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Visible Yet Immaterial: The Phantom and the Male Body in Ghost Stories by Three

Victorian Women Writers

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In the ghost story ‘Thurnley Abbey’, Alastair Colvin, an old Colonial hand, points out that ‘there are few ghosts outside Europe – few, that is, that a white man can see’ (Landon 1908: 228). Although he is of course proved wrong, white men’s vision, it is suggested, is impaired or impeded when it comes to apprehending the supernatural. There is much they cannot (or will not?) see. Women (white or otherwise) are not mentioned here, yet in ‘Thurnley Abbey’, the two men and one woman who apprehend the terrifying ghost figure (or fragments of it), are equally petrified and appalled. They spend the night huddled together to save their reason and provide comfort for each other, still terrified of what they have seen. . In this story and in many others, the echoing question of the ghosts that ‘a white man can see’ resonates through English ghost stories throughout the long nineteenth century.

This chapter considers the ghosts that become visible to white men, but it also **examines** the phenomena of the appearance of white men *as* ghosts. It references the work of three women writers of ghost stories from across the Victorian period: Catherine Crowe, writing in the early Victorian era, Rhoda Broughton from the middle of the age, and Edith Nesbit’s late Victorian tales. Exploring the question of men and ghosts through the work of these three popular women writers, we can trace the way that ghosts and ghost sightings reflect on Victorian ideas of masculinity. Victorian ghost stories have long been discussed by scholars in relation to gender and the writing and reception of these tales enabled women to have a voice and allowed a sort of veiled criticism of patriarchal society. Ghost stories were

written by both sexes, however, some of the most successful, radical and progressive were written by women. For many women the act of writing ghost stories was liberating. Diana Wallace states that

EXT [t]he ghost story as a form has allowed women writers special kinds of freedom, not merely to include the fantastic and supernatural, but also to offer critiques of male power and sexuality which are often more radical than those in more realistic genres (Wallace 2004: 57)

Indeed, critical attention has, to date, focused on the female ghost in Victorian ghost stories as echoing the social and domestic position of the Victorian woman who was ‘above all the ghost in the noontide, an anomalous spirit on display at the center of Victorian materialism and progress’ (Dickerson 1996: 11). However there has been virtually no critical consideration of the male ghost figure. Whilst the ghost body of a woman who is ephemeral and transparent may be less troubling to contemporary Western conceptualisations of gender, in the Victorian period the ghostly body of the white male phantom presented an anomaly that is yet to be explored.¹

Victorian moral doctrine advocated the principle of ‘a healthy mind and a healthy body’ and presented an idealised form of masculinity, which emphasised physical power and mental control (Hall 1994: 116),. The male phantasmal bodies in many ghost stories however, visibly display the direct antithesis to this ideal. Cyndy Hendershott in *The Animal Within: Masculinity and the Gothic* contends that ‘[s]table gender identity is predicated on the stability of the body itself’ and the ghost-body must be the most unstable of all (Hendershott 1998: 9). These phantom bodies take up no space, they have no corporeality or materiality and yet they are present and visible, open to scrutiny and often literally transparent These immaterial bodies are left being *only* body: barely there, most often reactive and compelled to

act; they radiate need. Yet while these ephemeral figures emphasise the weakness of the male body, there is another aspect to the male ghost, where it may be that it is the iron will of the dead man which is expressed in the manifestation of his phantom body. Thus, conversely, the male ghost body could be seen as the epitome of the 'mind/body' dichotomy, whereby the spirit (mind) revives and re-animates the memory of the fleshly body in order to intervene in the material world.

This chapter traces three positions in relation to female authored Victorian ghost stories: men seeing ghosts and their affective reaction to these experiences; the male phantom as an emasculated figure, immaterial and needy, and finally the male ghost as exuding a more manly version of active, determined masculinity. I will argue that the male ghost body signifies very differently to that of female ghosts and while on the one hand it can present a disempowered, disembodied state for men, particularly in later texts it can also point to the possibility of the survival of the masculine will from beyond the grave proving that the mind can truly transcend the body. Throughout the discussion of men and ghosts there are paradoxes, complications and questions that sometimes require more than one answer, yet it is a discussion that I believe bears fruit. At a time of flux and ambiguity for the signification of the white male body, of all Victorian male bodies, the upper-class white male ghost body is arguably the most paradoxical. Within the literature of the time these bodies are always and inevitably disturbing and contentious, bringing uncertainty to hegemonic, naturalised notions of Victorian masculinity.

Women's Ghost Stories and the Ghosts of the Marginal

The Victorian period was the 'golden age' of the ghost story and Cox and Gilbert contend that '[g]host stories were something at which the Victorians excelled' (Cox and Gilbert 1991:

x). The mid-to-late nineteenth century saw the rise of the literary ghost story and these tales became 'as typically part of the cultural and literary fabric of the age as imperial confidence or the novel of social realism' (Ibid. p. x). Over the years critics have discussed and argued about the changes in the representations of ghosts over the Victorian period. However, all agree that ghosts bring into question gender expectations, and the literary ghost story was a space where gender conventions were disturbed.

