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Introduction

Gothic Short Fiction by Women Writers from the 1860s to the 1890s

This doctoral thesis investigates nineteenth-century Gothic fiction by female British authors, focusing on short narratives by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Rhoda Broughton, Florence Marryat, Mary Molesworth, Margaret Oliphant, and Charlotte Riddell. The point of view from which this fiction is explored is space, considered from different perspectives: from physical, geographical space, through the metaphorical space of the human body, to the incorporeal, mysterious space of the mind. Before outlining the structure of the work, it is important to provide some context for the primary sources used; thus, this introduction will discuss short fiction in *fin-de-siècle* Britain and its relationship with the Gothic, looking in particular at the contributions of female authors, and at the ways in which they managed to find their own space in the literary panorama of the age. An overview of critical studies on short supernatural fiction by women writers will be provided. The scarceness of studies in this field is the main reason why this thesis was devised: through the analysis of space, the aim is that of contributing to the scholarly recovery of Victorian female authors, giving them the “space” that they deserve, for, despite being famous and praised writers during their lifetime, they have been mostly neglected in later times.

Short Fiction in Britain and the Supernatural

The short story has attracted less critical attention than other genres, such as novels, poetry, and drama. There exist really few critical studies exploring the short fiction genre,¹ the latest significant works being those by Liggins, Maunder and Robins in 2011,² dealing with the rise and development of the British short story between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, and Margree’s work on women’s short

¹Harold Orel, *The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. ix.

²See Emma Liggins, Andrea Maunder, Ruth Robbins, *The British Short Story* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

supernatural fiction in 2019.³ Short narratives already circulated during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, but it was not until the eighteenth century that the genre was rehabilitated only to become very popular in the nineteenth century.⁴ Short fiction has first been theorised by the North American author Edgar Allan Poe, who is still renowned today for the horror, supernatural and detective fiction that he published on magazines such as the *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* (1837-1840) and the *Graham's Magazine* (1840-1858). Poe's "tales of terror", as he used to refer to them, were meant for the American public as they responded to their need to distance themselves from the obsolete literary tradition of Europe, especially Britain.⁵ Thanks to Poe, the short story became a distinctive American genre whose characteristics and intents could not be transplanted in Britain, where short fiction developed independently of Poe's philosophy of composition.⁶

The increase in available reading materials was stimulated by the growth of the reading public: by 1840, fifty per cent of the British population was esteemed to be able to read, to which the market responded with a larger production of serialised novels.⁷ It is especially at the end of the Victorian Age that short fiction, although not as prominent as the novel, certainly gained consensus. Lockhurst identified 1884 as the year marking the beginning of short fiction in Britain, when the phrase "short story" seems to have been used for the first time.⁸ As the name suggests, short fiction has come to include any literary production shorter than a novel, oftentimes deemed of lesser status and seriousness than the larger works of prose fiction. At the same

³Victoria Margree, *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction, 1860-1930. Our Own Ghostliness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019).

⁴See Lia Simonetta Guerra, «Short Fiction Before the Nineteenth Century: Missing Links in the History of the Short Story», *Il Confronto Letterario* 60, supplemento (2013), pp. 103-117.

⁵See J. Gerald Kennedy, ed., «On Unity of Effect», in *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 529.

⁶See Allan H. Pasco, «On Defining Short Stories», *New Literary History* 22, no. 2 (Spring, 1991), pp. 407-422.

⁷Katherine Montwieler, *Marketing Sensation: Lady Audley's Secret and Consumer Culture*, in *Beyond Sensation. Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*, ed. Marlene Tromp, Pamela K. Gilbert and Aeron Haynie (Albany, NJ: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 46.

⁸Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p. 17.

time, various critics have praised the short story genre, for instance William Boyd described it as a miniature painting with portentous effects comparable to a dose of «compressed blast of discerning, intellectual pleasure.»⁹

On the contrary, European critics have often been sharp in their judgement of short fiction because they tended to compare it to novels, rather than considering it as a separate genre. The brevity of short fiction has been regarded as a flaw because, unlike novels, it does not grant the character of universality and objectivity of larger literary productions, rather relying on compression and emotions. It is worth noting that such criticism echoes the negative judgement often expressed by Victorians themselves. In discussing short fiction from the 1850s, Liggins argued that:

The most usual narrative trajectory argument is that the short story was distinguished from its short-fiction predecessors by an increasing realism, even paradoxically in stories such as ghost narratives, which went to considerable lengths to construct a version of authenticity to ensure a greater effect of horror when the monster entered. Realism in the smaller scale of the short story as opposed to the expansive scale of the novel, however, was problematic in that the short story could not provide a totalising narrative, which in many ways was the point of realism.¹⁰

This realism is indeed expressed through statements of the truthfulness of the narrated events, often said to have been experienced first-hand by the narrators themselves. Such claims of authenticity had also the function of attracting the reading public with delectable stories that could be potentially experienced by anyone, allowing readers to immerse into narratives that were perceived as chronicles of facts as if told by newspaper journalists. In fact, magazines were the place of origin of the short story: writers created compressed fictional works that could be published on periodicals, meaning that they were easily available to an increasingly huge number of readers. Thus, short fiction was born as a commercial operation initially, as a filler insert to alternate with editorial materials.¹¹ Even though serialised novels were still

⁹William Boyd, *Brief Encounters*, www.guardian.co.uk/books.

¹⁰Liggins, Maunder, Robins, *The British Short Story*, pp. 7-8.

¹¹Liggins, Maunder, Robins, *The British Short Story*, p. 7; Orel, *The Victorian Short Story*, p. 2.

more likely to pay better than short fiction because of the latter's self-contained character, which did not trigger the readers' curiosity for more, some of the major Victorian novelists also became writers of short stories for economic reasons, like Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Bram Stoker, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell and more. The popularity of short stories could be considered a result of the economic context, which forged the genre's aesthetic principles. As Liggins put it:

Romance and finance come together in the short story, perhaps even more acutely than they do in the novel, because the short story's ephemeral life in periodical publication makes that relationship much more immediate.¹²

Also, the opening statements announcing that the narrated events had really happened were captions meant to keep the readers' attention high: the presentation of events as realistic conveyed an effect of immediacy and allowed the reading public to identify with the characters and narrator. This kind of language could be defined as formulaic, and it drew directly from past oral traditions: the impression given is that of a tale told amongst people relating something that has occurred to one or another. In the nineteenth century, short fiction was indissolubly related to the Gothic genre, which responded to the Victorian fascination with the supernatural.

The Gothic was theorised by the critic Tzvetan Todorov, who shed light on the genre and the fantastic in literature in his pivotal work *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970).¹³ Todorov's discussion starts with an attempt to define the fantastic: the premise is that in our world, «a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires»,¹⁴ there occurs something that cannot be explained by our laws. The key word is uncertainty: according to Todorov, the fantastic resides in the uncertainty between what is real and what is not, «the hesitation experienced by a person who

¹²Liggins, Maunder, Robins, *The British Short Story*, p. 4.

¹³Originally published in French: Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Poétique / Seuil, 1970). The edition used for this thesis is *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to the Genre*, ed. Robert Scholes (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975).

¹⁴Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 25.

knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.»¹⁵ How the reader decides to answer the question results in the uncanny, or in the marvellous. Todorov further argued that hesitation on the part of the reader is a fundamental requirement of fantastic literature, which implies that the uncanny event must not be understood allegorically nor poetically. The rejection of these specific interpretations of a text, combined with the reader's hesitation and identification with the characters, who must appear equally hesitant, originates the fantastic. Fantastic texts thus stage events that are unlikely to occur in everyday life, and which could be classified as supernatural.¹⁶ Fear is one of the possible factors characterising the fantastic according to Todorov, who relied on H. P. Lovecraft's belief that the reception of the fantastic is situated in the personal, individual experience of the reader, which includes dread.¹⁷ The Gothic is a product of the fantastic, even though it is hardly a genre of its own, but stands rather in between the marvellous and the uncanny: if the reader recognises the laws of reality as preserved and the phenomena described as explainable then the work belongs to the uncanny, otherwise we enter the genre of the marvelous by, for instance, Walpole, Lewis and Maturin.¹⁸

Moreover, the supernatural has been widely studied by another major critic of the Gothic genre, David Punter, who traced its origins in the cultural changes of the eighteenth century and offered a detailed analysis of the Gothic that discusses its themes, style, range of characters, and meanings.¹⁹ The Christmas season was a favourite of Victorian authors, who produced several tales set during this time of the year in special issues of magazines released for the festive holidays. In December 1859, Charles Dickens inaugurated a short stories series for the Extra Christmas Edition of his periodical *All the Year Round*:²⁰ various authors contributed to these publications, namely

¹⁵Todorov, *The Fantastic*, *ivi*.

¹⁶Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 34.

¹⁷Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. *ivi*.

¹⁸Todorov, *The Fantastic*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁹David Panter, *The Literature of Terror. A History of the Gothic Genre from 1765 to the Present Day* (London: Longman, 1980).

²⁰The *All the Year Round* was a weekly literary magazine founded by Charles Dickens in 1859 and published until 1895, which serialised many famous Victorian novels including Dickens's own *Great Expectations* and Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*.

Charles Dickens himself, Wilkie Collins, and Elizabeth Gaskell among others. *The Haunted House* series²¹ begins with a story by Dickens in which the author presents a country house where the narrator is to spend some time to recover his health. This house is said to be haunted by the ghost of a hooded woman with an owl, who, however, is never seen by any of the characters. Each story has its protagonist sleeping in a specific room of the mansion and being haunted by ghosts that are not supernatural entities, but life experiences that have traumatised them or memories that have never abandoned them and resurface in a night of recollection.²²

Newspapers celebrated the coming of Christmas time with fervent articles, even sponsoring products to be given as Christmas gifts. For instance, the issue of Christmas Day 1860 of the *Morning Chronicle* recites:

On Christmas Day England gathers around the hearthstone and assembles in the family. The son separated by the cares of the world in the battle for life is reunited with his father, his mother, and his sisters. But this grand opportunity of reuniting the love of families is in some danger of being lost to us [because of the dangers of commercial activities].²³

²¹Dickens wrote three stories for the series, two of them frame it at the beginning and at the end, 'The Mortals in The House' and 'The Ghost in the Corner Room' respectively, the other one being 'The Ghost in Master B's Room'. The five remaining stories are 'The Ghost in the Clock Room' by Hesba Stretton, 'The Ghost in the Double Room' by George Augustus Sala, the poem 'The Ghost in the Picture Room' by Queen Victoria's favourite poet, Adelaide Anne Procter, 'The Ghost in the Cupboard Room' by Wilkie Collins, and 'The Ghost in the Garden Room' (or 'The Crooked Branch') by Elizabeth Gaskell. The stories are available at www.ereader.perlego.com in *The Complete Short Stories by Elizabeth Gaskell* (Hastings: Delphi Classics, 2017).

²²For instance, Stretton wrote of a girl who wants to marry for love and not suffer the same destiny as her mother, who had lived her life married to a man she did not love, longing for another man. Collins tells of an ex-mariner who was attacked by pirates and is haunted by the memory of a burning candle whose fire would have triggered an explosion had he not been saved in time. Dickens's final story is pervaded by melancholy as the narrator is haunted by the ghost of the innocence of youth.

²³John R. Gillis, «Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life in Nineteenth-Century Britain», *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1989), p. 228. See www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

The *Morning Chronicles*' journalists seemed to be particularly joyful when Christmas Day approached, a sign of the importance attributed to this festivity as a social and human, rather than solely religious, event.

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Once again everyone is saying the familiar words to everybody. A few days back, cattle shows heralded the approach of this day; then shop windows took up the note of preparation; then discursive vocalists, in the dead watch and middle of the night, huskily hinted, to the tune of some ancient psalm, that a particular event was coming. At last, here it is! Plaudite!²⁴

Christmas time became a recurrent theme in many literary productions of the Gothic genre: Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843) is well renowned, and a huge number of short stories was issued on various magazines during the festivities' period or had Christmas as their time frame. The afore mentioned *Haunted House* series was conceived for a special Christmas issue of *All the Year Round*, and at least ten stories within the selected corpus take place at Christmas or simply mention it as an occasion for the characters to rejoin their families. Moreover, the independent American press Valancourt Books has recently been publishing a series of volumes dedicated to ghost stories from the reign of Victoria revolving around Christmas, *The Valancourt Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*,²⁵ testifying to the recurrence of December 25th in "Gothic" texts of the time.

²⁴The passage is taken from the *Morning Chronicle* issue of Saturday December 25, 1858. Available at www.britishnewspapersarchive.co.uk.

²⁵Tara Moore, ed., *The Valancourt Book of Victorian Ghost Stories* vol. 1 (Richmond, CA: Valancourt Books, 2016); Allen Grove, ed., *The Valancourt Book of Victorian Ghost Stories* vol. 2 (Richmond, CA: Valancourt Books, 2017); Simon Stern, ed., *The Valancourt Book of Victorian Ghost Stories* vol. 3 (Richmond, CA: Valancourt Books, 2018); Christopher Philipppo, ed., *The Valancourt Book of Victorian Ghost Stories* vol. 3-4 (Richmond, CA: Valancourt Books, 2020-2021). Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home. Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2018), p. 11.

The proliferation of Gothic tales taking place during what is presumably the happiest time of the year, when families celebrate in unison in the intimacy of their houses, demonstrates that home is no longer perceived as a sheltered space, its sanctity can be broken, and troubles might come from the inside. Haunted houses have thus become a conventional literary motif of Victorian Gothic fiction, where “home” is no longer an inviolable sanctuary, as stories by Braddon, Broughton, Marryat, Oliphant, and Riddell prove. Secrets, murder, and vices that send families to the poorhouse abound in the short stories of the selected corpus, as the following chapters will demonstrate.

One of the masters of Victorian novel writing was certainly Wilkie Collins, whose masterpieces, namely *The Woman in White* (1859),²⁶ *No Name* (1862),²⁷ *Armadale* (1866),²⁸ and *The Moonstone* (1868),²⁹ introduced into fiction what Henry James called «the most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors»,³⁰ meaning that he transposed elements of anxiety and mystery into the homely context, thus bringing disruption behind familiar doors. The 1860s were years of cultural change within the middle class, which was still struggling with its own identity and building its code of decency and respectability within the boundaries of home. *The Woman in White*, Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1860-1861) and Ellen Woods’s *East Lynne* (1861)³¹ were discussed by Margaret Oliphant in an 1862 essay published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* as belonging to the category of “sensation”, which «encapsulated the experience of modernity itself – the sense of continuous and rapid change, of shocks, thrills, intensity, excitement» of the social changes that had struck in particular the middle class.³² Furthermore, Oliphant wrote that literature naturally mirrors society and its revolutions, thus social changes and their consequences enter the fictional world. She stated that sensation fiction already existed before Collins,

²⁶Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. Maria K. Bacham and Don Richard Cox (Plymouth: Broadview Editions, 2006).

²⁷Wilkie Collins, *No Name* (London; Smith and Elder, 1865).

²⁸Wilkie Collins, *Armadale. A Novel* (Hastings: Delphi Classics, 2017).

²⁹Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, ed. David Blair (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1999).

³⁰Henry James, «Miss Braddon», *The Nation* 1 (November 1865), p. 594.

