section of “biographies” instead

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5 As its name suggests, the Six Dynasties is a collective noun for the many Chinese dynasties during the periods of the Three Kingdoms (220–280 AD), the Jin Dynasty (265–420 AD), and the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589), a period of disunity, instability and warfare.

of “fiction” in books of history.<sup>6</sup> Immersed in this strong historicity, the narrative form of *zhiguai* is structured and composed accordingly in the form of historical writing and that of biography, which leads us to the next illustration of the humanisation of literary ghosts: poeticising ghosts.

### Poeticising Ghosts: The Narrative Form of *zhiguai*

As a literary manifestation of historicising ghosts, poeticising ghosts locates literary ghosts in the narrative formation of *zhiguai*, or that of ghost narratives, namely to record fragments of the life of ghosts and their daily unlikely encounters with humans in the written form of historiography and biography. Biography, a written account or history of a person’s life, and historiography, defined as the writing of history or of past events, are both narratives used to represent the significant past, either of a person or of a nation, from a historical point of view. Deeply affected by this historiographical style, *zhiguai*, though whose subject (ghosts) and content (the strange and supernatural) are utterly distinct from both of them (humans, the real and factual), adopts and adapts these narrative forms to a large extent as history is considered a noble genre which gains high literary recognition in Chinese narrative writing.

In imitation of historical writing, *zhiguai* substantialises and preserves the living traces of ghosts through its narrative formation. Firstly, *zhiguai* is always narrated in the past tense by a heterodiegetic narrator, who concentrates more on showing instead of telling and refrains from commenting most of the time. Due to these many layers of distance constructed by time, space, and narrative voice, *zhiguai* setting, characters and plots, no matter how strange or supernatural, are securely framed in the distanced historical narrative and arouse no ambiguity or hesitation in the Chinese reader’s or the character’s mind in recognising ghosts and their daily unlikely encounters with humans as purely common facts.<sup>7</sup>

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6 The reorganization of *zhiguai* into the section of “*xiaoshuo*” as literary fictional writings in books of history was done by Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072 CE) when he compiled *Xing Tang Shu* (*New History of the Tang*, 1060) in the Song dynasty. While the content of *zhiguai* has been officially recognised as fictional and imaginary since then, its literary form of historiography has remained intact till Pu Songling’s time, i.e. till the Qing dynasty.

7 This Chinese way of reading and writing the strange or the supernatural, i.e. *zhiguai*, is in direct contradiction to the strict definition of fantastic literature offered by Tzvetan Todorov in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, as he claims that the fantastic resides in the hesitation or ambiguity between the marvelous and the uncanny (33). While ghosts were recognised as real and factual and *zhiguai* was/had been read and written as history in Chinese culture, there exists no hesitation or ambiguity about the solid existence of the strange and supernatural in Chinese *zhiguai*.

Secondly, the language used in *zhiguai*, especially the one at its generic birth in the Six Dynasties, is mostly plain, factual, and brief, approximately some tens up to 350 words in length. They are quick sketches and snapshots of the life of ghosts, collecting both written and oral information about them, such as the insertion of speech and dialogues. As the life of ghosts is relatively insignificant and rather trivial in comparison with those of emperors and nobles, *zhiguai* narrative, though adopting a historiographical style, often fails to trace the whole life of a ghost in chronological order and is shown fragmented in its narrative form. However, it is via accumulating fragments of the life of many ghosts from here and there that the life of ghosts on the whole, along with pieces of the trivial everyday life reality around them, has been somehow threaded together and sustained in *zhiguai* narrative or in so-called *zhiguai* historiography.<sup>8</sup> The life of literary ghosts, especially those new-born ones sketched in the *zhiguai* of the Six Dynasties, is what will be examined next in humanising ghosts.