In the early Victorian period one of the most famous authors of ghost tales was Catherine Crowe. Published just before the advent of Spiritualism, Crowe's influential text *The Night Side of Nature: of Ghosts and Ghost Seers* (1848), is a collection of 'real' ghost tales: reports garnered from people's first-hand experience of the supernatural. These encounters with the unexplained were imparted to her through conversations, letters, and anecdotes, and have a strong connection with earlier oral traditions associated with tales of the supernatural. *The Night-Side of Nature* was intended as testimony to people's true experiences of ghosts and was to be presented as evidence to the scientific community. Crowe believed in ghosts and she felt strongly that science and scientific men were arrogant about this matter, perpetuating ignorance through their persistent refusal to investigate the supernatural. Indeed Crowe says that it is often 'the "weak and foolish" . . . women and unscientific persons' who apprehend and investigate paranormal phenomenon as they are more intuitive and open minded (Crowe [1848] 2000: 138). Crowe was not quite a feminist as we might understand it today, however, she had a keen eye for injustice and was certainly not to be silenced when it came to women's educational rights, generally advocating a more respectful appreciation of the more 'feminine' virtues of intuition and insight.² Crowe was a pioneering figure in many ways and Nicholas Freeman contends that *The Night-Side of Nature* 'was to prove inspirational for many writers of ghost stories as the nineteenth century progressed' (Freeman 2014: 188).

The second author this chapter will consider, Rhoda Broughton, wrote ghost stories as well as very popular sensation fiction. She too was an advocate for women's education, and perhaps unsurprisingly as she is writing in the mid rather than the early Victorian period (*Twilight Stories* was published in the 1870s), she is more radical in her outlook on gender than Crowe. Indeed, Tamar Heller argues that her work 'anticipates the more explicitly feminist fiction of the 1890s' and cites her 'association with rebellious femininity' (Heller 2011: 283; 290). Heller is speaking particularly about Broughton's sensation fiction, but Emma Liggins suggests that her tales of the supernatural allowed other freedoms, contending that, 'Broughton's ghost stories ... allowed her to comment on taboo subjects such as female sexuality and women's attitudes to money' (Liggins 2009: vi). As a popular ghost story writer her tales are ostensibly fictional, but as Joellen Masters contends, 'Broughton wrote her "nasty" little stories within a cultural *milieu* driven to chronicle, to record, and to prove the existence of an afterlife' (Masters 2015: 224). Additionally, Masters quotes a letter from Broughton written on October 9, 1872 that claims that the ghost story considered in this chapter, 'Poor Pretty Bobby,' is 'founded on fact' (Ibid. p. 229), echoing the folkloric, oral tale telling evident in Crowe's work.

Liggins says that Broughton's work 'set a trend for other women writers like [Edith] Nesbit' and Nesbit is the third author of supernatural tales considered here (Liggins 2009: iii). Nesbit's feminist credentials are not quite fully formed, for example she was against women's suffrage (Briggs 1987: 335). However, she was acutely aware of the gender politics of her day and Nicholas Freeman calls her 'a politically radical "new woman"' (Freeman 2012: 101). In her own life Nesbit had, as Julia Briggs asserts, 'enjoyed the benefits of independence, both financial and sexual' (Briggs 1987: 335). Victoria Margree argues that

although Nesbit was ambivalent towards feminism: ‘a feminist orientation is in evidence more widely in her works of supernatural short fiction. A preoccupation with gender is discernible in several stories that offer distinct gender critiques’ (Magree 2014: 246). Writing in the late nineteenth century, she was a member of the Occult group the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and was known to attend meetings of the Society for Psychic Research (Briggs 1987: 63). Nesbit was very superstitious and believed in ghosts (Briggs 1987: 173; 336). Although Victorian ghost stories were usually fictional stories, throughout the genre there is a strain of ‘real’ ghost tales present in the period that saw the foundation of Spiritualism (circa 1848) and the establishment of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882. Andrew Smith asserts that ‘it is important to distinguish ... between stories about ghosts and the literary ghost story’ (Smith 2010: 3) and we have both sorts in Crowe’s, Broughton’s and Nesbit’s tales. However, it is the suggestion of the ‘truth’ of the ghost stories that echoes the widespread belief in the supernatural apparent in the Victorian period. This belief resonates through all these women’s ghost stories adding a frisson of the real to the gender politics they present.

It is not just ghost stories that offered women a space in which to critique and question the society they lived in, interestingly the ghost figure itself is argued as being the site of radical critique. Those of us familiar with Victorian ghost stories recognise that very many ghost figures signify the ‘Other’ and most scholarly work about Victorian ghosts examines the phenomena of female ghosts. Yet far from viewing the female ghost as a mere extension of the repressive expectations placed on Victorian women, this phantom body is seen as liberated from the material expectations and conventions of the age. Indeed, Vanessa Dickerson contends that the appearance of the female ghost, as a central feature in Victorian tales, allowed for some visibility, agency and physical presence for women. She says ‘the

ghost corresponded ... particularly to the Victorian woman's visibility and invisibility, her power and powerlessness, the contradictions, and extremes that shaped female culture (Dickerson 1997: 5). Ghosts, she argues, are like Victorian women whose position was 'ambiguous, marginal, ghostly' (Ibid. p. 5). Figurations of ghosts and hauntings can bring to light that which has been obscured, forgotten or hidden. More than this, the ghost as a marginalised figure itself can bring to the fore the *presence* of the disavowed. The ghosts of those who are marginalised force notice onto themselves and will not be ignored.