³¹Ellen Woods, *East Lynne*, ed. Elizabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³²Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home*, p. 11.

namely in America, where Nathaniel Hawthorne had already tried to shake the reading public with his novels by means of «crime and violence, by *diablerie* of divers kinds, and by the wild devices of a romance which smiled at probabilities.»³³ Oliphant recognized that a new cultural wave had arisen in Britain:

Domestic histories, however virtuous and charming, do not often attain that result – nor, indeed, would an occurrence so irregular and destructive of all domestic proprieties be at all a fitting homage to the virtuous chronicles which have lately furnished the larger part of our light literature. Now a new fashion has been set to English novel-writers. Whether it can be followed extensively, or whether it would be well if that were possible, are very distinct questions; but it cannot be denied that a most striking and original effort, sufficiently individual to be capable of originating a new school in fiction, has been made, and that the universal verdict has crowned it with success.³⁴

Oliphant continued by stating that this kind of fiction was influenced by French «excitement» literature, with a tone of scorn towards the rivals across the Channel, and British «homeliness»,³⁵ so that the supernatural, magic, crime and various sorts of horrors invaded the homely space. Oliphant, however, praised Collins for being different from his predecessors in the field, his greatness lying in the ability to provoke tension, terror, and thrills without exploiting supernatural or criminal expedients. Collins did not exaggerate passions and no mysteries were presented for mystery's sake, but all actions were performed by recognisable human agents, whose motives were often unknown. Oliphant's concerns were not only her own, as during the 1860s many expressed their dislike for sensation fiction or recorded its influence on the new cultural and literary productions of the time, for instance through ironic vignettes on magazines like *Punch*.³⁶

³³Margaret Oliphant, «Sensation Novels», *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, no. 91 (May 1862), p. 565.

³⁴Oliphant, «Sensation Novels», p. 565.

³⁵Oliphant, «Sensation Novels», p. 565.

³⁶See the British Library archive online at www.bl.uk.

Sensation fiction brings marks of cultural and moral crisis within and without the walls of home, it uncovers Pandora's box and displays human fragilities. Bourne Taylor employed the medical metaphors of «collective cultural nervous disorder» and «morbid addiction»³⁷ to explain how sensation fiction, novels in particular, but also short fiction, operated directly on the readers «as an infection»³⁸ to blur the boundaries of class distinction within the middle class. It also incorporated the ideas of light reading and mass entertainment attributed respectively to the middle class, especially to a female public, and the upper working classes. Sensation fiction became a source of excitement because it did not hide the morbid, the dark side of human psychology, but displayed the corruption underlying the veil of respectability that the middle class had built for itself, and according to some cynical reviewers, it contributed to spreading the “disease” within the reading public.³⁹ Sensation fiction scared the conformists because it drew directly from experience and its setting was local rather than the exotic frame of eighteenth-century Gothic fiction. Through various modes, authors could exploit Gothic tropes and styles to instil in the reader's mind discomfort in knowing that what is familiar can be a threat, that the everyday world could turn into a horror scene because of the most unexpected people and for many possible reasons. It crept into the reader's mind by showing that, often, mysteries and danger lay behind home's doors. To achieve this, sensation fiction frequently resorted to themes such as the mask or the roleplay, as for instance in Wood's *East Lynne*, where the heroine's face is disfigured after an accident and she returns, unrecognized, to her former home and acts as her own children's governess. The process of discovery of identity was difficult and sometimes it never happened, as sensation fiction played on the ambiguity of human psychological processes, highlighting the disquieting truth that even trusted people might not be who they seemed to be. Sensation fiction showed how criminality, violence, and death could pervade the sacred household and originate in its heart, subverting the Victorian ideal of home as a shelter. To quote Ruskin's words:

³⁷Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home*, p. 12.

³⁸Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home*, p. 12.

³⁹Bourne Taylor quoted a passage from an 1863 article by Henry Mansel in the *Quarterly Review*, p. 12.

This is the true nature of home – it is a place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home: so far as the anxieties of outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be a home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over and lighted fire in.⁴⁰

Sensation fiction was thus psychologically powerful because it encompassed and displayed social anxieties, in particular the need to separate the public from the private, which was supposed to be protected by the veil of respectability. Given these anxieties, the supernatural was a fundamental part of the Victorian emotional, creative, spiritual, and intellectual world. The occult offered allegories to deal with changes that were difficult to process but permeated Victorian society: the role of women, the continuous development of the middle classes and their eagerness to distance themselves from the working classes, the Empire, and the ensuing moral battle of part of the population against the brutal methods of colonization. These were just a few of the many themes that Victorian intellectuals and authors struggled to represent and understand, and spiritualism often was exploited either to overcome socio-economic, gender and racial distance, or to widen the gap.⁴¹

⁴⁰John Ruskin, *Of Queens' Gardens*, in *Sesame and Lilies, The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Waddernburn (London: George Allen Publishers, 1909), Vol. 18, p. 122.

⁴¹See Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2016), pp. 19-22. Spiritualism and the occult encompass a field that has gained several admirers amongst scholars over the last decades, especially since the late twentieth century, during which a huge number of studies on such practices appeared. The *Ashgate Research Companion* offers an overview on criticism regarding spiritualism, also concentrating on the scientific and pseudo-scientific developments accomplished in the name of the occult. Some of the most recent works on spiritualism and science include Roger Lockhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy; 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell, eds., *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Peter Lamont, «Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence», *The Historical Journal* 47, vol. 4 (December 2004), pp. 897-920; Eleana Gomel, «“Spirits in the Material World”: Spiritualism and Identity in the *Fin de Siècle*», *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35 (2007), pp. 189-213.

It is equally clear that many nineteenth-century spiritualists believed that the empirical and apparently objective nature of their séance investigations was proof of the movement's radical innovation, of its rejection of the outmoded religious and political beliefs that they also held accountable for the oppression of women, the working class, and African and Native Americans [...] In celebrating nineteenth-century spiritualism's apparent postmodern precocity, we neglect its inheritance from older and more clearly essentialist forms of philosophical, scientific and, yes, religious modes of conceptualizing identity.⁴²

In part as a consequence of the late nineteenth-century ongoing process of materialization of the ghost, spiritualism became a spectacle, an occasion for social meetings and fashionable parties, where people gathered together hoping that some spirit might be stirred from the afterlife and come to pay a visit. An example of a renowned Victorian spiritualist was Georgiana Houghton, who became interested in spiritualism around 1859 thanks to another spiritualist, Mrs. Marshall. Her main goal was that of communicating with her recently deceased sister Zilla, but she increasingly became even more famous for her automatic drawings in the sixties, and for her spirit photography in the seventies. Spiritualist practices were enhanced by the introduction of technological devices like the cameras used by Houghton, and by the use of writing machines typical of stenography, telegraphy, and typewriting.⁴³ Short fiction encapsulated all the stimuli that social, political, spiritual, and economic changes provided at the end of the century: Gothic short fiction, freed from the restraints and definite structure of three-decker novels, was the ideal venue to discuss such issues in a concentrated yet effective manner. Brevity gave writers the advantage of piercing through the reader's emotions by playing on condensed but strong images of terror and anxiety, triggering reflections. The mysteriousness and "illogic" logic of the supernatural granted room for safe discussion because important themes were scrutinised through the veil of irrationality, thus authors were relatively free from

⁴²Kontou and Willburn, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, p.23.

⁴³Sara Williams, ed., *Georgiana Houghton. Evenings at Home in Spiritual Séance* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2013).

judgment. Novels could equally shock the reader's consciousness, but they lacked the immediacy necessary to be equally incisive.

Women and the Gothic

Ellen Moers coined the phrase "Female Gothic" in her 1974 essay "Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother",⁴⁴ where she argued that this genre includes all the works written by women in the Gothic literary mode since the eighteenth century, starting with Ann Radcliffe. This text, along with Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*,⁴⁵ was paramount in the inauguration of feminist criticism, a field of studies that progressively grew thanks to works by various scholars and critics.⁴⁶ In particular, in her study called *Women's Gothic*, Clery proposed a new definition of Gothic texts by women reflecting a change of perspective: female Gothic was no longer seen as a mere reaction to patriarchy, but female authors of the genre could be studied separately from their dependence on a man-made environment and appreciated for their own professional craft.⁴⁷

Ellen Moers's *Literary Women*⁴⁸ was as pivotal as her previous work in enhancing the idea of a Female Gothic tradition, which experienced a surge of studies especially in the 1990s with Diana Basham's *The Trial of Women*,⁴⁹ comprising a chapter on

⁴⁴Ellen Moers, *Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother. Literary Women* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976).

⁴⁵Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979).

⁴⁶See Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetic of Gothic* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Sue Zlosnik, *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2017); Donna Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2008); Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 2010).

⁴⁷E. J. Clery, *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeve to Mary Shelley* (Tavistock, UK: Northcote House Pub, 2004).

⁴⁸Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1976).

⁴⁹Diana Basham, *The Trial of Women: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (London: MacMillan, 1992).

ghost stories by women where she considered their way of challenging masculinity. Vanessa Dickerson's seminal *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide*⁵⁰ presented women as "angels in the house", considering them as ghosts of themselves, forced in a condition of "in-betweenness". Dickerson spotlighted the capacity of the ghost story to give a voice to those existing at the margins of society, women included, a point of view also shared by Clare Hanson, who defined the ghost story as a «form of the margin» in her essay "The Lifted Veil: Women and Short Fiction in the 1880s and 1890s".⁵¹ In 1993, Showalter wrote that Victorian women had a ghost-like role in their contemporary society, being relegated to the domestic environment and excluded from "manly" discussions related to social, economic, political, or intellectual issues. Female authors of the time found in short fiction the flexibility and freedom to actively participate in the world surrounding them thanks to the supernatural frames of Gothic fiction, which allowed women to subtly dissect themes they would have normally been banned from. In this sense, ghost stories represented an innovation with respect to the rather standard plots of three-decker novels, which generally ended with the heroine's marriage or death.⁵² The supernatural became the means through which Victorian female authors expressed their own present condition of ghostliness. As Dickerson put it, the ghost became a representation of women's

Visibility and invisibility, her power and powerlessness, the contradictions and extremes that shaped female culture' and therefore allowed for an exploration of the in betweenness' of feminine experience.⁵³

Most short stories written by authoresses present the typical claim of truthfulness establishing that the story about to be told happened for real, but they are also mostly

⁵⁰Vanessa Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1996)

⁵¹Clare Hanson, «The Lifted Veil: Women and Short Fiction in the 1880s and 1890s», *The Yearbook of English Studies* 26 (1996), pp. 135-142.

⁵²Elaine Showalter, ed., *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle* (London: Virago, 1993), pp. viii-ix.

⁵³Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide*, p. 5.

narrated in the first person by male narrators, an aspect strictly connected with the widespread idea that objectivity was a male characteristic. Basham argued that this expedient redirects the attention away from the female author and places a male consciousness at the centre of the narrative, so that a man must face the supernatural, interrogate and investigate it, and deal with the implications of the otherworldly encounter.⁵⁴ Masculinity is therefore challenged in this perspective and, at the same time, the outcome of the male consciousness' elaboration grants authority and strength to the female composition.⁵⁵ The perspective adopted by Basham, Showalter, and Dickerson would be resumed by Emma Liggins et al. in 2011 in the seminal volume *The British Short Story*, where the ghost story is presented as a space for female authors to discuss themes of relevance from the corner of their marginalised position. As a rule, over the decades few scholars have undertaken studies on Victorian female authors of the supernatural, generally privileging male writers such as Le Fanu, Dickens, Collins, Stoker, Machen, James, Wilde, and others,⁵⁶ and even less so on the short story genre. Diana Wallace stressed that women are esteemed to have produced about fifty per cent of all the ghost stories appeared during the Victorian Age, yet, apart from Vernon Lee (1856-1935), they have been given little or no credit by scholars.⁵⁷ *The British Short Story* seems to have contributed to reanimate this field of studies in the twenty-first century, followed by Luke Thurston's *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism. The Haunting Interval*,⁵⁸ where he took into

⁵⁴Showalter, *Daughters of Decadence*, pp. viii-ix.

⁵⁵Basham, *The Trial of Woman*, p. 158.

⁵⁶See for instance Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977); Jack Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980), with only scant references to Rhoda Broughton, Charlotte Riddell and May Sinclair; Glen Cavaliero, *The Supernatural and English Fiction. From The Castle of Otranto to Hawksmoor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁵⁷See Diana Wallace, *Female Gothic Histories* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), and «Uncanny Stories: The Ghost Story as Female Gothic», *Gothic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2004), pp. 57-68. See also Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith, *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

⁵⁸Luke Thurston, *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism. The Haunting Interval* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2012).

consideration brief narratives and explored the theme of the ghost as guest. In 2011, Hilary Grimes discussed the ghostly role of women in their own society and the connection between ghostliness, authorship, and female identity. She also considered the female fascination for spiritualism reflected in ghost writing, as many female writers also performed as spiritualists and, therefore, were declared transgressive.⁵⁹ Melissa Edmunson's *Women's Ghost Literature in Nineteenth-Century Britain*⁶⁰ highlighted the female tendency to portray benevolent ghosts, in most cases, as opposed to the malignant spirits evoked by male authors. She also emphasised women's subversiveness, enacted by means of their literary endeavours, in contrast with the oppressive patriarchal society. Kate Krueger's *British Women and the Short Story, 1850-1930* (2014) investigated the boundaries that constrained women over the mid-nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century: she moved from Dickerson's interpretation of ghost-like women, but she distanced herself from her predecessor by accentuating the presence of transgressive, "anti-angel" women in Victorian Gothic and sensation fiction, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's works.

The latest study on women and short fiction of the supernatural is Victoria Margree's *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction*,⁶¹ a volume that aims to provide an analysis of different Victorian authors dealing with a variety of themes from economic management to the Empire, offering a wide perspective on how female writers moved across the delicate social, political, economic, and historical context in the period of transition between Victorian and Edwardian Britain. It is also a compelling bibliographical tool for this thesis. Scholarship in this field has generally highlighted women's disadvantageous position due to chauvinism; however, when considering the marginal position of British women in the nineteenth century, one should consider that some of them enjoyed at least some benefits derived from their class. Two of the authors whose works will be explored in this thesis are an example of this: Margaret Oliphant and Charlotte Riddell belonged to the commercial middle

⁵⁹Hilary Grimes, *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny, and Scenes of Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), pp. 86-87.

⁶⁰Melissa Edmunson, *Women's Ghost Literature in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).

⁶¹See Margree, *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction*.

class, therefore they benefited from certain economic privileges on which others could not count. Moreover, they became prolific authors whose novels and short stories sold well, granting them an income and the possibility to provide for themselves and their families. Money is a theme that brings these authors together in literature as well, since both faced economic failures that aroused their concern for economic stability, which could be jeopardised by the whims of the financial system.⁶² The supernatural provided Riddell and Oliphant with the perfect frame to discuss the issue of financial dangers, with plots about lost wills and the transmission of wealth, because the “illogic” laws of the uncanny could mirror the unpredictable laws of the market.

Margaret Oliphant (1828-1897) was a Scottish author best known as a novelist, but also as an essayist and a literary critic. Throughout her career, she composed about one hundred novels and fifty short stories, most of them published in *Blackwood's Magazine*.⁶³ Her life was punctuated by a series of personal losses that left her perennially bereft; yet, despite her suffering, Oliphant never gave up writing, but she forced herself to keep her creative vein alive in order to support her family. Born and raised in Glasgow and then Liverpool, Oliphant was the daughter of a clerk. She married her cousin Frank in 1852, who died of tuberculosis seven years later; he had kept his illness from his wife for some time, a hurt that she never fully forgave.⁶⁴ Since Frank's departure, Oliphant became the sole source of income for her family of three surviving children; furthermore, she subsequently had to provide for her alcoholic brother, Willie, and for her other brother Frank's family when he was hit by a financial crisis. Oliphant was never able to maintain a long-term job, possibly because of her gender,⁶⁵ and her income as a writer never allowed her to boast an equally durable

⁶²See Sarah Bissell, «Spectral Economics and the Horror of Risk in Charlotte Riddell's Ghost Stories», *Victorian Review* 40, no. 2 (Fall 2014), pp. 73-89.

⁶³Oliphant also published in the *Fraser's Magazine* (1830-1882), *The New Quarterly Magazine* (1873-1880), and the *Longman's Magazine* (1882-1905).

⁶⁴Mike Ashley, ed., *Introduction*, in “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories of the Seen and the Unseen* by Margaret Oliphant (London: The British Library, 2021), p. x.