### Humanising Ghosts: The Literary Birth of Ghosts in *zhiguai*

Chinese ghosts, both cultural and literary ones, are humanised in a very corporeal sense that (or, as if) they are strongly affected and conditioned by their experiences and memories of being human and of having physical bodies before death, despite the very fact of their being immaterial. Shaped profoundly by this strong physicality that expresses their intimate relation both to their human selves and their worldliness, literary ghosts were brought to life in human form and endowed with vivid human qualities in *zhiguai*.

Like humans, literary ghosts are driven by both physical and emotional needs/desires. They possess not only a human-body form, which makes them hard to be differentiated from humans by sight, weigh basically nothing and stir no noise when crossing a river as narrated in “Song Dingbo” (Cao 321.4), but also have humanlike physical needs and desires for food, drink, shelter, sex, etc. Yet, they are unable to disturb the physical world in a profound, material way. For example, a large amount of food and drink that a ghost just consumed “would re-appear in the status as if they hadn’t been touched at all” shortly after the ghost left the scene, as recorded in Dai Zuo’s *zhiguai* story (2.267).

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8 *Zhiguai* historiography is a field that has been worked on a lot in the last decades, to reconsider the relation between history and literature. References can be found in Rober Campany’s *Strange Writings: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), or Judith Zeitlin’s *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

While this material-world non-disturbance rule seems to work strictly and perfectly in most cases, strong emotional bonds between humans and ghosts, such as love and affection, can surely do some tricks. They are illustrated most abundantly in three literary motifs in *zhiguai* to depict the emotional needs and desires of ghosts: to establish, maintain, or restore their relationships with humans in terms of love, resurrection, or revenge/favour.

One of the earliest *zhiguai* stories that covers more or less all three literary motifs and manifests evident material changes in the physical world of the text world is “Tan Sheng” (Cao 316.5). Tan, a scholar of 40, marries a young, beautiful, female ghost of 15 from a rich family, who comes to him one night, gives birth to a son after their marriage, and gradually regains half of her human flesh back within two years. It is when Tan breaks his promise not to look at her in firelight for three years that they are finally separated, but Tan is left with their son and rewarded and given office with the help of the family of the female ghost. As her emotional bond with her husband and son, or her self-awareness of being a wife and a mother, has been strengthened over time, she also gains more access to the physical world in terms of corporality. She is able to give birth to a human son like a human woman does and her gaining half of her human flesh back indicates her regaining her human identity and life, a process of humanisation of literary ghosts in its fullest literal sense, which, however, ends sadly in failure.

Being an early example of *zhiguai*, “Tan Sheng” relates a strong, plain yearning of the new-born literary ghosts for exerting actual effects on the material world and for retaining bits of their ghostly existence in the human world – a daring yearning manifested vividly in the humanisation of literary ghosts in *zhiguai* in the Six Dynasties; namely, historicising ghosts, poeticising ghosts and humanising ghosts. This desire of literary ghosts to become human, however, has not been eliminated or weakened much in later periods, especially in those of troubled times. *Zhiguai*, after all, is a literary genre that claims to be faithful recordings of the strange and supernatural in the form of historical writing, and it has persisted so till the time of Pu Songling.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

From the humanisation of cultural ghosts in Chinese society to that of literary ghosts in *zhiguai*, Chinese ghosts have developed from an abstract broad concept, to one concrete Chinese character in which many philosophical and religious

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9 Pu Songling (1640–1715) was a Qing dynasty (the last Chinese dynasty) writer, best known as the author of *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (*Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, 1740), i.e. the best known Chinese *zhiguai* collection in the world.