However, while the ghost figure may be liberating for those who have historically been marginalised, for the men that witness them, ghost-seeing is not such a positive thing. That many male ghost-seers are affected in a way that is detrimental to certain notions of masculinity has long been documented. In the introduction to *The Virago Book of Victorian Ghost Stories* Jennifer Uglow notes 'how the experience of seeing a ghost pushes men into conventional female roles: timid, nervous and helpless' (Uglow 1992: xvii). The experience of seeing a ghost can un-man even the most masculine of men, introducing elements of doubt into the world-view of those who are vigorous, rational, materialistically inclined. Catherine Crowe details the case of two soldiers in a military hospital. Corporal Q is being treated for an ulcerated leg and in the neighbouring bed, Private W has consumption. In his testimony Private W recounts:

EXT 'I was lying awake' said he, 'last Tuesday night, when I saw someone sitting on Corporal Q's bed. There was so little light in the ward that I could not make out who it was, and the figure looked so strange that I got alarmed, and felt quite sick. I called out to Corporal Q that there was somebody sitting upon his bed, and then the figure got up; and as I did not know but it might be coming to me, I got so much alarmed,

that being but weakly' (this was the consumptive man), 'I fell back, and I believe I fainted away'. (Crowe [1848] 2000: 215)

Private W has a bodily reaction to the apparition. The ghost is of the deceased wife of a colleague of theirs who desires Corporal Q to write something to her husband. Corporal Q has a similar reaction to the visitation from the ghost. He tells his superior officer who then questions him:

EXT [a]fter a while, she came towards me again; and while my eyes were upon her, she somehow disappeared from my sight altogether, and I was left alone.

It was then that I felt faint-like, and a cold sweat broke out over me. (Ibid. p. 214)

The reaction of both military men is physical: weakness, sickness, cold sweats and faintness. Both men feel the encounter strongly and it disturbs them deeply. They are in hospital, already in a position of dependency and vulnerability; these men themselves are not physically healthy but Crowe emphasises that they were 'both men of good character, and neither of them suffering from any disorder affecting the brain' (Ibid. p. 213). Yet they are undeniably in a powerless, physically fragile state and the ghost-sighting weakens them further. Frank Barrett contends that historically, '[m]ilitaries around the world have defined the soldier as an embodiment of traditional male sex role behaviours', for these men however, there is not possibility of a 'manly' soldier's reaction (Barrett 2008: 77). Ghost seeing has affected their bodies and turned them into fainting, sweating wrecks. Both men are questioned by their superior officer, they attest to the truth of the experience and he notes that 'six months afterward, on being interrogated, their evidence and their conviction were as clear as at first' (Crowe [1848] 2000: 215).

In the more conventional ghost story, Rhoda Broughton's 1872 tale, 'The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing But the Truth' the narrative is completed, but a note comes after: 'The is a true story' (Broughton [1872] 1995: 16). In this 'true' story on taking the inevitable 'small compartment of heaven' (Ibid. p. 9) at a ridiculously low rental price our narrator, Elizabeth De Wynt begins to comprehend something is wrong with the house. Narrated through letters to her dear friend Cecilia we eventually find out that it is haunted. The two people who see whatever shape/form the apparition takes (we are never told) both can only state: 'Oh! My God, I have seen it!' (Ibid. p. 13; 16). A maid goes mad and is carted off to a lunatic asylum whilst the handsome young man Ralph Gordon has a different fate. After hearing what has happened he asks permission to sleep in the affected room saying 'I should like nothing better' (Ibid. p. 15). The daughter of the house, Adela pleads with him not to stay there as he too might be sent mad:

EXT He laughed heartily, and coloured a little with pleasure at seeing the interest she took in his safety. 'Never fear,' he said, 'it would take more than a whole squadron of departed ones, with the old gentleman at their head, to send me crazy.' (Broughton [1872] 1995: 15)

Reluctantly Mrs De Wynt agrees and Ralph happily goes upstairs. They wait 'for exactly an hour; but it seemed like two years' (Ibid. p. 16), when the bell from upstairs rings urgently and they rush up. Mrs De Wynt writes to her friend:

EXT There he was, standing in the middle of the floor, rigid, petrified, with that same look – that look that is burnt into my heart in letters of fire – of awful, unspeakable, stony fear on his brave young face. For one instant he stood thus; then stretching out his arms stiffly before him, he groaned in a terrible, husky voice, 'Oh, my God! I have

seen it!’ and fell down *dead*. Yes, *dead*. Not in a swoon or a fit, but *dead* (Ibid. p. 16, original emphasis)

Ralph is affected even more deeply than the maid: his body is so affected that it cannot support his life any longer. He dies from fright – he does not sweat, or faint or even just lose his wits: Ralph Gordon expires. Seeing ghosts for all these men is a visceral, bodily experience. The horror is not just in the imagination – the mind, it manifests through the flesh and the physicality of their bodies. This relates to our contemporary notions of ‘affect’ whereby there is a re-turn to the body and the emotions, away from any attempt at objectivity. Patricia Clough states that affectivity as ‘a substrate of potential bodily responses, often automatic responses, in excess of consciousness’ (Clough 2007: 2). These responses are instinctive, automatic and beyond the comprehension of the mind. The immateriality of the ghost form, perhaps paradoxically, is comprehended and apprehended through the bodies of those who witness it.