⁶⁵D. J. Trela, ed., *Margaret Oliphant: Critical Essays on a Gentle Subversive* (Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania: Susquehanna University Press, 1995), pp. 22-23.

financial stability because her money was spent for her many destitute relatives, and she worried because of this.

Similarly, Riddell was conscious of the precariousness of financial stability because of her own father's economic demise. Riddell was born Charlotte Elizabeth Lawson Cowan (1832-1906) in Dublin to an English mother, daughter of a Liverpool merchant, and an Irish cotton manufacturer. Her father's business was greatly damaged by a financial stroke that plunged the family into near poverty; this is the possible reason why economic matters became so pervasive in her literary production,⁶⁶ haunting her for the rest of her life. Riddell's mother decided that her family should move to London as a remedy for such hardship, and here Charlotte began her career as an active, proficient writer of novels and short stories published mainly in *St James's Magazine* from 1867 to 1874, which she edited along with the periodical *Home Magazine*. Riddell used a number of male pseudonyms or published anonymously, and then chose the name Mrs J. H. Riddell after her marriage. Along with her short narratives, Riddell also published four supernatural novels, the best known being *The Uninhabited House* (1874).⁶⁷ She married Joseph Hadley Riddell, an engineer and a trader, in 1857, a man with little sense for business⁶⁸ who met a series of failures, turning his wife into the family's sole source of income; meanwhile, she struggled to adapt to the changing rules of the literary marketplace that no longer sponsored three-volume novels like those she preferred to write.⁶⁹ In fact, the increasing technological developments in print favoured shorter forms of fiction that allowed to reduce printing costs while granting a larger and more profitable production that circulated more easily. Eventually, Riddell could no longer sustain her

⁶⁶See Silvana Colella, *Charlotte Riddell's City Novels and Victorian Business. Narrating Capitalism* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2016).

⁶⁷Charlotte Riddell, *The Uninhabited House*, ed. Melissa Emunson (Peterborough, CA: Broadview Press, 2022).

⁶⁸Charlotte Riddell, *The Collected Ghost Stories of Mrs J. H. Riddell*, ed. Everett F. Bleiler (Dover: Dover Publications, 1977), p. viii.

⁶⁹Margree, *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction*, p. 31. See also Mary Elizabeth Braddon, «Devoted Disciple: The Letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1863-1873», ed. Robert Lee Wolff, *Harvard Library Bulletin* 22, no. 1 (January 1974), pp. 5-35.

family, and was forced to seek assistance; she turned to the Royal Literary Fund in 1901. Since the economic theme is central to Oliphant and Riddell's productions, their fiction has generally been investigated in relation to money issues and financial difficulties, so predominant in their lives. Copeland argued that the relation between women and economic concerns dates back to the eighteenth century,⁷⁰ and Edmunson recalled that economic anxiety has often triggered plots revolving around stolen inheritances, poverty and lost fortunes,⁷¹ recurrent themes also in Oliphant and Riddell's own works:

The importance of money and using it correctly resurfaced in the latter half of the nineteenth century in the ghost stories of writers such as Charlotte Riddell, Mary Louisa Molesworth and Margaret Oliphant. In their supernatural writings, each author confronted lost potential and the social repercussions of money being mishandled.⁷²

Such authors earned their own position in business, marking the beginning of a change in the condition of women since the 1850s,⁷³ attracted by the potentialities of the literary market and the desire of economic independence and self-reliance. As Edmunson argued, money drew writers, both male and female, to the short story genre and, towards the end of the century, authoresses were able to gain enough to support themselves independently and to obtain a living. This was the case of Oliphant, Riddell and Marryat for instance, «earning their own bread at a time when women were more openly challenging ideas of female submissiveness and economic powerlessness.»⁷⁴ Edmunson further explained that in many stories money become the

⁷⁰See Edward Copeland, *Women Writing About Money* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁷¹Melissa Edmunson, *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing, 1850-1930. Haunted Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), p. 93.

⁷²Edmunson, *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing*, p. 94.

⁷³Edmunson, *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing*, p. 95.

⁷⁴Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide*, p. 137.

haunting presence along with the phantoms, since characters undergo a period of economic distress and instability, a harsh experience that teaches them important life lessons on how to deal with money without squandering it. The morale at the end of such stories implies that «money generates immorality».⁷⁵ Riddell, Oliphant and Molesworth above all presented characters who suffer the consequences of economic mismanagement, and what mattered to them was showing how to use money correctly.⁷⁶

Such discussions testify to the predominance of the economic theme in criticism about Riddell and Oliphant's short narratives. Margree followed in these steps in her work about Riddell's 'Old Mrs Jones' and Oliphant's 'The Portrait', starting from the consideration that both texts raise questions about poverty and the responsibility of money management, reinforced by the setting of these tales, that is to say the haunted house.⁷⁷ Similarly, Edmundson adopted an analogous viewpoint in her discussion of Riddell's 'Walnut-Tree House' and 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk', of Molesworth's 'Lady Farquhar's Old Lady' and Oliphant's 'Old Lady Mary'.

Mary Molesworth and Florence Marryat, both mentioned by Dickerson and Edmundson, also participated in the wave of supernatural narratives produced by women and gained their place in the literary market of the second half of the Victorian Age.

Mary Louisa Molesworth (1839-1921) is one of the least studied Victorian authors: suffice it to know that, after her death, she was excluded from *The Dictionary of National Biography*,⁷⁸ a work of reference on notable British figures first published in 1885 and last updated in 2004. Roger Lancelyn Green wrote the only existing biography of Molesworth in 1961, acknowledging her declining popularity around the time of her death and devoting only a brief paragraph to her supernatural tales.⁷⁹

⁷⁵Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story, 1840-1920: A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 21.

⁷⁶Edmunson, *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing*, p. 96.

⁷⁷See Margree, *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction*.

⁷⁸Edmunson, *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing*, p. 112.

⁷⁹See Roger Lancelyn Green, *Mrs Molesworth* (London: Bodley Head, 1961).

Molesworth was the author of around a dozen ghost stories, published in the collections *Four Ghost Stories* (1888) and *Uncanny Tales* (1896),⁸⁰ but she was mostly known and praised for her fantasy works for children during her lifetime. Molesworth, née Stewart, was the daughter of a rich Manchester merchant and was educated in Great Britain and Switzerland, a social standing that clearly placed her above her female contemporaries. She married Major R. Molesworth, a Viscount's nephew, in 1861, but they legally separated in 1879. Her separation does not seem to have caused an inflection in her career, but she generally published her works under the male pseudonym Ennis Graham, less frequently as M. L. S. Molesworth, omitting her full name. Molesworth often talked about her interest in the supernatural and was convinced to possess the second sight, yet she was not a fan of mediums and spiritual séances, which she believed to be far too 'mysterious' to be actually given credit to.⁸¹

Molesworth shared the sensibility for the otherworldly with Florence Marryat who, contrary to Molesworth, was a medium herself. Marryat (1833-1899) was born in Brighton to Captain Frederick Marryat, who was also a writer; she was educated privately and became the author of several novels. Marryat spent a few years of her life in India with her husband, a member of the British Army stationed there, an experience that possibly inspired some of her works. Marryat lived a rather unconventional life: she was neglected by her husband, who remained in India upon her return to England; she therefore had different relationships while still being married to the point of being sued for adultery. Marryat's life was far from being monotonous, for not only did she have different love interests during her married life, but she was also a traveller, in particular to the United States; she became an actress and an author of comic sketches, and even opened a school of journalism towards the end of her life. Both Molesworth and Marryat's careers were not centred around the production of short stories of the supernatural, the former being an author of children's literature and the second a novelist. In particular, Marryat is best known for her

⁸⁰Neither one of these collections has been re-edited again after their first appearance, but the first and sole editions have been digitalised and uploaded on the British Library archives, the bibliographical reference for this thesis.

⁸¹See Lancelyn Green, *Mrs Molesworth*, page numbers unavailable.

masterpiece *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897),⁸² which was published the same year as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Her novel has aroused renewed critical interest because of its racial implications, but it was originally criticised for the representation of Harriet as a vampire *femme fatale*.⁸³ Her short narratives were published on magazines, especially the *Belgravia* and its Christmas issues, the magazine edited by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, or as parts of collections like *A Moment of Madness and Other Stories* (1883).

Amongst the authors in the corpus, Florence Marryat was particularly interested in the pseudo-sciences that dealt with mind and sleeping conditions, and she was also a spiritualist. She eventually gathered her supernatural experiences in a collection entitled *There Is No Death*,⁸⁴ a declaration of her belief in communication with the dead: she wrote about her dead loved ones and the happiness deriving from the possibility offered by spiritual séances of reuniting with them, although temporarily. Kontou argued that death punctuates Marryat's novels, but she did not take into consideration her short fiction, where death is not always presented as "irreparable".⁸⁵ Marryat collocated herself in what Morrison defined an intersection between the private and the public, connected by reports of supernatural encounters experienced first-hand by the authors of such accounts.⁸⁶

Marryat was active in spiritualist circles and societies, and her audacity in publishing accounts of her own experiences with the occult only fuelled her popularity in the literary panorama of the end of the century, in spite of her relatives' warnings that she would have made a fool of herself had she decided to publish *There Is No Death*.⁸⁷ In the book, Marryat offered to the public the impressions left upon her by

⁸²Florence Marryat. *The Blood of the Vampire*, ed. Brenda Hammack (Richmond, CA: Valancourt Classics, 2009).

⁸³Edmunson, *Women's Colonial Gothic Writing*, pp. 73-94.

⁸⁴Florence Marryat, *There Is No Death* (New York City, NY: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1891).

⁸⁵Kontou, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, pp. 225-227.

⁸⁶Mark Morrison, «The Periodical Culture of the Occult Revival: Esoteric Wisdom, Modernity and Counter-Public Spheres», *Journal of Modern Literature* 31, no. 2 (2008), p. 3.

⁸⁷See Florence Marryat, *The Spirit World* (London: F.V. White, 1895), p. 11.

her experiences, at the same time attempting to record faithfully what she had seen and heard during the séances. She also stated that she had no interest in starting arguments of any kind, because «[I] have had more than enough of arguments, philosophical, scientific, religious and purely aggressive»;⁸⁸ she seemed to attribute this belligerent attitude especially to men, for she announced that «every man may hold his opinion, and no one is permitted to dispute it.»⁸⁹ Marryat was very assertive in establishing her identity as the author and narrator of the reports (by frequently employing first person pronouns for instance), while also spotlighting the truthfulness that she attributed to what she was about to divulge, and to the belief in life after death. In the misogynist Victorian society that most women perceived as suffocating, Marryat's assertion was a strong affirmation of individuality and authority over men not necessarily holding all the truths. At the same time, she indirectly made female sensibility, scorned by male intellectuals who branded women as weak and inclined to hysteria for this, an added value, in that it allowed her to see beyond what rationality, a typically male quality from the Victorian perspective, allowed to bear. *There Is No Death* is also in part a manual on how to conduct fruitful séances, which Marryat herself led by combining the theatrical expertise that she owned, being an actress, and the empirical “theories” resulting from scientific research in spiritualism. She gave an example of a séance in her tale ‘A Midsummer’s Nightmare; or the Amateur Detective’ (1883, in *The Ghost of Charlotte Cray and Other Stories*), an ironical story where the protagonist is an actor, like her, who stages a spiritual séance in the final “scene” of the tale. Marryat was optimistic in relation to life after death, strongly believing that death is not the end. This attitude emerges from various reports included in *There Is No Death* as noticed by Kontou: in this perspective, ghosts do not come to remind the living of the past times spent together, a fact that does not generate a heartbreaking reminiscence of the loss, but rather a pleasurable experience. In *There Is No Death*, one episode involves Marryat's loss of her infant daughter, who died a newborn in 1861. During a séance, the child appears to her mother all grown up into a young lady, and she comforts her mother by telling her that she is always, and always will be, near her. The use of the personal pronoun “I” used for the ghost's speeches

⁸⁸Marryat, *There Is No Death*, p. 5.

⁸⁹Marryat, *There Is No Death*, *ivi*.

contributes to render the spirit's appearance realistic, but at the same time, it problematises it according to Kontou, as the "I" «traverses through time and space, through the medium and through Marryat's desire to join the daughter who has never left her mother's side.»⁹⁰

It is the relationship between life and death, between acceptance and belief, between memory and new experiences, between the past and the present to be really problematised, especially considering that Marryat used a variety of literary genres to tell her episodes: the idea of feeling the presence of a deceased loved one is strong in the tale 'Sent to His Death!' that will be discussed in the following chapters.

Like Marryat, also Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915) lived an unorthodox life; she recognised and exploited the potential of the ghost story as a vehicle for social critique,⁹¹ making her female ghosts no longer objects of aesthetic contemplation, in the style foregrounded by Edgar Allan Poe. In doing so, Braddon highlighted political and social constructions instead.⁹² Braddon was extremely popular as a novelist, her best-known work being *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862),⁹³ which has even been dramatized and filmed several times. She was born in London to parents who separated when she was five years old; when she was ten, her brother left for India and Australia, and eventually became Premier of Tasmania. In 1860, Braddon fell in love with the publisher John Maxwell, and they started a cohabitation, although he was married and the father of five children. Maxwell's wife was confined in an asylum, so Braddon acted as his children's mother; she gave him six more children after the woman died and they could finally get married.

⁹⁰Kontou and Willburn, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, pp. 225. Kontou's quotation is from Marryat, *There Is No Death*, p. 85. Kontou discussed Marryat's relationship with her dead child in *Parallel Worlds: Collins's Sensationalism and Spiritualist Practice*, in Andrew Mangham, ed., *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2007), pp. 37-55.

⁹¹Margree, *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction*, p. 69.

⁹²Margree, *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction*, pp. 72-73.

⁹³Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, ed. Lyn Pykett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

In the year of the Indian Mutiny and the Matrimonial Causes Act, Mary Elizabeth Braddon began her professional career. Supporting herself and her mother by becoming an actress on the provincial stage, Braddon was among those Victorian women who understood the importance of female employment opportunities and property rights, and had witnessed the inequities of Victorian marriage law at first hand. Braddon's mother separated from her adulterous husband in 1840, but only after she had lost all the property she brought to the marriage because of her husband's financial incompetence. After two years of acting in Yorkshire, the twenty-four-year-old Braddon began writing fiction to make money. Her first novel, *Three Times Dead*, appeared in 1860, and her second, *Lady Audley's Secret*, from 1861 to 1862.⁹⁴

Braddon was one of the most prolific authors of her time: in particular, her short narratives were published both individually and collected in several volumes. Still today, her short supernatural fiction is frequently anthologised. Braddon was certainly favoured by the fact that she herself was the editor of two magazines, the Christmas annual *Mistletoe Bough* and the literary magazine *Belgravia* from 1866 to 1899; she was therefore free to publish what she preferred and to aid other fellow authors, like Marryat, in publishing their own stories on her magazine. Feminist solidarity is an issue that has been discussed by many in relation to Braddon, because her literary production seems to shift between anti-feminist positions in her novels and feminist sympathies in her short stories.⁹⁵ The latter can hide more radical messages attacking the moral façade of the Victorian bourgeoisie in a more subtle way with respect to her sensation novels: this is made possible because the language of the fantastic, characterising Gothic narrations, allows to mask transgressive ideas while their structure, not necessarily requiring narrative closure, favours the lack of explanatory remarks that either condemn or redeem the raffish character.

In contrast with Braddon stands the Welsh writer Rhoda Broughton (1840-1920), who once commented that she began her career as Zola, but ended it as Charlotte

⁹⁴Margree, *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction*, pp. 72-73.

⁹⁵Margree, *British Women's Short Supernatural Fiction*, p. 74.