thoughts had been gathered. From there the concept developed into complicated cultural belief systems in its early structural formation, and further to a myriad literary ghosts, which were brought into life in human form and depicted vividly with distinct human traits in the considerable corpus of the *zhiguai* ghost narratives in the Six Dynasties.<sup>10</sup> As literary ghosts are fulfilling this irrepressible tendency of humanisation in order to become more human or gain more human features, they, along with ghost narratives, serve the role of valuable foils to humans and history – they are the absolute but intimate “other” in mirroring Chinese people and society, even more so when their strange and supernatural existence stirs no hesitation. It is when literary ghosts are narrated to appear more human than humans are, either in ghost narratives or in reality, that we as readers might start to reflect upon who or what a human being is, or how to be a human. The formerly taken for granted borderline between humans and ghosts is somehow dramatically twisted or even reversed. Literary ghosts in ghost narratives in the Six Dynasties and in general can thus be read as some restored images of the living yet alienated humans in Chinese society, whose ghostly presence reminds us of an essential anthropological need of returning home as explicated in the etymological reading of 鬼 (*gui*) – they, as well as we humans, need to return home in the sense that order and humanity shall be restored.

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10 Though the production of *zhiguai* narrative was at its peak in the Six Dynasties, we shall keep in mind as well that *zhiguai* was considered as a genre much inferior to history and poetry in Chinese narrative tradition, adding that many of them are lost or survived only as fragments today; thus, “the considerable corpus of *zhiguai* ghost narratives,” which refers to maybe up to one third of the 55 extant but incomplete books of *zhiguai* collections circulating in the Six Dynasties, shall neither be exaggerated nor underestimated.



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Vera Shamina

## Mystic Motifs in Silver Age Poetry and Prose

**Abstract:** The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by a feeling of crisis, which overlapped different spheres of public life. Reality seemed vague and bleak, the future uncertain. At the same time it was a period of an intensive philosophical and religious quest, a search for values, which produced new forms and ideas in art and literature. It was Russian Symbolism that reflected the spirit of the time to the greatest extent. One of the recurrent themes both in poetry and prose of the Silver Age authors was the interaction of the world of the living and that of the dead. Love for Symbolists was mostly a tragic, mysterious, poignant feeling, and lovers were often doomed to part or to die. However, those who lose their beloved always feel their presence and continue to communicate with their souls which is brightly reflected in their poetry and prose.

**Key words:** Russian symbolism, modernism, ghosts, occultism, mystic motifs.

The turn of the 19th to the 20th century both in Russia and in the Western world at large was marked by the rejection of positivism and materialism as well as the classic approach to literature. This was the time when a feeling of crisis overlapped different spheres of public life. There was no longer any trust in rational thinking, reality seemed vague and bleak, the future uncertain. At the same time it was a period of an intensive philosophical and religious quest, a search for values, which produced new forms and ideas in art and literature as well as new figures who contributed to the treasury of Russian literature, and who made it possible to speak about a Russian cultural renaissance. In Russia it resulted in the appearance of a large group of artists, called ‘Russian symbolists, who “like their French and Belgian counterparts, rejected the didactic depiction of the empirical world and conceived of a truer reality hidden by phenomenal experience. They believed that intuition was more important than objective knowledge. This borrowing of ideas from further west was accompanied by aesthetics of art for art’s sake” (Bogomolov, 20).<sup>1</sup>

Symbolism was the first and most significant modernist school in Russia. The symbolists rejected the crude naturalism of life-like descriptions and turned away from the social analysis of the nineteenth century in favor of the inner spiritual world of an individual. Creativity according to them is an unconscious intuitive contemplation of mysterious meanings, which only an artist is capable of. Moreo-

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1 This and all other translations from Russian are by the author.

ver, it is impossible to relate these “mysteries” rationally. According to one of the most prominent theoreticians among the symbolists – Vyacheslav Ivanov – poetry is the “cryptography of the inexpressible” (qtd. in Bogomolov, 311). Valeri Brusov gives the following motivation for the symbolists’ aspiration to the other world:

Art is what in other spheres we call revelation, creation is opening the door into Eternity. We live amidst eternal, primordial lie. Thought and therefore science is unable to expose this lie. But... there are illuminations. These illuminations are the moments of ecstasy, super-sensual intuition, which give a different comprehension of the world of phenomena, and penetrate beyond the surface crust into their core. (*Kluchi ot tain*)

An artist is required to possess not only a super-rational sensitivity but also a most delicate talent of creating implications. It was the symbol which was called upon to relate the contemplated mysteries.