In one of the most striking stories about a man seeing a ghost, E. Nesbit’s ‘From the Dead’, the narrator’s experience brings a chilling new dimension to the tradition of men who see ghosts being frightened out of their wits. After abandoning her for years, a repentant husband has a change of heart and rushes to the deathbed of his wronged and neglected wife. Alas, he is too late for forgiveness; she has died before he arrived. That night he lies in the room next to her corpse full of guilt, grief and remorse. He begins to be spooked by perceived tiny sounds from next door but rebukes himself:

EXT ‘You fool!’ I said to myself; ‘dead or alive, is she not your darling, your heart’s heart? Would you not go near to die of joy if she came to you. Pray God to let her spirit come back and tell you she forgives you!’

‘I wish she would come,’ myself answered in words, while every fibre of my body and mind shrank and quivered in denial. (Nesbit [1893] 2015: 75)

The narrator’s rational self calls out loud for his dead wife to come to him whilst he shrinks and quivers at the idea both in body and mind. Interestingly here his mind also revolts and is equated with his physical self whilst his dis-embodied words ring out. Unfortunately for him, his wish is granted:

EXT The door opened slowly, slowly, slowly, and the figure of my dead wife came in. It came straight towards the bed, and stood at the bed-foot with its white grave-clothes, with the white bandage under its chin. There was a scent of lavender. Its eyes were wide open and looked at me with love unspeakable.

I could have shrieked aloud. (Ibid. p. 75)

This is an active ghost who moves and speaks. This is most certainly a purposeful ghost and it/she has come to express her undying love to her husband leading to this memorable encounter:

EXT ‘You’ll love me again now, won’t you’ now I’m dead? One always forgives dead people.’

The poor ghost’s voice was hollow and faint. Abject terror paralyzed me. I could answer nothing.

‘Say you forgive me,’ the thin, monotonous voice went on; ‘say you’ll love me again.’ ...

‘I suppose,’ she said wearily, ‘you would be afraid, now I am dead, if I came round to you and kissed you?’

She made a movement as though she would have come to me.

Then I did shriek aloud, again and again, and covered my face with the sheet, and wound it round my head and body, and held it with all my force (Ibid. p. 76)

Our narrator is immobilised by fear. Passive and petrified he can only lie in his bed and shriek. M. Grant Kellermeier who annotates my copy of Nesbit's horror stories says that the wife is making an offer to her erring husband: 'Accept me as a [sic] corruptible flesh rather than an idealistic spirit, and you shall have absolution' (Kellermeier 2015: 77). He continues:

EXT While we may forgive her rueful spouse for not wanting to partake in necrophilia (the subtext is very clear – she is offering him the absolving baptism of sexual intercourse), symbolically his failure to accept his wife as a flawed mortal – decay and all – is a condemnable miscarriage of love and action. (Ibid. p. 77)

The husband fails twice – first, when out of pride he rejects his living wife, but more importantly he absolutely fails in his position as husband and man when he rejects her ghost, succumbing to 'abject terror' which paralyzes him and shrieking 'again and again,' while he hides his head in the bed clothes like a child.

All these ghostly encounters have the effect of un-manning the ghost seers, which serves to feminise them, leading to physical affect that in a paradoxical manner returns them to their bodies: sweating, shaking, paralyzed, shrieking and even dying. None of these reactions could be classed as a 'manly' response to a supernatural encounter. This was particularly apparent in the ghost stories of the mid to late nineteenth century, a period which saw the hardening of gender divisions and the rise of the cult of manliness. John Tosh argues that the concept of manliness 'implied that there was a single standard of manhood, which was expressed in certain physical attributes and moral dispositions' (Tosh 2004: 2). These are

(white) colonial values and, John Beynon argues, rest on an ideal of ‘hard masculinity’ that involved discipline and self-sacrifice, and the ‘manly’ virtues of ‘grit, self-reliance, determination, leadership and initiative’ (Beynon 2002: 28). Self-sacrifice, a stiff-upper lip, leadership and a strong sense of Britishness, (or more likely Englishness), were ‘manly’. Manliness was an expression of a certain type of idealised masculinity – muscular, fearless, bold, daring and forthright. It was a cult which celebrated spaces of homosociality, encompassing the public school system, the British Empire, Christianity, and, of course, the military. ‘Real’ men could boast of a ‘manly character’ and a ‘manly figure’ (Tosh 2005: 3). At the same time the rise of the movement of Muscular Christianity combined the physical with the spiritual: espousing a robust, healthy, moral masculinity which served the Nation. A ghost however, has no place; it has moved beyond any question of national boundaries.