Yonge,⁹⁶ a conservative nineteenth-century writer. If the beginning of her career witnessed heroines who defied social conventions, Broughton's 1897 novel *Dear Faustina* is indeed an example of an anti-New Woman manifest that discredits the movement's activists while promoting the acceptance of male guidance and female submission to it:⁹⁷

In effect, the social projects of Broughton's New Woman are normalized by being relocated from a tainted and threatening female-controlled realm to an approved male-dominated environment in which female contributions are limited to "womanly" work and distanced from an aggressive public posture.⁹⁸

The most conservative of the authors in the corpus began her career with the novel *Not Wisely, but Too Well* (1865),⁹⁹ published in serial form in *The Dublin University Magazine*, and she would continue to be mainly known as a novelist. Like Mary Molesworth, Broughton is a rather neglected author nowadays, having been scarcely studied by scholars and critics, and those who have analysed her works have privileged her novels.¹⁰⁰ Broughton was autonomous in the decisions she made regarding the publication of her works, shaping her professional career according to her own demands. Her novels made her one of the most active authors of the

⁹⁶Charlotte Yonge (1823-1901) was a novelist who became famous for her novel *The Heir of Redclyff*, published in 1853 (London: MacMillan, 1870); she was renowned for her faith, restraint, and moderation. Her literary production helped spread the influence of the Oxford Movement, involving high church members of the Church of England since 1830s, and brought to light matters of public health and sanitation, which were some of her main concerns.

⁹⁷Patricia Murphy, «Disdained and Disempowered: The "Inverted" New Woman in Rhoda Broughton's *Dear Faustina*», *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 19, no. 1 (Spring, 2000), p. 57.

⁹⁸Murphy, «Disdained and Disempowered», p. 57.

⁹⁹Rhoda Broughton, *Not Wisely, But Too Well*, ed. Tamar Heller (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2013).

¹⁰⁰See Marylin Wood, *Rhoda Broughton (1840-1920): Profile of a Novelist* (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1993); Pamela Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Ann L. Ardis, *Dear Faustina*, in *New Women, New Novels: Feminism in Early Modernism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1990).

nineteenth century, but her short supernatural fiction secured Broughton's position as a popular author: she published her first tales of the uncanny in the *Temple Bar* from 1868 to 1873, when she collected them in *Tales for Christmas Eve*; the same collection was reissued in 1879 under the title of *Twilight Stories*. Over the following years, she continued to publish ghost stories in a variety of magazines including the *Temple Bar*, *Pall Mall Magazine*, *Penny Illustrated Paper* and *Illustrated Times*, *Belfast News-Letter*, *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, and *The Morpeth Herald*.¹⁰¹ Her narratives included themes such as «murder, bigamy, illegitimacy, theft and adultery» that scandalised her contemporaries;¹⁰² her works were witty and sometimes risqué in their representation of passion and adultery, that is why she was often accused of being vulgar and improper.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 concerns domestic spaces, namely the haunted house that, in the context of Victorian literature, is home to the middle class. The house motif became prominent in this period because it allowed both male and female authors to raise questions regarding the family and its inherent relationships like marriage, motherhood, and the condition of women. Domesticity, and home as its symbol, is embedded within the Victorians' perception of self and nation as a safe harbour against the violence of industrial capitalism,¹⁰³ a true sanctuary:¹⁰⁴ the house, with the typical image of the family gathered around the fireplace,¹⁰⁵ is a safe space against the hostile external

¹⁰¹See Emma Liggins, ed., *Introduction*, in *Twilight Stories* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2009), pp. i-vii.

¹⁰²Liggins, Maunder and Robbins, *Introduction*, in *The British Short Story*, p. i.

¹⁰³Bridget Walsh, *Domestic Murder in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2014), page numbers unavailable.

¹⁰⁴Anthea Trodd, *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1989), p. 1.

¹⁰⁵Carolyn Lambert, *The Meanings of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2013), pp. 105-107: «a well-kept fire and a clean hearth conveyed a range of messages about the morality of the house's inhabitants, a woman's domestic competence and the wealth and physical security of the family»; fire symbolizes the «ebb and flow of emotion [...] fire then, as a living thing, can symbolise death as well as life.»

world. However, Gothic and sensation fiction authors exploited fiction to demonstrate that, behind the façade of respectability and the neat separation between the private and the public sphere, evil can originate within the house walls, or it can penetrate them from outside. For this reason, the nineteenth century witnessed a proliferation of texts with plots set in haunted houses that marked a shift from the eighteenth-century Gothic tradition.

Section 1.1 deals with haunted house narratives, considering in particular Riddell's 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk' (1882, published in the collection *Weird Stories*) and Braddon's 'The Winning Sequence' (1896, *Lloyd's Magazine*): both tales revolve around the feminine space *par excellence* within the house, the drawing-room, and tell the story of two women who refused to comply with the Victorian code of feminine decorum, turning from angels in the house into devious *femmes fatales* in their own way.

Section 1.2 presents short narratives that are characterised by a revival of mediaeval buildings in eighteenth-century Gothic fashion. In the nineteenth century, castles, abbeys, monasteries, and convents were substituted by haunted houses and violent familiar environments, but in some works the interest in the medieval, Gothic architectural spaces persisted, though they were adapted to Victorian literary and cultural canons. Margaret Oliphant explored the theme of legacy and hereditary in her tale 'The Secret Chamber' (1876, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*), set in an ancient Scottish castle; Mary Elizabeth Braddon set three of her narratives within the corpus in an abbey, a monastery, and a medieval library, 'His Secret' (1881, *Mistletoe Bough*, then collected in *Flower and Weed and Other Tales* in 1884), 'Herself' (or 'The Venetian Glass', 1894, *Sheffield Weekly Telegraph Christmas*) and 'Sir Hanbury's Request' (1874, *Belgravia Christmas Annual*, then collected in *Weavers and Weft and Other Stories*, 1877) respectively.

Sections 1.3 and 1.4 move from the frontiers of the house, its walls, and their openings towards the outer space. Section 1.3 analyses tales that explore liminal spaces like corridors, doors, and windows, which either represent means of escape from a condition of subordination or the unwillingness or impossibility to avert entrapment, as in Oliphant's 'The Open Door' (1881, "The Open Door" and "The Portrait", *Two Stories of 'the Seen and the Unseen' with Mysterious Occurrences*,

then published in 1882 in the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and collected in *Stories of the Seen and the Unseen* in 1884) and 'The Library Window' (1896, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*), Riddell's 'The Open Door' (1882, *Weird Stories*) and 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk', Marryat's 'Sent to His Death!' (1883, *A Moment of Madness and Other Stories*), Broughton's 'Poor Pretty Bobby' (1872, *Temple Bar Magazine*, then collected in *Stories for Christmas Eve* in 1872, later re-edited as *Twilight Stories*), and Molesworth's 'Lady Farquhar's Old Lady' (1873, published in 1888 in *Four Ghost Stories*) and 'The Story of the Rippling Train' (1887, then collected in *Four Ghost Stories* in 1888).

Section 1.4 explores the symbolic meaning of mirrors and portraits, apparently only decorative items that are brought to life by supernatural entities in their attempt to communicate with the living, as in Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant' (1867, *Belgravia*), 'Herself', and 'His Secret', and Oliphant's 'The Portrait' (1881, "*The Open Door*" and "*The Portrait*", *Two Stories of 'the Seen and the Unseen' with Mysterious Occurrences*, then collected in *Stories of the Seen and the Unseen* in 1884).

As previously explained, sensation fiction and Gothic canons allowed writers to investigate questions of gender often related to violence: the Victorian literary trope of the haunted house became thus related to themes of domestic violence, either perpetrated by men overpowering submitted women, or by female criminals who sought, through crime, to subvert the canonical social order and overcome patriarchal authority, defying the role of 'angels'. Murder becomes the cause of haunting in various narratives in the corpus, where ghosts are either female victims or killers, a theme that was of particular concern at the time because of the various reforms that were passed during the final decades of the century, improving the general life conditions of women while threatening the male role of authority. Section 1.5 thus concentrates on domestic violence through the analysis of stories by Riddell, the master of haunted house narratives: 'Nut-Bush Farm' (1882, *Weird Stories*), 'Walnut-Tree House' (1882, *Weird Stories*), and 'The Open Door', all dealing with intra-family murders, and 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk' and 'Old Mrs Jones' (1882, *Weird Stories*).

The last section of the first chapter, Section 1.6, moves from Thurtson's suggestion that ghosts are guests and explores the distribution of these roles in the corpus narratives, with particular emphasis on Oliphant's 'Old Lady Mary' (1884, *Stories of the Seen and the Unseen*) and especially Braddon's 'The Dreaded Guest' (1871, *Belgravia Christmas Annual*, then collected in *Milly Darrell and Other Stories*), highlighting the relationship between supernatural entities and the living co-existing and sharing the same domestic environment.

Chapter 2 explores haunted natural landscapes. Section 2.1 privileges spaces that are in proximity to home, acting as the bridge between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2: private gardens and parks. The picturesque aesthetics continued to thrive well into the nineteenth century, deeply influencing the artistic and literary representations of the time, including architecture and, specifically, garden design. Short narratives like Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant' and 'Sir Luke's Return' (1875, *Belgravia Christmas Annual*, collected in *Weavers and Weft and Other Stories* in 1877) suggest an alternative reading of the tales that concerns British imperialism, reflecting end-of-the-century fears triggered by the slow decline that the Empire was suffering. The picturesque aesthetics is discussed in relation to Braddon's 'The Ghost's Name' (1891, *Mistletoe Bough*, then collected in *All Along the River and Other Stories* in 1893) and Oliphant's 'Earthbound' (1880, *Frazer's Magazine*), a thrilling and touching tale of loss and mourning where the garden is the background to characters that cope with love, death, and the suffering deriving from these feelings. Furthermore, Oliphant's 'Earthbound' and 'The Open Door' also include references to ruins, a presumed funerary urn, and a derelict house respectively. The theme of ruins was particularly dear to Victorians, afflicted by a nostalgia of the past, and obsessed by its vestiges. They contemplated ruins as cultural items blended into nature, a "picturesque" activity that fuelled "sublime" feelings of combined horror and melancholy. Ruins represented liminal features between the past and the present, the artificial and the natural, a means to re-create the past and make it live anew.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶See Anne Janowitz, *England's Ruins Poetic Purposes and the National Landscape* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

Victorians were indebted to Wordsworth's philosophy of nature, as we will see: the sublime and the picturesque are analysed in relation to Victorian short fiction in Section 2.1, since a great number of narratives exploits picturesqueness and sublimity to introduce feelings of horror, anxiety and fear perceived by the characters and resulting from events described as uncanny, a concept derived from Freud's theory of the *unheimlich* illustrated in Chapter 1: Braddon's 'The Little Woman in Black' (1885, *Mistletoe Bough*, then collected in *Under the Flag and Other Tales* in 1886), 'Herself', 'The Ghost's Name', and 'Good Lady Ducayne' (1896, *Strand Magazine*), Marryat's 'The Invisible Tenants of Rushmere' (1883, *The Ghost of Charlotte Cray and Other Stories*), Molesworth's 'Unexplained' (1888, *Four Ghost Stories*), Oliphant's 'The Open Door' and 'The Lady's Walk' (1897, published in book form), Riddell's 'Nut-Bush Farm', and Broughton's 'The Man with the Nose' (1872, *Temple Bar Magazine*, then collected in *Stories for Christmas Eve* in 1872, later re-edited as *Twilight Stories*).

Section 2.3 analyses two different tales that present characteristics of the sublime, but being set in very specifically 'circumscribed' landscapes, they will be discussed separately: Marryat's 'Lost in the Marshes' (1883, collected in *A Moment of Madness and Other Stories*) stages a marshy landscape, typically associated with criminals and monsters since the Middle Ages, whereas Braddon's 'My Wife's Promise' (published in *Belgravia Annual* in 1868, then collected in *Under the Red Flag and Other Stories* in 1886) is set in part in the Arctic region, a reflection of the vivid interest of Victorians in polar expeditions, as will be explained.

Finally, Section 2.4 briefly approaches a theme that resounds everywhere today, being a pressing issue of capital importance: the relationship between industrialisation and the environment, and the consequences of human exploitation of nature. Certain texts within the corpus prompt an ecocritical discussion that, however, has not the pretension of being a thoroughly ecocritical analysis, for this is not the main theme of this work. Nonetheless, references to the changing conditions of natural environments throughout the corpus show that Victorians had a sense of the negative consequences of industrialisation and of its impact on nature. The section focuses on references that appear in Oliphant's 'The Open Door', 'The Lady's Walk', 'Earthbound', and 'The Beleaguered City' (1880, published in book form), Molesworth's 'Unexplained' and 'Witnessed by Two' (1888, *Four Ghost Stories*), Braddon's 'Dorothy's Rival' (1867,

Belgravia Christmas Annual, then collected in *Under the Flag and Other Tales* in 1886), ‘Prince Ramji Rowdedow’ (1873, *Belgravia Christmas Annual*, then collected in *Weavers and Weft and Other Stories* in 1886), and ‘Sir Hanbury’s Request’, Broughton’s ‘The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth’ (1868, *Temple Bar Magazine*, then collected in *Stories for Christmas Eve* in 1872, later re-edited as *Twilight Stories*) and ‘Poor Pretty Bobby’, and Riddell’s ‘The Open Door’, ‘Nut-Bush Farm’ and ‘Walnut-Tree House’. It is worth noting that ecological concerns are made manifest in texts by all the authors in the corpus but one.

The third and last chapter examines a different kind of space, outside of any geographical border: the body and the mind, discussed in Section 3.1 and Section 3.2 respectively. As we will see, the pseudo-science known as phrenology inspired the creation of many fictional characters in late century Gothic fiction, by both female and male authors. Science applied to theories of deviancy and degeneration shaped models of otherness and abnormality,¹⁰⁷ generating the uncanny. The vampire body, examined in Section 3.1.1, is an example of this: vampires were often interpreted as pathologically deviant creatures in that they showed signs of sadistic perversion and were sexually aggressive.¹⁰⁸ The vampire begot anxiety about sexuality and challenged the bourgeois Victorian moral codes of heterosexuality and patriarchy, the «universally accepted standard.»¹⁰⁹ In the corpus, specifically in Marryat’s ‘Sent to His Death!’ and Braddon’s ‘Good Lady Ducayne’, there are mock-vampire figures of women whose behaviour can be read in various ways.

Section 3.1.2 investigates the disabled body. Today, disability is interpreted as something constructed on top of impairment and it is not represented by a sensory or physical deficit, but rather as the reception and construction of that difference.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons. Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 5.

¹⁰⁸Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 282.

¹⁰⁹Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, p. 211.

¹¹⁰See Mairian Corker and Tom Shakespeare, “Mapping the Terrain”, in *Disability/Postmodernity: Embodying Disability Theory* 3 (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 3; Lennard J. Davis, *Bending Over*

However, in Victorian literature disability was built on the binary distinction between the normal and the abnormal.¹¹¹ In this perspective, the disabled body enacted theories of deviancy in its own way, because the cognitive, sensorial or physical impairment was translated as alien from the normal bodily experience. Metaphorically, the disabled body was also connected with oppression, meaning that the different body, therefore the “other”, was subjugated to a code of “normalcy” that became a universally accepted standard:

This dynamic of disruption is articulated and reinforced in each encounter between the subject performing normalcy and the subject prescribed as abnormal or deviant. It is within the visual field, within the perception of the body, within the moment of the stare that this power over another is articulated, when one body in possession of normalcy is able instantaneously to define, catalog, and exclude the body that is impaired or different. There is an innate violence attached to the stare of normalcy, and at the foundation of the normal/abnormal encounter.¹¹²

The abnormal, disabled body is the protagonist of Braddon’s ‘Herself’ and ‘Dorothy’s Rival’ and of Marryat’s ‘Lost in the Marshes’, where three different characters are portrayed as defenceless victims of the dualism normal-abnormal, standard-deviancy, or as individuals working to defeat this binary distinction in a cultural and social context where respectability and flawless demeanour were signature traits of the bourgeois façade.