Philosophical theses of symbolism proceeded from an idealistic assumption that visible and tangible reality is fake, illusory while the true essence is hidden, transcendent. The teachings of idealistic philosophers from Plato to Kant, later Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and some Russian philosophers, Vladimir Solovyev in the first place laid the path for the symbolist theory about the two worlds between which the symbol can be an interlink. Visible reality according to them is just a distorted reflection of the mysterious world, which symbolists prefer to it. Symbolists often overemphasize the atmosphere of vagueness avoiding distinct characteristics of objects. Hence their works are filled with the images of *mist, fog, darkness, shade*. *Shadows* are a very typical attribute of symbolist poetry. Brusov used it more than once in his verses: “The shadows of uncreated creatures are swinging in the dream” (Тень несозданных созданий колыхается во сне) (*Poems*). In his poem “The Final Cup” Merezhkovskii writes: “Our life is but a shadow of a shadow” (Лишь тенью тени мы живем) (*Pustaya chasha*). It is interesting that both in Russian and in English one of the most evident synonyms of the word “shadow” is “ghost” or “dead soul”. Thus in Annenskii’s poem “Ghosts” we read:

“The shadows’re wondering and praying:  
 “Oh, let us in!” (И бродят тени, и молят тени: /”Пусти, пусти!”)  
 Through misty clouds the silver moon beams  
 To window lean. (От этих лунных осеребрений / Куда ж уйти)  
 The greenish ghost – the bush of lilac  
 Knocks at the door... (Зеленый призрак куста сирени/ Прильнул к окну...)  
 I pray thee, shadows  
 Stay here no more. (Уйдите, тени, оставьте, тени,/ Со мной одну.../  
 Please leave me, shadows  
 With her alone... (Она недвижна, она немая,/ С следами слез/

She's dumb and lifeless /С двумя кистями сиреней мая/ В извивах кос...).  
Her life is gone (*Prizraki*).

Thus ghosts in the poetry and prose of symbolists act as agents connecting the world of the living with that of the dead and thus life itself acquires a spooky, illusory quality. No wonder almost all of them have a poem or a story with such a title. In some of them apparitions as such are not present, but they determine the comprehension of reality by the characters, the author and in the long run induce the reader to feel like the characters of Bunin's story *Fog* lost in the all-embracing mist.

This brings us close to another characteristic feature of the symbolists' world-view – comprehension of love and death as an inseparable unity. It was already in the early critical responses to the works of symbolists that their interest to the themes of love and death was stressed (Ivanov, 9). On the one hand it was very much due to the general eschatological mood of this period – the feeling of an increasing cultural, political and global crisis. This mood was also supported by the feeling of a 'boundary' existence of an individual "between two abysses" – life and death, as Andrei Belii puts it. On the other hand the lives of many symbolists themselves were filled with dramatic love affairs and tragic deaths.

Valeri Brusov's first love – Elena Kraskova suddenly died of smallpox. Many of his poems written in 1892–1893 were dedicated to her. In 1913 the poet suffers another tragedy when his young lover – the poetess Nadezhda Lvova commits suicide. In his poem *The Demon of Suicide* Brusov creates an image of a dark-eyed youth who appears among the mortals softly seducing them. The image of a dying woman seemed to be haunting the poet. In his poem *The Ghosts* he describes sinful shadows of the past jeering at a dead woman.

Konstantin Balmont who expressed a vivid interest in everything unfathomable and mysterious, even infernal, which can be traced in his poems *The Voice of the Devil*, *The Witch*, *The White Angel*, or *The Sea Devil* twice attempted to commit suicide. Leonid Andreyev also attempted suicide after an unhappy love affair in 1894. And later, in 1906 in Germany his wife would die of postpartum fever.