In relation to the accepted ‘supernatural’, (the Holy Ghost is still a ghost), although Christianity was expected, it was not to be taken too far. David Newsome says that Charles Kingsley, one of the greatest proponents of ‘godly’ version of manliness, believed that,

EXT manliness was the antidote to the poison of effeminacy ... which was sapping the vitality of the Anglican church. Young men came to the church for spiritual nourishment: they went away perverted. Their enthusiasm was diverted into unnatural, un-English pursuits. They were encouraged to think of themselves as beings set apart from other men, their minds bent on other-worldliness (Newsome 1961: 207)

When Christianity remained straightforward and non-reflexive it was acceptable: men needed a rationalistic, materialistic grasp of the world and their place within it. Forthright, down-to-earth and undoubting, a manly man was to have ‘nothing odd about him’ (Ibid. p. 98).³

Solitude and contemplation of the 'other-worldly' were not seen as conducive to proper expressions of manliness and ghosts inevitably smack of the 'other world'.

Always contradictory though, Victorian society was never a unified entity and it created its own anxieties. Whilst such straightforward manliness was encouraged from some quarters in others it was suggested that other reactions to the spiritual (and supernatural) were both possible and desirable. Brett Carroll adds a different dimension to the idea of men and ghosts in his study of Victorian men and Spiritualism. The purpose of Spiritualist practice was to court communication with spirits and Carroll contends that this opened up a new dimension of masculinity for Victorian men. He argues that far from being a negative thing, the feminised position of the male ghost seer allowed new insights and the possibility of new expressions of masculinity. Carroll says, 'Spiritualist ideology and ritual provided ideal theoretical and physical settings for [the] rethinking of masculinity' (Carroll 2000: 5). His point is that in opposition to the ideal of manliness as strength, competition, and aggression, there was another type of masculinity being espoused, one that manifested itself into a kind of Victorian new-man:

EXT Countless Victorian advice manuals warned against excessive absorption in public pursuits ... offering an alternate ideal of "sentimental" or "domestic" manliness that identified masculine fulfilment with the moral responsibilities and emotional and spiritual ties of marriage and domestic life ... Men conforming to this ideal would emulate their wives and mothers – that is, integrate into their identities traits they defined as feminine – by softening competitive aggressiveness, seeking close domestic involvement, replacing expression of patriarchal anger with an openly affectionate style of governance (Carroll 2000: 5)

Carroll claims that from this model some men turned to Spiritualism ‘for relief’ from more aggressive models of manliness and suggests that the acceptance of a concept of a higher spiritual plane, an engagement with emotions, especially grief led to a ‘reorientation of manhood’ (Ibid. p. 7). Here, communication with spirits can be a liberating experience for men. Carroll cites what he calls the ‘Spiritualist’s androgynous spiritual aspirations’ (Ibid. p. 6), which disrupt conventional notions of manly masculinity in very many ways, and indeed ghosts themselves are often de-gendered and referred to as ‘it’. Apart from poor dead Ralph Gordon, the men who encounter ghosts in the stories we have examined must have learned some kind of lesson. Crowe argues that women are more likely to see ghosts than men because women are more sensitive and receptive; she claims that this sort of in-sight is ‘more frequently developed in women than in men’ (Crowe 2000: 176). Ghost seeing, it appears, can create an empowered female gaze and she states quite clearly that ‘experience, observation, and intuition must be our principle if not our only guides’ (Ibid. p.16). If allowed, ghost-seeing and an openness to the supernatural can enable a fruitful melding of masculinity with a more feminine, intuitive outlook.

The Male Ghost Body

We have argued that seeing ghosts in these female authored tales usually forces men into a feminised position and this can be seen as either de-masculinising or as presenting an opportunity for enhanced intuition and feeling. We will now turn to the presence of the male phantom as it is seen, witnessed, and apprehended by others. Issues of seeing and believing inevitably follow any report of ghost sighting and scholars from the margins have long questioned the concepts of seeing, vision, and visibility. Richard Dyer contends that ‘the ultimate position of power in a society that controls people in part through their visibility is

that of invisibility, the *watcher* (Dyer 1997: 44-5, original emphasis). This is a different type of invisibility to that which over-looks and denies the humanity and agency of women or those who are seen as 'other' in whatever way. This is the invisibility of the centre as it surveys, categorises and marks 'difference'. Judith Butler explains this phenomenon in relation to the idea of the (neutral/objective) white gaze that looks outwards, describing: 'the masculine privilege of the disembodied gaze, the gaze that has the power to produce bodies, but which is itself no body' (Butler 1990: 136). However, it is possible to argue that the surveillance of the male ghost body entirely reverses this power dynamic. The type of 'no-body' manifested by the male ghost, does not produce a disembodied, empowered gaze rather, in its immateriality and transparency, it is a body that is *looked at*. In her discussion of postcolonial masculinities Stephanie Newell states that '[i]f postcolonial women's writing is generally regarded as re-visionary, then (post)colonial masculinity ... tends to be dys-visionary, acting out the failure of the visual economy during bodily encounters' (Newell 2009: 246). A similar interchange may be happening in relation to the visibility of the ghostly white male body. The apparition of the dead white man reverses the power of the gaze. The body of this ghost figure is surveyed: it is seen and it needs to be seen. An invisible, unseen ghost is no ghost at all: a ghost needs someone else to witness it and testify to its existence.