Race was another major issue, understandably so in a country that was used to dominate the world through its imperialistic policies. Nothing more than the foreign, thus the unknown, generated the uncanny in the eyes of the Victorians: the late century witnessed increasing cracks in the Empire, raising questions of legitimacy and morality. Defining and marginalising the “Other” entailed circumscribing what it

Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions (New York City, NY: New York University Press, 2002), p. 50.

¹¹¹See Mark Mossman, «Representations of the Abnormal Body in “The Moonstone”», *Victorian Literature and Culture* 37, no. 2 (2009), pp. 483-500.

¹¹²Mossman, «Representations of the Abnormal Body in “The Moonstone”», p. 488.

meant to be British, what made up Britain's historical, cultural, social structure and who was to be excluded from it.¹¹³ The law had a key role in the process of establishing who met the requirements of Britishness and who did not: at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Catholics, Jews, dissenters and atheists were still prevented access to Parliament, while law-making was reserved to proper Britons, who were of Anglican faith. Over the century, such religious restrictions were slowly reduced, but new classes of "Other", emarginated from engagement in any field, were settled on moral grounds, that is to say prostitutes, homosexuals, and criminals, and on xenophobic grounds, comprising the Irish people and, obviously, the colonised peoples. As Grube stated, Victorian representatives of all classes used these outsider groups to enhance their class superiority: these minorities became scapegoats in the face of the law, while "proper" British people justified their self-righteousness by addressing the "Other" as inherently deviant.¹¹⁴ Xenophobic issues emerge from Broughton's 'Behold! It Was a Dream' (1872, *Temple Bar Magazine*, then collected in *Stories for Christmas Eve* in 1872, later re-edited as *Twilight Stories*), where the Irish question is blended with the discourse on criminal atavism forged by phrenologists and physiognomists, and where an Irish man becomes the archetype of evil. Similarly, fears of reversed colonization cause anxiety and phobia at the expense of people with a dark skin, subjected to the "racial superiority" of the white, British colonizer: Indians and Jews are equally characterised by dark skin tones that, in phrenological terms, distinguish the criminal from the decent man, as will be explained while examining Braddon's 'Prince Ramji Rowdedow' and 'The Ghost's Name', Broughton's 'The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth', and Riddell's 'Old Mrs Jones' and 'The Last of Squire Ennismore' (1888, collected in *Idle Tales*). The theme of otherness is examined in Section 3.1.3 and Section 3.1.4 respectively.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, p. 130.

¹¹⁴See Dennis Grube, *At the Margins of Victorian Britain. Politics, Immorality and Britishness in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

¹¹⁵On the legal difficulties in establishing the colonised people's identity see Ian Baucom, *Out of Place. Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Lastly, the final section of the thesis explores the mind, a source of the uncanny because of its undecipherable mechanisms that, still today, have not been fully comprehended. Since the Middle Ages, literature has always mirrored a fascination for the space of the mind, especially for dreams, way before the emergence of scientific approaches to this subject. Subsequently, psychoanalysis and literary production became intertwined:

For the psychoanalytic critic, the elements, structures, and themes that constitute the “make-believe” world of the literary text speak to the desires and fears of both authors and readers [...] In literature, we weave the beautifully elaborated fabric of language that lets us articulate what could not otherwise be known or said, not only for ourselves but for others also. Freud and others in psychoanalysis’ first generation drew upon literature both for examples of psychoanalytic insight and as prior statements of what they themselves were struggling to understand. All literature is subject to such analysis, but in the compressed, time-honed forms of myth and fairy tale, they often saw the nuclei of our most abiding concerns.¹¹⁶

The Gothic is the perfect literary genre to express anxieties about the working of the mind, to represent the uncanny derived from dreams, examining facts that are at odds with empirical evidence.¹¹⁷ In Freudian terms, the gap between reality and the supernatural originates the uncanny as it happens in dreams, when the distinction between reality and imagination fades. Massé affirmed that the Gothic influenced psychoanalysis, and psychoanalysis illuminated the Gothic in turn.¹¹⁸

Section 3.2.1 investigates the narratives that feature dream episodes or related sleep disorders, namely sleepwalking, in particular Broughton’s ‘Behold! It Was a Dream’ and ‘The Man with the Nose’, Riddell’s ‘Forewarned, Forearmed’ (1861, *Frank Sinclair’s Wife and Forewarned, Forearmed*), ‘Sandy the Tinker’ (1882, *Weird Stories*), ‘The Old House in Vauxhall Walk’ and ‘Old Mrs Jones’, Marryat’s ‘Sent to His Death!’, Molesworth’s ‘Witnessed by Two’ (1888, *Four Ghost Stories*).

¹¹⁶Michelle Massé, *Psychoanalysis and the Gothic*, in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), p. 307.

¹¹⁷Massé, *Psychoanalysis and the Gothic*, p. 307.

¹¹⁸Massé, *Psychoanalysis and the Gothic*, p. 308.

Section 3.2.2 briefly examines the theme of mental instability, with particular insistence on hysteria. The corpus does not present full accounts of hysteric behaviours, but various stories include descriptions of behaviours that can be attributed to hysteria, which will be discussed in this section also in relation to mesmerism and hypnotism, two debated branches of a pseudo-science inaugurated in the eighteenth century by Franz Anton Mesmer, a German physician who claimed the discovery of a universal fluid connecting all living beings. At the end of the nineteenth century, these disciplines had already been questioned by the scientific community, but Victorians remained intrigued and, at the same time, disquieted by them because, as we will see, both mesmerism and hypnotism implied the control of the subject's mind on the part of someone else: having one's thoughts and actions directed according to another individual's will was a question of the uncanny, produced by the loss of self-control and the invasion of the private sphere of the subject. Such references occur in Marryat's 'Sent to His Death!', Braddon's 'Evelin's Visitant', Oliphant's 'The Library Window' and 'Earthbound'. In this thesis, the noun "hysteria" is used to define the mental illness afflicting the analysed characters because this was the medical term employed by nineteenth-century psychiatrists,¹¹⁹ a "gendered" definition for hysteria as it was considered to be a female malady. However, today this is no longer the accepted designation for this kind of disorder. The *OED* defines "hysteria" as follows:

Originally: a (supposed) physical disorder of women attributed to displacement or dysfunction of the uterus, and characterized particularly by a sensation of fullness in the abdomen and chest, with choking or breathlessness [...] (now *historical*); (later also) a (supposed) disorder with similar symptoms affecting men (now *historical*). In later use: a disorder characterized by neurological symptoms (such as an inability to perform voluntary movements, loss of vision or hearing, seizure-like episodes, etc.), often accompanied by exaggeratedly or inappropriately emotional behaviour, originally attributed to disease or injury of the nervous system and later thought to be functional or psychogenic in origin. In recent classifications of diseases the names *conversion disorder* or *functional neurological symptom disorder* are preferred to *hysteria*.

¹¹⁹The term "psychiatry" was already in use in the nineteenth century, as it was first coined by Johann Christian Reil, a German psychiatrist, anatomist and physiologist. He first used the noun *psychiatrie* in 1808: see David K. Binder, Karl Schaller and Hans Clussman, «The Seminal Contributions of Johann Christian Reil to Anatomy, Physiology, and Psychiatry», *Neurosurgery* 61, no. 5 (November 2007). According to the *OED*, the term began to be used in Britain mainly in the second half of the nineteenth century: *Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

The disorder attributed to the uterus was known earlier in English by names including *rising of the mother*, *suffocation of the mother*, and *hysterical passion* or *hysterical passion*.¹²⁰

Several articles published in the renowned medical review *PubMed* refer to hysteria as “conversion disorder”, a type of disorders where the patient presents physical symptoms but there are no organic causes explaining them, “dissociative disorder”, when the patient experiences an involuntary disconnection between thoughts, memories, actions, identity and the surrounding environment, or “somatoform disorder”, also known as psychosomatic or somatic symptom disorder, a mental condition that induces an individual to experience bodily symptoms in response to psychological distress. Nowadays, the term “hysteria” therefore encompasses a number of clinical conditions related to mental disorders and psychopathological states.¹²¹ We can now begin to journey through these Gothic spaces that act as the setting of women’s subtle discussions on hot topics of their time, and explore their indirect participation, through the channel of Gothic short fiction, into the scientific, cultural, political, social, and economic panorama that characterised the later decades of the Victorian Age.

¹²⁰*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

¹²¹See for example F. M. Mai, «“Hysteria” in Clinical Neurology», *PubMed* 22 (May 1995), pp. 101-110; Antonio Carota, Pasquale Calabrese, «Hysteria Around the World», *PubMed* 35 (June 2014), pp. 169-180; W. Curt La France, «“Hysteria” Today and Tomorrow», *PubMed* 35 (June 2014), pp. 198-204.

Chapter 1

The Victorian Haunted House

Domesticity, and home as its symbol, was embedded within the Victorians' perception of self and nation as a sanctuary, a safe space against the violence of capitalism. In this view, the house, with the iconic image of the family gathered around the hearth, was a harbour against the hostile external world, a private space that allowed one's full expression of creativity and tastes, while the public sphere required restraint and conformity to the social rules of decorum and respectability.¹²²

The growing cultural power of the middle-class led to a strict distinction between public and the private sphere. However, nineteenth-century Gothic fiction demonstrated that home was no longer perceived as a sanctuary, but that its stability could be broken, and troubles could come from the inside. For these reasons, the Victorian Age saw a proliferation of haunted house narratives, marking a shift from the medieval revival of eighteenth-century Gothic. Haunted houses have thus become a conventional literary motif of Victorian Gothic fiction.¹²³

Section 1.1 concentrates on the hauntings of one specific room: the drawing-room. In Victorian houses, the drawing-room was a strongly gendered space connected to women, who were viewed as angels in the house. Women were relegated to the domestic sphere, and they were attributed the role of guardians of the household. The drawing-room was the stage for women to show their abilities as domestic "leaders" and, for this reason, it required a specific decorative style that should represent the family's fashionable tastes. It was the centre of social gatherings, the filter between the public face of the family, its private concerns, and the intrusion from the external world upon them. Even though the house was the main setting in Gothic narratives of the time, some stories in the corpus offer a revival of medieval buildings that are, however, adapted to the codes of domesticity and decorum typical of the Victorian

¹²²Trodd, *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel*, p. 1; see also Carolyn Lambert, *The Meanings of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction*, pp. 105-107.

¹²³See Walsh, *Domestic Murder in Nineteenth-Century England*, page numbers unavailable.

bourgeoisie, as discussed in Section 1.2. These medieval edifices become the theatre of family tragedies, at the hand of both human and supernatural agents, wrecking the families' equilibrium through murder, secrets, and sudden, inexplicable deaths. The protagonists are all middle-class members who find themselves face to face with betrayal by family or friends or must face the consequences of their family's past misdeeds, marking the life of every faultless descendant.

Section 1.3 deals with liminal spaces, namely corridors, doors, and windows, which carry a number of symbolic meanings: they offer a passage to escape from a coercive condition within the house or they may be open towards the outside, and thus symbolise an invitation to enter and discover the truth about dark events of the past.

Section 1.4 concerns two elements that were typical decorations of any Victorian drawing-room, namely mirrors and portraits, whose nature of items that give back images play key roles in revealing the truth about characters and their deaths or misdeeds in various stories in the corpus.

Section 1.5 investigates domestic violence and murder, committed by both female and male culprits. The Victorian concern with masculinity and male dominance over the family, especially women, on one side, and women's unwillingness to subdue to male power on the other, often led to clashes and violence that, in extreme cases, culminated with murder. The representation of female murderers in narratives was often softened to render these characters less shocking to Victorian readers, infused with ideals of feminine decorum, angelic innocence, and domesticity. Victorian middle-class men were, on the contrary, the heralds of the economic and scientific advancement, while being dominant in their domestic role as fathers and husbands. The social reforms improving the access of women to basic rights threatened the traditional role of men. The short stories in the corpus challenge both stereotypes by presenting homicidal or violent characters that are both female and male, further destabilising the ideal of home as sanctuary.

Section 1.6 offers a brief overview of the relationship between the words "ghost", "guest", which are etymologically cousins, and "host". In haunted houses, ghosts occupy spaces even though they are incorporeal entities. The buildings they inhabit in death are the same they used to inhabit in life, so they are still dwellers of their houses but do not legally possess them anymore, for obvious reasons, and new residents come

to share the same spaces. The analysis concentrates on the relationship between the ghosts and the living co-inhabiting the same space, attempting to explain who plays the role of guest and who is the host in the interactions between them.

1.1 Home Haunted Home: The Drawing-Room

Haunted buildings were typical settings of eighteenth-century Gothic novels, inspired by the medieval Gothic style of cathedrals and castles. The Middle Ages revival of the Romantic period spurred interest in mediaeval architecture, in particular in the Gothic style, so that castles, abbeys, monasteries and old ruins became centres of action in many Gothic works.¹²⁴ Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764),¹²⁵ considered to be the first Gothic novel, is set in a castle possibly inspired by Strawberry Hill House, the Gothic revival villa that Walpole had designed for himself in a Gothic-like style.¹²⁶ Another master of Romantic Gothic fiction was Ann Radcliffe, who also chose medieval buildings as settings for her novels: in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794),¹²⁷ Emily lives for a time in the Castle of Udolpho, a remote castle located on a towering hill in the Apennines. Abbeys and monasteries were often selected as plot settings, for instance by Radcliffe in *The Italian* (1797)¹²⁸ and Matthew G. Lewis in *The Monk* (1796).¹²⁹ Jane Austen's Gothic experiment,

¹²⁴Sylvia A. Grider, *Haunted Houses*, in *Haunting Experiences. Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore*, ed. Diane E. Goldstein, Sylvia Ann Grider and Jeannie Banks Thomas (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2007), pp. 145-146.

¹²⁵Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto. A Gothic Story*, ed. Nick Groom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014),

¹²⁶The medieval Gothic style originated in the twelfth century and was characterised by pointed arches, vaults, and windows, elaborate window tracery, pinnacles, spires, and high pillars. Gothic cathedrals were developed vertically to symbolise the elevation towards God. However, the style's name had originally a pejorative meaning: in fact, the term "gothic" was associated with the Germanic tribes that had invaded southern Europe putting an end to the Western Roman Empire and their "barbaric" habits.

¹²⁷Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, p. 3.