Fyodor Sologub's wife Anastasia Chebotarevskaya drowned herself, which became an unbearable misery for her husband for the rest of his life. In his works he would again and again recollect her image as in the poem "You passed unnoticed...": "Your eyes and lips were numb and listless/ Without either pain or gloom ("Твои глаза не выражали/ Ни вдохновенья, ни печали, /Молчали бледные уста") [...] "The end has come to mortal wondering/The deathly path is now yours" ("Конец пришел земным скитаньям, /На смертный путь вступила

ты”) (*Poems*). In another poem she again appears visible only to her loving husband: “Invisible to others / Appeared you to me...” (ibid).

No less dramatic was the love-life of Nikolai Gumilev: he fell in love with a young poetess Elizaveta Dmitrieva but she rejected his proposal and married another poet, Maximilian Voloshin, with whom later Gumilev had a duel, in which however no one was injured. In his early poems he also often writes about the interaction of love and death, which found its reflection in his collection *Romantic Flowers*, which include such poems as *The Cave of Dreams*, *Horrible Visions*, *Death*, *Beyond the Coffin* and *Horror*. The key motive of this cycle is the motive of fatal seduction with love, which is inseparable from death. Thus in the poem *Horror* he pictures an image of a phantom with a head of a hyena on a slender maiden’s shoulders, which acquires a paralysing power over the poet: “It was your wish to come and you are mine!” (“Ты сам пришел сюда, ты мой!”) – claims the phantom (*Uzhas*). The phantasmagoric image is multiplied in the mirrors, which is another recurrent symbol in the Silver Age poetry and prose. The mirror in old beliefs symbolised a magic connection between the object and its reflection (Zaharieva, 65). For symbolists it was the door to the other world, the other side of life, and one cannot be sure which is more real. For example A. Chayanov in his story *Venetian Mirror* describes the adventures of a glass-man – a mirror double of the protagonist, who takes his place in real life (*Venetsianskoye zerkalo*).

But perhaps the most tragic and mysterious was the story of Vyacheslav Ivanov. He loved his wife dearly but in 1907 she suddenly died and in five years Ivanov married her daughter Vera from the first marriage who seemed to him a reincarnation of the deceased wife. He wrote: “She is the image and reflection of my beloved – her mother. I am scared to lose her as suddenly as I lost her mother” (qtd. in Bavin, 174). In 1920 Vera died. It seems only natural that all this brought Ivanov to mysticism and occultism which resulted in his association with a certain lady, A. Mintslova, who gained strong influence on Vyacheslav Ivanov and soon acquired in Moscow the reputation of a prophet. Together they practiced spiritism, which became quite popular among the symbolists at the beginning of the 20th century. “Russian symbolism directed its major efforts towards the unfathomable. Alternately it fraternised with mysticism, theosophy, occultism” – wrote Gumilev (*Naslediye symbolisma i acmeism*) who later rejected its aesthetics and had his own way in art.

This mood manifested itself in the choice of themes, imagery and expressive means. As we have already shown one of the recurrent themes both in poetry and prose of the Silver Age authors was the interaction of the world of the living and that of the dead and especially so the communication with those whom the

poets once loved. According to Uri Lotman dramatic relations between Eros and Thanatos constitute the core of the “erotic utopia” of the fin de siècle generation in Russia, which was based on the belief that “only love can overcome death and make the body immortal” (Lotman, 425).

The poets who lost their beloved ones feel their presence and continue to communicate with their souls both in their poetry as well as at the séances of spiritism. Most of them share Georgy Chulkov’s belief that, “the one who once existed may not be found on the earth but his existence is not less real than that of the living” (*Sestra*).