In the section 'Apparitions', Crowe recounts the tale of a ghost that is desperate to communicate; one that has a pressing need to speak:

EXT [s]ome years ago, during the war, when Sir Robert H E was in the Netherlands, he happened to be quartered with two other officers, one of whom was despatched into Holland on an expedition. One night, during his absence, Sir R H E awoke, and, to his great surprise, saw this absent friend sitting on the bed which he used to occupy, with a wound in his breast. Sir Robert immediately awoke his companion, who saw the spectre also. The latter then addressed them saying that he had been that day killed

in a skirmish, and that he had died in great anxiety about his family, wherefore he had come to communicate that there was a deed of much consequence to them deposited in the hands of a certain lawyer in London ... He therefore requested that, on their return to England, they would go to his house and demand the deed. (Crowe [1848] 2000: 154-5)

This ghost has come back to communicate to his fellow soldiers and, of course, needs to be visible to them. The deed is eventually recovered and the family saved from penury. This episode is reminiscent of that of the female ghost who communicated with by Corporal Q. Both ghosts need help and both need a live person to act for them. In Victorian times it was far more usual for a woman to need a man to act for her outside of the domestic space and the Victorian ideal for men is of self-reliance and an ability to take responsibility for oneself. The ghost of this officer though, requires physical help as he cannot impinge on the material world at all. He cannot act and he needs others to undertake the care of his family. This need of help resonates very differently for the figure of a dead wife than that of a soldier, placing this ghost figure in a feminised position of powerlessness and need.

The question of 'need' arises many times in relation to ghosts; the need for action to be taken, for recognition, or merely for the ghost to be witnessed by a living being. The ghost in our next story, 'Poor Pretty Bobby', appears before his lover as he needs to escape from his watery grave and come home. The eponymous poor pretty Bobby of Rhoda Broughton's story is feminised from the start. This is a relatively conventional story whereby our narrator Phoebe and her father's ward Bobby fall in love. Bobby serves at sea with his guardian, but finds him over-protective. He complains to Phoebe: "Your father always takes a great deal too much care of me," he says with a slight frown and a darkening of his whole bright face. "I might be sugar or salt" (Broughton [1873] 1995: 51). Britain is at war with France and although they capture several French ships, Bobby is not allowed to take any captured boats

to shore on his own. He is not allowed to prove his mettle and his greatest fear is that his fellow officers “conclude that my not being sent is my own choice; in short, that I am – *afraid.*” (His voice sinks with a disgusted and shamed intonation at the last word)’ (Ibid. p. 53, original emphasis). Yet when Bobby is eventually allowed to captain a captured French vessel back to port, the shackled French officers escape, take the ship and shoot Bobby, flinging his body over board.

Poor pretty Bobby is not allowed to embody any manly type of masculinity throughout the entire narrative. Before his death he falls ill with a fever allowing Phoebe to ‘nurse and cosset him’ (Ibid. p. 51) and when he begins to recover they go out together; ‘reversing the order of things – *he* leaning on *my* arm’ (Ibid. p. 52, original emphasis). Although he recovers from this fever, Bobby is set up to be apparitional. Yet in this story Phoebe too is more connected with the ghostly. There is a questioning of who is the ghost and Phoebe **associates** herself with the ghostly several times. She says, ‘I remember once standing with my back to a bright fire in our long drawing-room, and seeing myself reflected in a big mirror at the other end. I was so thinly clad that I was transparent, and could see through myself’ (Ibid. p. 48). And just before she hears the phantom Bobby insistently knocking on the front door Phoebe says: ‘I can see my own ghostly figure sitting up in bed, reflected in the looking glass opposite’ (Ibid. p. 56). Phoebe’s spectral presence contradicts and confuses the question of the ghost. But although she may be the more traditional female figure of the ‘ghost in the noontide’ (Dickerson 1996: 11), it is Bobby who becomes the actual ghost.

After his murder Bobby’s ghost returns to Phoebe who apprehends her ‘beautiful boy-lover’ (Broughton [1873] 1995: 56):

EXT He stands there still and silent, and though the night is dry, equally free from rain or dew, I see that he is dripping wet; the water is running down from his clothes, from his drenched hair, and even from his eyelashes, on to the dry ground at his feet.

‘What has happened?’ I cry, hurriedly, ‘How wet you are!’ and as I speak I stretch my hand out and lay it on his coat sleeve. But even as I do it a sensation of intense cold runs up my fingers and my arm, even to the elbow. How is it that he is so chilled to the marrows of his bones on this sultry, breathless, August night? To my extreme surprise he does not answer; he stands there, dumb and dripping. ‘Where have you come from?’ I ask, with that sense of awe deepening. ‘Have you fallen into the river? How is it that you are so wet?’