¹²⁸Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian; Or, the Confessional of the Black Penitents. A Romance*, ed. Frederick Garber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹²⁹Matthew G. Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. Howard Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Northanger Abbey (1817, posthumous),¹³⁰ sees the protagonist, Catherine, moving to the Tilneys's home, Northanger Abbey, and since she is an avid reader of Gothic stories, she expects the place to be dark and frightening. On the contrary, Northanger Abbey is quite a delightful house, but it has many rooms where, mysteriously, no one ever enters. Moreover, the pleasant aspect of the abbey does not prevent Catherine's gloomy thoughts, especially after learning of the empty rooms that once belonged to the lady of the house, who had died nine years before: she fancies that the woman might have been imprisoned or murdered there.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, many fictional works revolved around the domestic space. The characteristics of haunted houses were basically stereotypes from an architectural point of view, the archetype being an old-fashioned, dilapidated house with signs of neglect all over it, generally surrounded by likewise overlooked gardens where blooming life was but a distant memory. On the inside, the building was generally a maze of corridors and rooms wrapped in darkness. Noises, swift movements, and shadows completed the work of art. All contributed to create a melancholic and spooky atmosphere that immediately made both the protagonists and the readers anxious. In a discussion about nineteenth-century detective stories, the German philosopher, critic, and writer Walter Benjamin offered a picture of "interior design" that, in his words, calls out for murder:

The bourgeois interior of the 1860s to the 1890s, with its gigantic sideboards distended with carvings, the sunless corners where palms stand, the balcony embattled behind its balustrade, and the long corridors with their singing gas flames, fittingly houses only the corpse. "On this sofa the aunt cannot but be murdered." The soulless luxuriance of the furnishings becomes true comfort only in the presence of a dead body. Far more interesting than the Oriental landscapes in detective novels is that rank Orient inhabiting their interiors: the Persian carpet and the ottoman, the hanging lamp and the genuine Caucasian dagger. Behind the heavy, gathered Khilim tapestries the master of the house has orgies with his share certificates, feels himself the Eastern merchant, the indolent pasha in the caravanserai of otiose enchantment, until that dagger in its silver sling above the

¹³⁰Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Marilyn Butler (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

divan puts an end, one fine afternoon, to his siesta and himself. This character of the bourgeois apartment, tremulously awaiting the nameless murderer like a lascivious old lady her gallant, has been penetrated by a number of authors who, as writers of “detective stories” - and perhaps also because in their works part of the bourgeois pandemonium is exhibited - have been denied the reputation they deserve.¹³¹

Dickens’s ‘The Mortals in the House’, published in 1859 in *Household Words* as the opening of the *Haunted House Series*, offers a description of the country mansion that the protagonist, his sister and their friends are going to inhabit for three months, which is renowned for being haunted by the ghost of a murdered woman:

It was a solitary house, standing in a sadly neglected garden: a pretty even square of some two acres. It was a house of about the time of George the Second;¹³² as stiff, as cold, as formal, and in as bad taste, as could possibly be desired by the most loyal admirer of the whole quartet of Georges. It was uninhabited, but had, within a year or two, been cheaply repaired to render it habitable; I say cheaply, because the work had been done in a surface manner, and was already decaying as to the paint and plaster, though the colours were fresh. A lop-sided board drooped over the garden wall, announcing that it was “to let on very reasonable terms, well furnished.” It was much too closely and heavily shadowed by trees, and, in particular, there were six tall poplars before the front windows, which were excessively melancholy, and the site of which had been extremely ill chosen. It was easy to see that it was an avoided house — a house that was shunned by the village, to which my eye was guided by a church spire some half a mile off — a

¹³¹Walter Benjamin, *Manorially Furnished Ten-Room Apartment*, in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, translated from the German by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, with an introduction by S. Sontag (London, Verso: 1985, 1979), pp. 48-49. The text was first published in Berlin in 1928 with the title *Einbahnstraße*, translated into English as *One Way Street and Other Writings*. It is a collection of intellectual and literary writings by Benjamin, from reminiscences of childhood, through thoughts on language, philosophy, psychology, aesthetics, and politics, to literary criticism. This quotation belongs to the section *Hochherrschaftlich Möblierte Zehnzimmerwohnung*, translated as *Manorially Furnished Ten-Room Apartment* by Jephcott and Shorter.

¹³²George II of Hanover (1683-1760) became king in 1727, thus the house’s style is predominantly neoclassical.

house that nobody would take. And the natural inference was, that it had the reputation of being a haunted house.¹³³

A similar description occurs in ‘Sent to His Death!’ by Florence Marryat, where the country mansion called Poplar Farm is preceded by a long-neglected drive and is portrayed as gloomy by her own owner; the sun even disappears behind the autumn clouds and the trees show their naked branches, like skeletons in the darkening day. This was generally the canonical aspect of haunted houses in Gothic tales, an image that has come down to our days. However, there were others that seemed to have as their only inconvenient the fact of being isolated from inhabited centres. Such houses were not necessarily abandoned mansions, but they were sometimes sold or let for very cheap prices without apparent reason. In Florence Marryat’s ‘The Invisible Tenants of Rushmere’, the protagonist and narrator, Arthur, moves temporarily to an old country-house which is advertised as follows:

On the banks of the Wye, Monmouthshire. - To be Let, furnished, a commodious Family Mansion, surrounded with park-like grounds. Stabling and every convenience. Only two and a-half miles away from station, church, and post office. Excellent fishing to be procured in the neighbourhood. Rent nominal to a responsible tenant.¹³⁴

The house is clearly presented with alluring phrasing as a little oasis, and indeed it does not much contradict the expectations when the protagonist sees it for the first time. It is good-sized and furnished with adequate comforts, it is isolated but built on an elevation that offers a good view around. To discover why the price of the rental is so cheap, Arthur even looks around in search of cesspools that might have polluted the air in the house, for building defects or strains, but there is nothing wrong. All

¹³³Available at www.ereader.perlego.com in *The Complete Short Stories by Elizabeth Gaskell*, page number unavailable.

¹³⁴Florence Marryat, ‘The Invisible Tenants of Rushmere’, in *The Ghost of Charlotte Cray and Other Stories* (Liepzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1883), p. 34.

seems perfect, only his wife is distressed for fear that they could be attacked by robbers without a soul there to help them.

Charlotte Riddell was master in setting her stories in haunted houses, a trope that recurs in many of her narratives.¹³⁵ Riddell usually began her tales with the narrator buying a house that is inexplicably cheap and moves in without considering the warnings of the locals, who always know about some terrible event that had occurred in that same house or that it is haunted. As in Marryat's 'Rushmere', in Riddell's 'Old Mrs Jones' the events occur in an

Old-fashioned house – not a grand old-fashioned house altogether above their position, but a rambling, ramshackle building, with a wide staircase, and lots of cupboards, and plenty of rooms they could let off to great advantage, and large cellars, and a paved yard at the back, where were also stables, and coach-house, and lofts, and wash-house, and brew-house, and ever so many other odd little places, telling unconsciously of the time when people, and things, and ways were different from what they are now.¹³⁶

In the context of Victorian society, the house was considered the building block of civilization, and, as Wohl affirmed, family was the main «nursery of civic virtues or a refuge from the tensions of society.»¹³⁷ Family was the first and main “teacher” of moral, religious, ethical and social values. Wohl further stressed the concept by stating that family was not just a simple institution, but a creed to Victorians, and the strength of family values and structure within the English society helped distinguish the moral worth of England as a nation compared to other countries. Family represented social stability, in the words of Lord Shaftesbury:

There can be no security to society, no honour, no prosperity, no dignity at home, no nobleness of attitude towards foreign nations, unless the strength of the people rests upon

¹³⁵Charlotte Riddell, *Weird Stories*, ed. Emma Liggins (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2009), p. ii.

¹³⁶Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 130-131.

¹³⁷See Anthony Wohl, *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), page numbers unavailable.

the purity and firmness of the domestic system. Schools are but auxiliaries. At home the principles of subordination are first implanted and the man is trained to be a good citizen.¹³⁸

The metaphor of family and home as truly sacred spaces, protecting the members against the ferocity of the outer world, became especially prominent in relation to the British middle class, particularly affected by the Industrial Revolution and the growing consequences of capitalism, which created strong class divisions between the bourgeoisie and the working classes. In 1845, upon his return to Germany following a visit to Manchester, Friedrich Engels published an account on the conditions of the British middle class, *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England*,¹³⁹ and offered an insight into the differences between the upper and the lower middle class. He witnessed the tensions that emerged during the so called “Hungry Forties”, years of food distress caused by the potato blight in Northern Europe when, furthermore, the Corn Laws were still active.¹⁴⁰ Engels recorded differences in the quality of food provided to the upper middle classes, healthier than the scraps that served as nourishment for the poorest, or differences in the fine clothing of the bourgeoisie against the inadequate garments of the lower classes and the poor hygiene conditions these had to endure. Engels also noticed the attempts of the middle class to become more and more detached from the working classes. Scholars who study the formation of the British middle class often speak of “class consciousness”, a growing sense of

¹³⁸Anthony Wohl, «The Bitter Cry of Outcast London», *International Review of Social History* 13, no. 2 (1968), p. 217. The quotation is taken from G. Potter’s «The First Point of the New Chapter: Improved Dwellings for the People», *Contemporary Review*, n. XVIII, 1871, pp. 555-556.

¹³⁹It is translated in English as *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Engel’s work was considered a pioneering treatise of social and economic empirical research, as he took into consideration various aspects such as health conditions, salaries, mortality rates and more. The essay was recently published in translation in 2009 by the Oxford University Press.

¹⁴⁰The Corn Laws were promulgated in 1815 and abrogated in 1846. They established heavy trade restrictions on the import of food and corn. This move was meant to maintain the prices of local corn higher to favour British producers, but it had the effect of leading the poorest classes to starvation, as it was impossible to import enough foreign corn to supply the needs of the entire population when local resources were low.

identity of the bourgeoisie, separated from the workers, with a specific set of beliefs building class unity.¹⁴¹ This was reflected also in architecture, in that the privacy and intimacy of the family was not to be disturbed by the intrusion of the servants, excluded from the family core, so that separate passageways were built for them.¹⁴² Private rooms such as bedrooms and drawing-rooms became the centre of the family gatherings, whereas the workers were relegated to the working spaces such as the kitchen:

House and home overlapped physically, but evolved wholly separate meanings and mental topographies. Home was above stairs; kitchen and workrooms did not belong to home, and their functions, including the sounds and smells that went with production, were made invisible, not only through the removal of eating from the kitchen to separate dining rooms, but also by those increasingly rigid domestic routines which reduced contact between servants and family members to a kind of robotic encounter, in which the latter actually became wholly insensible to the presence of the former. Even prayers became strictly family moments.¹⁴³

The exclusion of servants from the family is testified to also in the *Haunted House* series mentioned above. In the first story by Dickens, ‘The Mortals in the House’, when the rumour that the mansion is haunted reaches the servants and they start to

¹⁴¹For more information on this theme, which is not to be further treated in this thesis, see for instance Asa Briggs, «Middle-Class Consciousness in English Politics, 1780-1846», *Past & Present*, no. 9 (April 1956), pp. 65-74.1956; R. S. Neale, «Class and Class-Consciousness in Early Nineteenth-Century England: Three Classes or Five?», *Victorian Studies* 12, no. 1 (September 1968), pp. 4-32; Alexander Tyrrell, «Class Consciousness in Early Victorian Britain: Samuel Smiles, Leeds Politics, and the Self-Help Creed», *Journal of British Studies* 9, no. 2 (May 1970), pp. 102-125; David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1991); John Seed, «Capital and Class Formation in Early Industrial England», *Social History* 18, no. 1 (January 1993), pp. 17-30; Wendy Bottero, «Class Identities and the Identity of Class», *Sociology* 38, no. 5 (2004), pp. 985-1003; Simon Gunn, «Class, identity and the urban: the middle class in England, c.1790-1950», in *Urban History* 31, no. 1 (2004), pp. 29-47.

¹⁴²Gillis, «Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life in Nineteenth-Century Britain», p. 222.

¹⁴³Gillis, «Ritualization of Middle-Class Family Life in Nineteenth-Century Britain», p. 222.

panic and see ghosts everywhere, the narrator and his sister decide to send them away because «they come here to be frightened and infect one another, and we know they are frightened and do infect one another.» So the siblings take the house wholly in their own hands and just invite some friends over, all attending upon themselves without «faithful obstructions.»¹⁴⁴

Home had a particular role in the writings of the early Victorian author Elizabeth Gaskell, whose life was struck by many family deaths; she experienced the loss of her mother as a baby, her brother who disappeared probably in India, her father who had always been rather absent in her life, and three of her children, including a stillborn daughter and a nine-months old baby. Moreover, as a little girl she was raised by her aunt, a loving woman who took good care of her but who lost her own daughter, Marianne, and the sadness that filled the house became part of young Gaskell's growing process. Being a Unitarian, she often felt excluded from social circles and never felt at ease when she had to move with her family to Manchester, since she preferred the rural countryside life of the south rather than the chaotic industrialized north. Gaskell's fictional homes present situations of instability and include «issues of class, gender, power, and the need for psychological security and stability, within the physical structure of a building.»¹⁴⁵ Gaskell's own house, on the outskirts of Manchester, was a huge villa that was not far from the hovels where the poor and the working classes lived, people who appeared to threaten the newly reached status of the bourgeoisie.

Furthermore, houses were built to keep the servants out of the family circles, with back doors, corridors, and rooms accessible from different passages, but in ways that also allowed to maintain control over the household and the butlers and maids' services.¹⁴⁶ Despite this, the nineteenth-century middle class expanded its demand for domestic workers both to meet its needs and to state its new standards and newly

¹⁴⁴Gaskell, *The Complete Short Stories*, page number unavailable.

¹⁴⁵Lambert, *The Meanings of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁶In *My Lady Ludlow* (1858), Gaskell described Hanbury Hall as structured to allow Lady Hanbury to monitor the servants and have them constantly within calling distance. Lambert, *The Meanings of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction*, p. 38. See Elizabeth Gaskell, *My Lady Ludlow and Other Stories*, ed. Edgar Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

acquired social status. Women were employed for the house-works and for nursing children: they were estimated to be around 1.2 million in England and Wales by 1871, classified as “maids-of-all-works”.¹⁴⁷ Servants were expected to be socially invisible, yet they played a crucial role in making the family they worked for appear at their best: they kept the house clean, of course, but also mediated the social encounters that took place within the house by serving both their employers and their guests, for instance by welcoming them upon their arrival. Servants were involved in the codes of etiquette, and, for this reason, they occupied an ambivalent position within the household: they had to be invisible, yet they were indispensable.¹⁴⁸ Family time around the hearth was experienced by Victorians as unique, contrary to the profane world outside domestic walls. Privacy was more highly regarded than the public sphere. The idea was that family would remain intact regardless of any storm that might hit the external space.¹⁴⁹ This resulted in a ritualization of time within the household, where specific moments were particularly valued.

The profusion of rooms and commodities filling the haunted house in Riddell’s ‘Old Mrs Jones’ suggests the wealth of the family who once inhabited the building, noble or far richer than Mr. and Mrs. Tippens, a middle-class couple with aspirations above their possibilities. In ‘A Strange Christmas Game’,¹⁵⁰ Martingdale Estate is a haunted house inherited by the protagonists, brother and sister Lester, marked by neglect and abandonment. In ‘The Open Door’, there is a description of the inside of the house: a «dead silence» reigns in it, it is dark for the blinds are pulled down, the trees outside shadow the windows and little light can penetrate, adding to the sense of suffocation the building provokes.¹⁵¹ On the other hand, the lack of people inside the house or

¹⁴⁷Lambert, *The Meanings of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell’s Fiction*, p. 139. See also Pamela Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1975).

¹⁴⁸Judith Flanders, *The Victorian House: Domestic Life from Childbirth to Deathbed* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 278; Lambert, *The Meanings of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell’s Fiction*, p. 140

¹⁴⁹On the idealization of family see also Shelley Richardson, ed., *The Family and Mid-Victorian Idealism*, in *Family Experiments: Middle-class, professional families in Australia and New Zealand c. 1880-1920* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016), pp. 39-66.

¹⁵⁰Charlotte Riddell, ‘A Strange Christmas Game’, in *Chill Tidings. Dark Tales of the Christmas Season*, ed. Tanya Kirk (London: The British Library, 2020), pp. 9-24.

¹⁵¹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 41.

around it creates a sense of eeriness and is disturbing. According to Wilson, there is a fear-generating contrast between what is supposed to be in the house and is not, its inhabitants, and what is in the house, real or imagined, but is not supposed to be there.¹⁵²

However, Riddell proved that things are not so different in urban landscapes. The protagonist of 'The House in Vauxhall Walk', Graham, is in great economic distress and his prospect is to become a beggar when one night, roaming the streets of London, he encounters an old friend, William, who is about to leave his city apartment to move elsewhere. William invites Graham to stay in the emptied house: there are just some pieces of furniture left, but there is fire in the grate. Here one might read the idealized image of home as the gathering of family before the hearth: Graham is alone, but he has found a place where to rest, be warm and fed even in an empty house thanks to the kindness of a friend, although he knows that this is but a temporary solution. Even if the place is almost bare, the interior decorations and the precious materials, such as oak and mahogany, show the wealth of the family who had built it.¹⁵³ The windows have no curtains, but in his renewed spirit Graham fancies children playing hide and seek behind imaginary curtains that could shelter adults too, either parents playing with the little ones or lovers using them as a retreat for their intimate moments, evoking the innocence of childhood and the passion of love, the joy of games and laughter in a house that had never really witnessed such happiness.¹⁵⁴

The relevant role of the drawing-room as a domestic space in the Victorian Age is evidenced by a long series of manuals of good conduct and analogous articles on magazines published at the time. In his 1865 *The Gentleman's House*, architect Robert Kerr provided a fully detailed description of how a gentleman's house should be designed, including its drawing-room.¹⁵⁵ Kerr argued that the drawing-room must be

¹⁵²Elizabeth Wilson, «Haunted Houses», *AA Files*, no. 67 (2013), p. 114.