As a matter of fact Georgy Chulkov, a younger symbolist, was one of those who frequently incorporated all sorts of spooky imagery into his stories. He was born in 1879 and died in 1939 in Moscow. He started his creative work with poetry, but later wrote mostly prose – he published four volumes of stories, one volume of critical essays, and one volume of drama and poetry. He was especially interested in religious and philosophical problems, he explored the depths of human psychology in his stories, and was not alien to mysticism. The general mood of Chulkov’s stories is distinctly melancholy. Chulkov’s heroes are always aware of some mystery beneath the surface of everyday life. Even in those cases when the story is set in some concrete historical environment, reality seems to have dream-like qualities and the characters are like sleep-walkers. “We are all blind,” exclaims the heroine of the story *The Blind*. Social events, like war or revolution, are not specified and perceived by the author and his characters as symbols of a hostile environment, as in the story *Fate*. The idea of irrational doom, blind humanity lost in the obscure hostility of the universe, is most clearly expressed in his allegory *The Sheep*. Here the author shows a flock of sheep making its way without a shepherd in the fog and mist, moving forward without any direction with black hawks hovering over them, looking for prey.

The theme of interaction of the world of the living with the world of the dead is especially prominent in his two stories – *The Voice from the Grave* and *The Sister*. In both cases the story concerns the death of a beautiful young woman who has some unfathomable disease. In both stories Chulkov’s hero strives to penetrate into the eternal mystery of death using the power of reason but fails, coming to the conclusion that human possibilities are limited. Both stories are narrated by the main character, which imparts verisimilitude to the narration and provides deep psychological insight into the hero’s mind and soul. The narrator is anonymous and is characterized only by his own confessions. The historical setting in both stories is hard to identify, possibly it is the turn of the century but we do not see any historical particularities as they are hardly relevant to the action, which

makes them sound like fables or parables rather than stories of a historically specified narrative. The first story, *The Voice from the Grave*, is set in Rome, the second, *The Sister*, in an old Russian family manor house. Though the first story is more topographically concrete, what really matters in both cases is that the action unfolds itself in the atmosphere of antiques: old paintings, tapestries, sculptures, books – all this creates a kind of a baroque framing for the mysterious story and imparts grandeur to the sufferings of the heroes.

In the first story we find the motif, which is quite frequent in Edgar Allan Poe's stories – that of two women linked by hidden bonds through their love to one and the same man. The first woman is the narrator's wife Vera. Her name in Russian means "faith" and that is what she really is for him. She is earthly and heavenly harmonious; she is the embodiment of love, patience, wisdom, and forgiveness. The other one, whom Vera and her husband meet in an old church – mysterious and infernal – is Princess Elena (the name is also not randomly chosen, as Elena reminds us of the Trojan war, treachery, breach of marital obligations, etc.), who combines rare beauty with some cruelty, which is reflected in her ominous smile. Besides, she bears distinct marks of the forthcoming death. All this puzzles and fascinates the narrator. The hero falls in love with the princess, though he feels guilty because of his treachery. This feeling of guilt becomes unbearable, and finally he decides to break up with his mistress. When he informs her about his decision, Elena's face suddenly acquires a strangely hostile expression, and she ominously declares: "But you are mine, only mine! ... Remember then that you will never be with your wife again!" The very next moment she is herself again – tender, submissive, loving. She asks for three more dates, and when he comes for the third time to say "Farewell," he finds her dead. Then comes the climax of the story, the major conflict, which is not so much in this love affair but in the confrontation of the rational and the irrational. The story starts with the narrator's speculations about René Descartes, who declared that he could live as long as he wanted and who believed in the unlimited power of man's reason and will. Throughout the whole story the protagonist is trying hard to convince himself that everything in the universe can be rationally explained. He does not change his opinion even when a friend of Princess Elena, a mysterious Hungarian with the Italian name of Jemisto, who according to the narrator looks like a death mask, like a phantom from the grave, demonstrates his supernatural abilities at a spiritualistic séance. He even calls up a ghost from the beyond. But the protagonist, though acknowledging the existence of other dimensions inhabited by demons who may have direct influence on our life and fate, still insists that all these phenomena can be scientifically studied and explained. Actually, he is convinced that matter