‘It was cold,’ he says, shivering, and speaking in a slow and strangely altered voice, ‘bitter cold. I could not stay there.’ (Ibid. p. 57)

Bobby is literally ‘wet’: He could not bear to stay where he had fallen and has attempted to come home. He is passive, minutely observed through Phoebe’s feminine gaze. His ghost body freezes Phoebe’s own body as she touches him: signifying not life and virility, but stagnation, immateriality and death. Phoebe tells us: ‘a feeling of cold disappointment unaccountably steals over me – a nameless sensation, whose nearest kin is chilly awe’ (Ibid. p. 56). Bobby cannot serve her now – this depleted figure of a man is a ‘disappointment’. Tamar Heller, in a discussion about Broughton’s earlier novels looks at the way she allows her female characters to ‘reveal the depth and desperation of their sexual passion’ (Heller 2013: 12). Heller cites Margaret Oliphant’s contemporary criticism of Broughton’s work as epitomising ‘this intense appreciation of flesh and blood, this eagerness of physical sensation’ (Ibid. p. 12). Phoebe’s sensual ambitions and longings are thwarted. Bobby is no longer ‘flesh and blood’ and coldness and ‘chilly awe’ are the only physical sensation he is able to impart.

Allen Warren argues that the ‘widely accepted’ notion of manliness carried at its heart: ‘the close connection between manliness and good health, both physical and moral ... There was a widely held belief that a healthy physique was more important than a veneer of social culture’ (Warren 1987: 199–200). Here though, in Bobby’s ghost body we have the least healthy of all bodies, one which represents impotence, death and defeat; an insubstantial, ethereal body.

The Power of Will

The ghost that Sir Robert sees in Crowe’s tale and Bobby’s ghost are both needy and powerless to act for themselves. Bobby wants home, warmth, and comfort, whilst the soldier’s ghost needs someone to take care of his family for him. The ghost figure in the next story I want to turn to is slightly different. This is John Charrington, the main figure in E. Nesbit’s famous ghost story ‘John Charrington’s Wedding’. The first line of the story reads: ‘No one ever thought that May Forster would marry John Charrington; but he thought differently, and things which John Charrington intended had a queer way of coming to pass’ (Nesbit [1893] 2015: 47). This opening of the story sets up the strength of John Charrington’s will and the force of his determination to possess May Forster. M. Grant Kellermeier states in his notes on the story: ‘This ghost story, like so many others, is largely concerned with the trait of wilfulness. In this instance it is the power of a man’s will to possess a woman’ (Kellermeier 2015: 47). When his friend jokingly ascribes the help of supernatural agency to his success with May to be due to ‘mesmerism, or a love-potion,’ Charrington himself sites ‘perseverance’ (Nesbit [1893] 2015: 48). He refuses to be denied. Charrington is called away to see a dying man to whom it is suggested he is heir, but promises May that ‘Nothing shall keep me’ from their wedding day (Ibid. p. 50). However, when he arrives late at the church something is wrong. Our narrator’s gardener describes how he looked:

EXT I never see Mr. John the least bit so afore, but my opinion is he's been drinking pretty free. His clothes was all dusty and his face like a sheet. I tell you I didn't like the looks of him at all, and the folks inside are saying all sorts of things. You'll see, something's gone very wrong with M. John ... He looked like a ghost. (Ibid. p. 53)

This is of course a ghost story, and therefore we are pretty sure that John Charrington does not just 'look' like a ghost. The couple leave the church:

EXT John Charrington did not look himself. There was dust on his coat, his hair was disarranged. He seemed to have been in some sort of row, for there was a black mark above his eyebrow. He was deathly pale. But his pallor was not greater than that of the bride, who might have been carved in ivory – dress, veil, orange blossoms, face and all. (Ibid. p. 55)

The bells ring and instead of 'the gay wedding peal, came the slow tolling of the passing bell' (Ibid. p. 55). May seems horrified: 'The bride shuddered, and grey shadows came about her mouth, but the bridegroom led her on' (Ibid. p. 55). They enter the wedding carriage and Charrington puts his head out of the window, crying to the driver 'Drive like hell' (Ibid. p. 56). The carriage returns some time later without Charrington but with May, almost spectral herself now: 'White, white and drawn with agony and horror' and with her hair turned 'white like snow' (Ibid. p. 56). John Charrington has returned from the dead to complete his wedding, as he declared before '*I shall be married, dead or alive*' (Ibid. p. 57, original emphasis). The iron will of John Charrington has dragged May to hell, turned her into a white, ghostly figure, and within a week she too is dead. Was there a ghostly rape? It is, of course, impossible to say, but the ghost figure of Charrington – cold and wilful, cruel, and determined – is not the more traditionally feminised figure of the returning phantom of a dead man. The dead soldier of Crowe's tale and poor pretty Bobby return through love;

Charrington returns it seems merely because he is determined to possess May and will not break his word albeit that he breaks her body.