¹⁵³Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 101; also *The Open Door*, p. 42.

¹⁵⁴Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 102.

¹⁵⁵The number of manuals of good conduct that were published during the Victorian Age makes a long list, some examples being Henry G. Clark's *The English Maiden, Her Moral and Domestic Duties* (1842); Mrs Sarah Stickney Ellis's popular series *Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1839), *Daughters of England: Their Society, Character, and Responsibilities* (1842), *Wives of*

easily accessed from the entrance door and it should be possibly placed on the ground floor; if necessary, a second drawing-room could be contemplated, and he discussed a series of interconnections between this specific room and others, such as the library, the music hall, the dining room or even the boudoir.¹⁵⁶ The drawing-room was clearly the centre around which the main house activities revolved, it was the core of social gatherings, and thus a perfect window for showcasing the taste and wealth of the household also in terms of furniture and decorations. Furthermore, it also represented the intimate space where the family women could display their ability in creating a proper domestic environment. Logan compared the drawing-room, which she referred to as the parlour, to Shakespeare's Globe, meaning that it is a little world of its own, crucial to the shaping of the family experience as «the particular visual, spatial, and sensory embodiments of human culture at a particular historical moment.»¹⁵⁷ As the rising world of marketing and, consequently, advertising grew, debates on the proper aesthetic of the Victorian house spread. As for decorations, Lambert reported the list of the primary objects one could find in a Victorian drawing-room from *Cassell's Household Guide*:¹⁵⁸ «a plethora of articles on leather work, diaphanie (the art of

England: Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations (1843), and *Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibilities* (1844); and the anonymous *The Lady's Own Book: An Intellectual, Moral, and Physical Monitor* (1859). There were also manuals on how to prove suitable for marriage, like the anonymous *Hints on Husband Catching, or A Manual for Marriageable Misses* (1846). Alongside these books, manuals concerning the keeping of the house began to appear around 1850, for instance Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management* (serialized from 1859 to 1860 and fully published in 1861), which sold 125.000 copies in eight years. Other examples are James Walsh's *Manual of Domestic Economy* (1856) and the renowned *Cassell's Household Guide: Being a Complete Encyclopaedia of Domestic and Social Economy, and forming a Guide to Every Department of Practical Life* (1869-1871).

¹⁵⁶Robert Kerr, *The Gentleman's House: Or, How to Plan English Residences, from the Parsonage to the Palace; with Tables of Accommodation and Cost, and a Series of Selected Plans* (London: Murray, 1865), pp. 113-115.

¹⁵⁷Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlor. A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 1.

¹⁵⁸The guide was published in 1869 with the title of *Cassell's Household Guide: A Complete Encyclopedia of Domestic And Social Economy and Forming a Guide to Every Department of Practical Life* (London: Cassell, Petter and Galpin).

imitating stained glass), imitating marble busts and statuettes in wax, paper flower-making, feather screens and clay modelling.»¹⁵⁹ The December 1879 issue of *The Art Amateur* deals with drawing-room decorations and furniture, explaining which trends were in fashion at the time, from Venetian mirrors to Persian rugs, china of various types, pianos, and

Brocades both of oriental Chinese, Japanese, and Indian manufacture; people less wealthy invest in pretty woollen materials, with curious patterns and subdued colors; or in cretonne or whole-colored curtains of cotton material, arranged with a contrasting border; but the things to be avoided in the way of curtains are the stereotyped plain or striped reps and damasks, with ubiquitous border to match.¹⁶⁰

In Broughton's Gothic tale 'The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth', which is written in letter form, Mrs. De Wynt writes to her correspondent and friend, Mrs. Montresor, that she has found a house in London that is ironically presented as the perfect compromise between «what was suited to the means of a duke, and what was suited to the needs of a chimney-sweep»,¹⁶¹ thus a place whose price is suited to a middle-class family. In this house, there are

Two drawing-rooms as pretty as ever woman crammed with people she did not care two straws about; white curtains with rose-coloured ones underneath, festooned in the sweetest way; marvellously, immorally becoming my dear, as I ascertained entirely for your benefit, in the mirrors, of which there are about a dozen and a half; Persian mats, easy chairs, and lounges suited to every possible physical conformation [...] Ormolu garden gates, handless cups, naked boys and décolleté shepherdesses; not to speak of a family of china pugs, with blue ribbons round their necks, which ought to themselves to have added fifty pounds a year to the rent. Nice little house crammed with all possible sorts of objects, like a museum.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹Lambert, *The Meanings of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction*, p. 93.

¹⁶⁰«Drawing-Room Fashions», *The Art Amateur* 2, no. 1 (December 1879), p. 18. Another article about the drawing-room's furniture appeared in the April 1889 issue of *The Decorator and Furnisher*, p. 18.

¹⁶¹Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 2.

¹⁶²Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 3.

This description by Broughton reflects the proper decorative motifs for a Victorian middle-class drawing-room. In another issue of *The Art Amateur*, the author wrote that the drawing-room is where “we” live, talk and play, it is essentially the ladies’ room and thus it must be decorated in a cheerful, delicate and pleasant manner, without stiffness or formality.¹⁶³ Birds, flowers, also in the Japanese style, are perfect to convey the liveliness one breathes during social meetings in the drawing-room. Colour choice had to follow the principle of complementarity, according to which the best colour combinations were black and white, violet and yellow, blue and red, white and violet, yellow and blue, and green and purple, but also, for instance, gold with dark red or lilac, pink with black or white.¹⁶⁴

The drawing-room became the symbol of the family’s public respectability, while being the family’s *locus amoenus* within the private sphere, keeping the two well separate. Drawing-rooms were also a typically feminine space, decorated by women, very often with items made by women themselves; they were the reception rooms where the ladies of the house played their role of hosts and where their abilities as wives, mothers, householders, and social characters were scrutinised. Middle class women spent most of their time in the drawing-room, alone or in company, as this was the space appointed to them and dedicated to a multitude of activities, from social gatherings to letter writing, from simple resting or reading or sewing to discussing with servants the activities to be carried out. In her autobiographical notes, Oliphant wrote about some social meetings she used to have with her husband:

What I liked best in the way of society was when we went out occasionally quite late in the evening, Frank and I, after he had left off work in his studio, and went to the house of another painter [...] Alexander Johnstone’s house was the one to which we went most. I joined the wife in her little drawing-room, while he went up-stairs to the studio. (They all had the drawing-room proper of the house, the first-floor room, for their studios). We

¹⁶³«Drawing-Room Color and Decoration», *The Art Amateur* 5, no. 2 (July 1881), p. 37.

¹⁶⁴Logan, *The Victorian Parlor*, p. 46.

women talked below of our subjects, as young wives and mothers do – with a little needlework and a little gossip. The men above smoked and talked their subjects.¹⁶⁵

Women were conceptualised as angels within the house, a poetic metaphor behind a harsher truth, that is to say that they had no other role in society but the one that they occupied behind their houses's threshold; they were supposed to concentrate all their activity on the management of the house without actually taking part in the required operations, for instance, cleaning and cooking, so as to remain distinct from the servants. Kaston Tange argued that a woman's authority within her own house was undisputed, but whenever other women entered her own space as guests the lady was automatically judged, and her authority as angel was to be confirmed by members of the community who did not belong to the family's nucleus.¹⁶⁶ According to Kaston Tange

The use of the drawing-room to preserve the association of femininity with 'decorum' highlights the paradoxical elements of a space that is at once one of privilege, circumscription, and substantial influence. That is, although women withdrew to the sanctuary that protected them from male indelicacies, this withdrawing simultaneously enabled women to police the habits of tobacco and alcohol, since etiquette maintained that gentlemen should not linger too long in the dining room before rejoining the ladies in the drawing room for tea.¹⁶⁷

The drawing-room was indeed a space where women could retreat from 'masculine' entertainments like drinking alcohol, playing cards, or smoking, avoided by women according to standards of delicacy and decorum. It thus represented the sole space within the house where women enforced domestic rules and could "dominate" men. Drawing-rooms were also generally located far or on different floors from more manly

¹⁶⁵Elizabeth Jay, *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant. The Complete Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 43-44.

¹⁶⁶Andrea Kaston Tange, *Architectural Identities. Domesticity, Literature and the Victorian Middle Classes* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 65-66.

¹⁶⁷Kaston Tange, *Architectural Identities*, p. 67.

areas such as the studio or the billiard room, sometimes even far from the library. The drawing-room is defined by Kerr as the «*Lady's Withdrawing-Room*, otherwise the *Parlour*, or perfected *Chamber* of Medieval plan.»¹⁶⁸ The room must be characterised by cheerfulness, elegance and lightness in terms of furniture. Furthermore, Kerr stressed the importance of open air and sunshine for the well-being of the ladies, thus the drawing-room should communicate with the garden.¹⁶⁹ In Braddon's 'A Very Narrow Escape', the drawing-room, or sitting-room as it is called here, is: «at the back of the offices [...] the prettiest room in the house, opening into a small garden, at the end of which there was a narrow creek – an inlet from the river that flowed through Norbury.»¹⁷⁰

The perfect middle-class lady never subverts conventions and never gives way to her “masculine” side, thus conforming to the angel in the house role. Women's power within Victorian society was strictly related to the domestic space: ladies were the keepers of the house, and their duty was to establish the schedule of housekeeping activities while managing the servants and regulating their conduct. The drawing-room was the spiritual centre of the house where women governed their domain over the house workers. This was the sole position of leadership women could hold, and even within domestic boundaries they were powerful until they moved to manly spaces, where husbands or fathers had control. Middle-class women's movements within Victorian society were rather ghost-like, the frontier of their personality remained the drawing-room, so it is not surprising that many ghost stories of the time staged events taking place, or somehow linked, to this specific room and the objects that belonged to it.

¹⁶⁸Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, p. 107.

¹⁶⁹Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, p. 107. Kerr was very specific here: «The point generally preferred is as nearly as possible South-East, taking the sun from early morning till about two hours after noon, and having it directly in front not later than 9 or 10 am. This gives to the apartment all the advantage of being rendered cheerful and pleasant by the morning sun in good time before occupation for the day, and also the equal benefits of shade towards the hottest part of the afternoon and relief from the level rays of the evening.»

¹⁷⁰Mary Elizabeth Braddon, 'A Very Narrow Escape', in *Great Waters and Other Tales* (Liepzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1877), p. 298.

«Oh! my lost life – for one day, for one hour of it again!»¹⁷¹ hears Riddell's Graham Coulton in his dream while sleeping in 'The House in Vauxhall Walk'. After an altercation with his father, Admiral Coulton, Graham leaves his house and finds himself wandering the streets of London in a dreadful weather until he runs into the open door of a house, a miraculous fortune on such a bad night. This open door means more than a simple invitation to enter, but Graham is still unaware of this. Graham's friend, William, the owner of the house, is moving to another house because his wife and children felt «desolate» at night,¹⁷² but he does not explain the reason. William invites his fellow in and lights a fire for him in a room that is more of a «spacious apartment occupying the full width of the house on the first floor.»¹⁷³ From the interior design of the room, one can already guess this used to be the drawing-room, which had been devised to be bright thanks to its four windows that are now shuttered close; under every window there are low seats «suggestive of pleasant days gone by; when, well-curtained and well-cushioned, they formed snug retreats for the children, and sometimes for adults also.»¹⁷⁴ The only pieces of furniture left in the room are a settee beside the hearth and a large mirror on the opposite wall, with a black marble table underneath it. The emptiness of the room allows Graham to enjoy its beauty, with ornamented ceilings, panelled walls and the fireplace lined with tiles. The whole space suggests that the family who had it built was wealthy and fashionable. However, the emptiness and the darkness that now reign over the room stand in stark contrast with the cheerfulness Graham imagines once pervaded it. He will soon discover that happiness never inhabited this house, and that a tragic event occurred that is yet to be solved. During the night, Graham dreams of a woman sitting beside the fire, picking and dropping coins as she desperately cries for her lost life. William will tell him that what he saw was the ghost of the lady of the house, Miss Tynan, quite old, rich and a

¹⁷¹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 105. See also See Melissa Edmunson, *Women's Ghost Literature in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Edmunson defined this narrative as a Christmas tale and compared Riddell's ghost to Dickens's Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol* (1843), arguing that Miss Tynan is beyond redemption, unlike Scrooge, because she is entrapped in her desperation and bound to material life, p. 105.

¹⁷²Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 104.

¹⁷³Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 101.

¹⁷⁴Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 102.

terrible scrooge, murdered by someone who probably sought for financial help and was denied it.

So far, the key elements here are the windows and the entrance door. When Graham passes by the house, the door is standing open as if inviting him to enter: this escamotage devised by Riddell sets the story in motion, as Graham stops and accepts William's offer to rest in the house that he is leaving. Graham is not interested in knowing why his friend is moving elsewhere, he does not ask questions about his wife and children not being comfortable, he follows William in the room on the first floor without hesitation. William momentarily resumes his role of host in the old house to provide for the man in need: he lights a fire, prepares a makeshift bed, and brings food for Graham, who plays the role of guest. There is no light but that provided by the lit fire, as the windows are closed. There are four windows that are always kept shut, so that light is never allowed to pass: Graham imagines a past of light with the windows open, suggesting a tension towards the external world and the will to let the light of life flow in and out of the room, while seeing them shut represents the will of keeping the outside world away. The closed windows stand for the incapability or unwillingness to reveal the truth, which is left engulfed by the shadows of an appalling domestic secret. The only light comes in from the open entrance door, which in this perspective appears as a beacon of hope to finally solve the mystery.

Graham sees Miss Tynan in his dreams several times, appearing as «filthy of person, repulsive to look at, hard of heart as she was.¹⁷⁵ She does not linger only in the drawing-room, but Graham has different visions in which she is seen ascending a staircase with difficulty due to her age, or entering a bedchamber as unclean as the woman herself:

The poorest labourer's wife would have gathered more comforts around her than that room contained. A four-poster bedstead without hangings of any kind – a blind drawn up awry – an old carpet covered with dust, and dirt on the floor – a rickety washstand with all the paint worn off it – an ancient mahogany dressing-table, and a cracked glass spotted

¹⁷⁵Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p.107.

all over – were all the objects he could at first discern, looking at the room through that dim light which oftentimes obtains [sic] in dreams.¹⁷⁶

The image Graham evokes is of the utmost negligence and disinterest towards the domestic space: home and family had no meaning for Miss Tynan. In one of his dreams, Graham sees a man who kneels before the lady and begs for her assistance. He cannot discern everything that passes between the two figures, but he recalls the man speaking in the name of former days, of a mother and the time they were united as brother and sister by family ties. Gold had the best over love, as the woman repudiated her dear ones when the malady of gold took over her mind and blinded her; consequently, she never attempted to create a family of her own. Graham specifies that his sister meets the man almost on the threshold, a sign that she is motivated to keep others out of her house as well as out of her heart. As she refuses to be the angel of the house and acts as if possessed by a devil, the demon of avarice, her own brother «changed to an angel, which folded its wings over its face, and the man, with bowed head, slowly left the room.»¹⁷⁷ William will explain to Graham that the woman in question was the landlord's sister, and that she had been stabbed in the heart because of the money that she was supposed to have: neither the murderer nor the money were ever found, but the fact that she had been stabbed in the heart is meaningful, why should her heart beat when it was so cold and loveless?