and only matter underlies all phenomena in the universe, though we may not yet know certain forms of its transformation. When the protagonist sees his dead mistress, he has a feeling that she is not actually dead but is in a state of lethargy and that by the concentration of his will he can bring her back to life. Then an exercise in mesmerism follows: Chulkov's hero tries by the power of his will to transcend the boundaries of the two worlds, and succeeds: for a moment Elena opens her eyes to say: "You are mine, aren't you, only mine!" – and then closes them forever. And ever since then when in moments of passion he kneels down before his wife and speaks the words of love he hears the tender voice whispering: "You are mine, only mine!" The prophecy has come true; the protagonist could never be intimate with his wife again.

These themes and especially that of the reincarnation of souls are also explored in Chulkov's story *The Sister*. As previously mentioned, the story is set in an old Russian family manor house, exquisite but decaying and stuffed with different objects of art. Paintings on religious subjects hang next to books on philosophy and mysticism. Gothic furniture and tinted windows in some rooms, as the author says, contribute to the general atmosphere of mystery. The protagonist, who as in the previous story is its narrator, feels "surrounded by the shadows of the past ... who stretched their arms to him, exhausted by the life beyond the grave, and called him to their unfathomable paths." The narrator comes to this house to visit his sister, whom he hasn't seen since his childhood, as she has been brought up by their aunt who has died recently. He can hardly recognize the little creature he remembers from his childhood in the slender girl with "wise and mysterious eyes." Thus, from the very beginning the image of the heroine is associated with some enigma: "she seemed to bear a stamp of fatigue," and later the protagonist learns that she is fatally ill. Talking to her he is constantly aware of some secrets known only to her. She often talks of her deceased aunt as if she were alive and once declares that "the one who already exists may not be found on the earth but his existence is not less real than that of the living." Very soon the narrator gets some proof of this statement when at night he sees the ghost of his aunt sitting at the foot of his bed. He attributes it to hallucination but by strange coincidence his sister has a heart attack this very night. When the protagonist comes to her room she asks him to read the letter that their aunt wrote before her death. It reads: "I must warn you that now you are living through the seventh circle of your existence and the one who was once your bride is now your sister." At first he does not attach much importance to this, ascribing these mysterious lines to the state of his aunt's nerves and soon forgets about it. But later he becomes very sensitive to the state of his sister's health and does not even need to be told when

she has a heart attack. Like the hero of the previous story by Chulkov, the brother concentrates all his will to make his sister's heart restore its rhythm. The narrator feels that death is at her feet and it is only due to the effort of his will that he "can still keep the mourning guest away." Another thing that troubles the hero is his dreams. While in the daytime his attitude towards his sister is absolutely chaste, in his dreams he sees her naked and desires her. Finally this unequal struggle with death exhausts his will and he gives in. At this last moment when he feels that the link between them is breaking and he is letting death get hold of its prey, his sister opens her eyes and utters: "Fiancée, my beloved!" and then closes them forever.

Thus, we cannot fail to trace in Chulkov's stories some obvious motifs inherent in the works of all Russian symbolists – desire to understand and give rational explanation to the irrational, fascination with the mystery of death. "This desire to peer into the fissures connecting the mortal world with the immortal," writes Adam Weiner, "becomes an irresistible temptation, fraught both with artistic promise and moral danger" (16). This was one of the problems which Russian symbolists were confronted with; therefore in many of their works we find an intention to interlink occultism with Christianity, mainly Russian orthodoxy, which seldom if ever succeeded. However, it was Russian Symbolists who through their spooky visions and mystic motifs questioning materialistic omniscience and challenging rationality intuitively foreshadowed the turbulence of the years to come and the destruction of the old world with its values and beliefs.

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