Nesbit's story is published later than Crowe's and Broughton's and John Charrington's ghost figure is not de-masculinised, indeed it is more of a hyper-masculine figure whose spirit entirely masters both his own body and the laws of nature. There appears to be a movement from the feminised ghost figures of the early- to mid-Victorian period to a more robust and manly ghost figure in the later tales. Interestingly, this movement has been noted in relation to the female ghost figure, but not specifically the male. Diana Basham quotes Dorothy Scarborough from her 1917 essay 'Modern Ghosts' who argues for more 'muscular' Victorian ghosts as opposed to the helpless wraiths of before. She says where gothic ghosts were as:

EXT fragile and helpless as an eighteenth century heroine when it came to a real emergency [later Victorian ghosts were] stronger, more vital; there seems to be a strengthening of ghostly tissue, a stiffening of supernatural muscle in these days.

Ghosts are more healthy, more active, more alive than they used to be (Basham 1992: 156)

Ghosts have become more robust, determined, and disturbing over the period of the nineteenth century. Vanessa Dickerson looks at stories written by women towards the end of the century and says that 'female ghosts found in the stories by later writers are not only older but also less humble and more aggressive than their predecessors' (Dickerson 1996: 144). These female ghosts seek vengeance for their deaths. Ghosts in these stories, she argues 'body forth the energies of the liberated, even if somewhat negatively liberated, women' (Ibid. p. 146). Dickerson's idea of purposeful, vengeful female ghosts seems to be suggesting a more 'manly' type of female ghost and in this way the female ghost body can be seen as liberated, radical and transformative.

However, in relation to masculinity this hardened, energetic ghost figure is not necessarily a good thing. In this case a more ‘manly’ ghost is a more disturbing ghost. In Nesbit’s story there is strong criticism of John Charrington’s robust ghost and his wilful disregard for May. The suggestion in ‘John Charrington’s Wedding Day’ is that John *should not* have returned and he kills May by doing so. This is the ultimate ‘shot gun’ wedding and May has no volition or choice here at all. There are echoes of Broughton’s earlier story ‘The Man with the Nose’ (1873) here. In this story a new bride is permanently abducted by a mysterious mesmeric figure of a man with a most peculiar, distinctive (and phallic) nose. However, the suggestion is that this is an actual person (although he is apprehended by the poor bride in a dream as well), who has a real material presence. As a ghost it is Charrington who is the most active and destructive in his intentions and the execution of his ghostly will.

Conclusion

Speaking about people’s encounters with ghosts and supernatural phenomena Crowe states that, ‘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’ (Crowe [1848] 2000: 142). People have always seen ghosts and the sighting of male ghosts is perhaps nothing extraordinary. However, the effect these visions have on Victorian gender politics is unexpected and powerful. Evoking and representing emotion – grief, loss, yearning and sometimes fear – the return of a dead man brings with it an inevitability of reflection and doubt. The male ghost figure of whatever sort embodies fragmentation and anxiety, undermining notions of the idealised, healthy, wholesome masculinity that Victorian society was so anxious to promote. Male ghosts cause

disruption to gender norms: male ghost bodies are dis-engendered and dis-located in place and space.

This chapter has dealt with stories by just three Victorian women writers however there were many more authors of ghost stories – both male and female – and many hundreds of tales. For all though, the male ghost figure presents an anomaly. As it has no flesh or corporeal materiality, all that is left for the ghost is the visibility, the presence of the (insubstantial) body that needs to be witnessed in order for it to exist at all. Ghosts and men and men as ghosts appear to be something like oil and water: they cannot properly mix. Any male ghost body will, by its very presence (fictional or in ‘reality’) shake some of the bastions of Victorian philosophy and cultural expectations. Notions of the Kantian body/spirit split, questions of the body and materiality, of will, volition, agency and physical action are all shifted and destabilised by the most ephemeral of male ghosts and also by robust, active ghosts like John Charrington. Examining lesbian and male gay versions of the ghost story in twentieth and twenty first century tales, Paulina Palmer argues that the ghost, ‘[a]s well as evoking connotations of invisibility and fluctuations in visibility ... can operate as an image for liminality and border-crossing’ (Palmer 2012: 66). And whilst, when alive, the upper-class, white man in Victorian society may have signified the centre, as ghost body he is now inevitably pushed into the margins, the liminal and border-spaces not intended for his occupation. The male phantom is dis-placed; all that his living body signified is re-placed, doubled and echoed, made transparent, ephemeral and temporary. Even a robust ghost like John Charrington is not a permanent fixture, albeit that his hold over May extends from beyond the grave. Death comes to us all, and the figure of the male phantom in Victorian tales acts as a *memento mori*, shaking the idea of patriarchal permanence and dismantling conventional conceptions of Victorian manliness.

¹ I began to touch on this subject very briefly in an article entitled: ‘Science, Ghosts and Vision: Catherine Crowe’s Bodies of Evidence and the Critique of Masculinity’, *Victoriographies*, 4:1, 46–61.

² For discussion on women’s education rights see Catherine Crowe, *The Story of Lilly Dawson* ([1848] 2015), and on women’s intuition and insight see *The Night Side of Nature* ([1848] 2000).

³ William Hughes, *Tom Brown’s School Days*, quoted in David Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning* (1961: 98). Newsome argues that Hughes painted Tom as ‘the paragon of manliness’ (Ibid. p. 98).

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