Graham has visions of other poor people emerging from the deepest shadows and huddling around her, women, children, poor souls crying for the misery they died in, and that Miss Tynan could have relieved had she granted them the assistance that they required. The old hag, as Graham calls her repeatedly, never performed her duties as lady of the house as envisioned by Victorians, subverting their social codes, and turning into the 'demon' of the house, rather than the angel. It is easy to imagine the windows being shut even in past times, as the woman was too stingy to open her door to the world to avoid threats to her belongings. The beautiful drawing-room was for herself alone, the fire in the hearth burnt for her alone; the role of angel in the house

¹⁷⁶Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp.107-108.

¹⁷⁷Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p.107.

is momentarily taken on by William, who allows Graham in and shares his former domestic space with him, partially recreating the ideal familiar nucleus so dear to middle-class families.¹⁷⁸

Miss Tynan's avarice prevented her from hiring servants as well, that is why the house is so filthy and neglected in Graham's dreams. This fact leads to two considerations. The first one concerns the spaces in the house: the ghost is seen walking up the stairs, a liminal area of the house used to separate spaces both physically and hierarchically, as servants were not supposed to use the same passages as their employers to avoid the family's "contamination" by the working class. Given the total absence, at least presumed, of maids and butlers when Miss Tynan lived, the woman did not risk meeting the house workers and mingle with them, so that the necessary distinction that the bourgeoisie made between its members and the lower classes collapses. Having no servants means no need to keep spaces separate. At the same time, the lack of people to be ordered around deprived Miss Tynan of the only power Victorian women had as leaders of the house. She was a completely powerless woman in this perspective despite her economic strength.

The second consideration concerns an object in the room, a mirror.¹⁷⁹ A first clue of the importance of this item is given by the gleams of reflected light Graham notices when he dreams of the ghost for the first time, and even though he is far from it, he can see everything in the glass.¹⁸⁰ The mirror is another expedient that Riddell used to lead the protagonist, and the reader, to the truth. After having learnt from William the story of the murdered woman, Graham decides to start searching the house to see if he can find the gold that Miss Tynan had left behind, since, for all that is known, it was never stolen from the building. On the same night, the woman appears on the doorway of the drawing-room, and Coulton witnesses something uncanny: from the mirror glides a second female figure that scares Miss Tynan's spirit away with piercing

¹⁷⁸It is true that William helps Graham by offering him to stay in the house, but he never asks him to join him and his family in his new house, where Graham could be comfortable, thus conveying an idea of partial generosity.

¹⁷⁹Mirrors will be discussed in Section 1.4, a.

¹⁸⁰Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p.105.

shrieks.¹⁸¹ Again, the following night Graham perceives the ghost moving to and fro between the hearth and the mirror, until one night he is involved in a scuffle with the murderer of Miss Tynan and his accessory, who had returned in search of the treasure, and the moment he is wounded with a knife, a crash echoes in the house. The young man remains unconscious for hours, but when he wakes up, he finds the house filled with policemen and curious intruders, while two men are being accompanied to the police station. The source of the smashing sound is identified by an astonished Mr. Tynan, and the reason why the ghost was so protective of the room and its mirror becomes clear:

When he unlocked the door, what a sight met his eyes! The mirror had fallen – it was lying all over the floor shivered into a thousand pieces; the console table had been borne down by its weight, and the marble slab was shattered as well. But this was not what chained his attention. Hundreds, thousands of gold pieces were scattered about, and an aperture behind the glass contained boxes filled with securities amid deeds amid bonds, the possession of which had cost his sister her life.¹⁸²

The broken glass could symbolise the final atonement for the ghost, with the gold retrieved by the brother whom she had mistreated in life, in the name of a rediscovered familiar bond that goes beyond the boundaries of the living world, and which goes side by side with Graham's reconciliation with his father. Vauxhall Walk's drawing-room mirrors the incapability of Miss Tynan to take on the female role Victorian society had established for women, and its overall neglect is a direct reflection of the corruption of the woman's soul, consumed by avarice.

In another story, Braddon's 'The Winning Sequence', the spectre used to be a woman whose attitude towards money and society was the opposite to Miss Tynan's. The story begins *in medias res*, is told in the present tense, in a cinematic style that makes the readers plunge into the events and feel as if they were witnessing them. The setting is an

¹⁸¹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p.112.

¹⁸²Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 114-115.

Old-fashioned house in the Royal Village, that old-world Richmond to which Kings and Queens and Dukes and Duchesses, wits and politicians, and lovely loose-lived ladies, used to come a century and a half ago, and where Royalty still inhabits, and loyal joy-bells often ring loud.¹⁸³

The narrator apparently gets his hands on by stating that the house has been inhabited by the noblest people, while highlighting the fact that many loose-lived women passed by as well, living their dissolute lives within the house's walls. The reputation of the building is not entirely free from scandals then. The ghost appears in the first lines of the story and is presented through sounds: when night is about to shift to dawn, a very light footfall can be heard, and breaths that come from «the far distance of an unknown grave.»¹⁸⁴ The lady of the house opens her chamber door to investigate the source of the sounds, and notices a pair of velvet embroidered, high-heeled shoes before the door of the room opposite hers, as if the ghost had taken off its shoes to make the least possible noise. A figure descends the staircase, dressed in a silk gown of Indian pattern, suggesting that the ghost was wealthy when alive. The woman sees or believes she sees the figure, as the narrator instils some doubts in the reader about the existence of this entity. She follows the vision downstairs and into the drawing-room, whose door opens noiselessly, where the woman sees, or thinks she sees, the she-ghost lighting a candle.

Then the shadow-woman sets down the tall silver candlestick on a phantasmal card-table, and the house-mistress sees that other woman, who has been dead a century and a half, kneel on the carpeted floor, which is scattered with cards thick as fallen leaves in November woods – kings and queens and aces, cards that turn the fortune of a game; she gathers them up in heaps, and kneeling by the table, in the dim candlelight, she sorts pack after pack with infinite pains, assures herself, with earnest eyes and puckered brow, of numbers and of suits, each pack complete, and with nothing to spare, and then after this patient labour, which lasts a long time, she lays one small pack of cards on the table, and

¹⁸³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 281.

¹⁸⁴Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 281.

flings all the rest upon the ground again – flings them pell-mell about the floor and under the card-table. The little pack of selected cards she thrusts into the bosom of her red and yellow bed-gown; and then she blows out the candle and creeps out of the room and across the hall upstairs again [...] Slowly and softly she steps with pale naked foot from stair to stair, and at the top of the staircase melts in and is absorbed into the growing dawn, and lo, when the living woman looks at the ground by the door of the empty bedchamber, the velvet shoes are gone.¹⁸⁵

This thorough and beautiful description of paranormal activity shows the type of social gatherings the now dead lady of the house used to host. The Kings and Queens mentioned at the beginning are none other than the figures that overthrow fortunes in card games, and the fact that the ghost re-enacts scenes of card games means that she had an addiction to them. The woman was called Sybilla, after the Greek mythological figure of the sybils, virgins inspired by a god endowed with prophetic virtues and able to make predictions and provide responses, but in an obscure or ambivalent form. She was married to a younger man who loved her, Colonel Challoner, but who realised his wife had a passion verging to vice, which has caused her many debts that she could not repay without winning at cards.¹⁸⁶ Her winning sequences generally took place in the drawing-room, in her favourite spot made up of a table decorated with brocade, curtains and a circular mirror surmounted by a brazen eagle. The candles on the sides of the mirror were never lighted, possibly to prevent bystanders from detecting her tricks. The woman is so fascinating that she enchants her guests with her manners, but the Queen of Hearts has the Queen of Cards fooled: during one of the games, one of the opponents realises Sybilla has been cheating by flinging some cards on the floor, and more cards not accounted for are found as various guests start searching the floor for evidence of the misdeed. The culprit's husband, dishonoured, reacts by demanding a duel with his wife's last victim, a contest that will cost him his life.

Sybilla falls into the utmost desperation knowing the Colonel risks his life because of her and hopes once more to mould his will and gain him back. However, on the day she decides to reach him, she accidentally sees her figure in a looking glass. On the

¹⁸⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 282-283.

¹⁸⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 283.

one hand, the mirror in the drawing-room used to be kept unlit: Sybilla feared that someone might notice her tricks by looking at it with the lights on, but the impossibility to see her reflection meant that nobody could learn about her crime, and consequently, her reputation remained crystal clear in the eyes of society. On the other hand, Sybilla's reflection in her bedroom's glass must necessarily be visible, as she had to perform her beauty routines. The woman alone could see her own face in the mirror knowing the truth she hid. The revelation of her wrongdoing makes Sybilla's mask of respectability drop, and she eventually can see herself for what she truly is, her conscience stained with fraud and the impending death of her beloved husband. In her reflection, Sybilla sees the witch of the fairytales after her enchantment has failed: a «haggard countenance, plastered with white lead and ceruse, with drawn features and purple lips, a face to work Circean spells.»¹⁸⁷

Because of the abhorrent image reflected, Sybilla decides not to meet her husband, as «to see her as she looked this morning in the searching eastern light would be enough to break love's spell at its strongest.»¹⁸⁸ Sybilla subverts the Victorian canon of the angel of the hearth by adopting the more manly habit of gaming, without renouncing her feminine charms. In fact, Colonel Challoner falls victim to Sybilla's sensuality, as she provokes him with her eroticism to the point of obfuscating his mind as if casting a spell on him:

Perfumes that hung about her lace and frippery, the ivory whiteness of her arm, the tapering hand, the music of her *sotto voce* speech, these were the ingredients that she brewed for him nightly. He was not master of his wits, he was not master of himself, when she hung over him, when her hair touched his brow and her breath fluttered on his cheek; and he scarcely knew what he dealt or to whom he dealt, scarcely knew whether he was winning or losing, had but one desire, one impulse, and that was to draw the lovely head down to his breast and lose himself in the witchcraft of her kisses.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 290.

¹⁸⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, *ivi*.

¹⁸⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 288.

Sybilla is unable to protect herself and her family from the dangers of the outside world and lets its corruption flow within her walls, but she is also a victim of herself and her own vainglory.

There is another short story in the corpus that deals with death as a consequence of a card game gone wrong, Riddell's 'A Strange Christmas Game', but this time it is two men fighting over a win. Brother and sister Lester inherit from a distant relative whom they did not know a neglected family mansion called Martingdale, which is known to be haunted. The caretakers report the following sounds are usually heard, «such stamping, and swearing, and knocking about on furniture; and then tramp, tramp, up the great staircase; and along the corridor and so into the red bedroom.»¹⁹⁰ The ghosts in this house march from one room to the other and a paranormal entity is also said to have been seen several times in the park. The siblings pooh-pooh - to use Riddell's expression - the existence of the supernatural and spend Christmas time alone in the house, without servants, as they had all abandoned the ship for fear of the ghosts. On Christmas night, Clare Lester summons her brother to the parlour, where two spirits are sitting at a table, after having properly set the fireplace ablaze and lit the candles: they are playing cards. The young people can only see the face of one of the ghosts, a handsome man of twenty-five or so who has clearly «lived hard and wickedly» in their opinion, and who is their ancestor, Jeremy Lester. They cannot see the other's face, but they think that he must have been an older man. Suddenly, the unknown phantasm announces that he has won the game and is promptly accused of cheating by the opponent. Here the tramp, tramp up and down the stairs begins, as the spirits re-enact the events of that fatal night. On that day, Jeremy had gone to the red bedroom to retrieve a couple of rapiers for a trial by duel. Then, the two men had moved outside in the park for the combat; Jeremy had turned his back on the adversary and started pacing away from him. Naively, or believing the code of honour would have been respected, the advancing man had not realised the other's intentions: before it was time to turn, Jeremy found himself with a rapier through his breast.

This short narrative by Riddell sees two men occupying the drawing-room for their 'indecorous' entertainment, possibly because the story is set in the eighteenth century

¹⁹⁰Riddell, 'A Strange Christmas Game', p. 14.

and, therefore, prior to the conceptualisation of the house as the ideal safe space, with women relegated to the drawing-room to perform their duties as hostesses; furthermore, a simpler explanation might be that the distant relative from whom the siblings inherit the house had no other family than them, much less a wife, so he lacked a female figure by his side who could contain his dissolute behaviours.

1.2 Medieval Revival

1.2.1 Deconsecrated Buildings

In Braddon's 'His Secret', the Trevannions own an estate built around an Abbey in Boscobel, in a quiet town between Devon and Cornwall, immersed in beautiful nature. The Abbey is «full of beauty and interest from an archaeological point of view»¹⁹¹ as it is rich in relics and memories of old monastic days, to which the Trevannions added the purchases made over the years during their travels to Italy, from china to cabinet pictures, their corridors adorned with window-seats whence one could admire the peaceful nature around Boscobel. The Abbey is no longer a consecrated edifice, but it has acquired a different kind of 'sacredness' connected with the concept of family attributed to it by its actual owner, Isabel:

She had seen so little of this world, outside Boscobel Abbey, that she might be forgiven if she fancied the old house just the one most interesting thing in the universe. Her father had been born in it, her mother had lived and died in it, and she had loved them both so well, that the mere sense of its association with them made the grey old mansion sacred.¹⁹²

Isabel marries Captain Geoffrey Wyatt, and starts with him a happy marriage, marred only by the Captain's costly hobby of horse-racing. This lasts until the arrival at Boscobel of Geoffrey's friend Jasper, who had fought with him in India, to whom the couple offers a place at the vicarage and the task of managing their financial

¹⁹¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 67.

¹⁹²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 68.

expenses. Life is monotonous but happier thanks to Jasper, who has put the household in order and brought peace to their domestic life by forbidding Geoffrey's trips, as «nothing had been too insignificant for his stewardship. Rectitude and plain-dealing were shown in every detail of his management.»¹⁹³ Jasper is moderate in his management of the family's possessions, while Wyatt used to squander his wife's money that is now donated to charities, used to finance a hospital, schools, and the church. Jasper Dane's companionship slowly becomes a natural element of the family, the three sit together in the drawing-room or by the terrace, hardly ever separate, and the woman finds in him a companion with whom to share her passion for French and Italian literature, music and art, subjects that are uninteresting to Geoffrey. Jasper is appreciated because he is perceived as unobtrusive while, at the same time, he "does the dirty work" as the household's administrator, so that everything is in order and domestic peace reigns. Apparently, Jasper lacks any maliciousness, yet Isabel becomes aware of his feelings for her and tries to put a distance between her and Dane by accompanying her husband on his excursions in nature, favouring a more out-of-door life than usual. Consequently, Jasper becomes more solitary, he is often seen in his room writing incessantly nobody knows what. Jasper understands that he has no more reasons to stay in Boscobel, so he decides to leave and join the army in America, despite his friends' protests.

The second chapter of the tale begins with the phrase «there was horror in Boscobel»,¹⁹⁴ as on one November morning, Geoffrey is found stabbed through the heart in his house, all evidence suggesting a robbery gone wrong, despite the security apparatus of the house:

The Abbey, guarded as few houses are guarded, by barred shutters and massive bolts, had been broken into by thieves; a pane of glass had been smashed in a narrow window in the hall, a piece cut out of the heavy shutter inside, and the bar removed. It was so narrow a window that the person entering by it must have been of slim figure [...] skilful enough to unlock the great barn door without alarming the household and to admit his confederates [...] The glass cupboard in the hall had been emptied of its racing cups and

¹⁹³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 81.

¹⁹⁴Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 83.

jewelled-hilted swords. It was with one of these court rapiers that Geoffrey Trevannion had been stabbed to death.¹⁹⁵

Clearly, the pieces of the puzzle do not perfectly fit in the reconstruction of the events, but there is a corpse to take care of. Geoffrey's motionless body is carried to a bedchamber called King Solomon's room, because of the fresco looking down from the ceiling depicting the Queen of Sheba upon meeting King Solomon. The fresco inspired by the Bible passage was probably part of the monastic heritage left from the old days, a piece that evoked the religious solemnity that the Abbey used to have when it was a consecrated building. In fact, this room was once used as the couple's bedchamber, as if their union was in a way sanctified before the altar of God. Now, once again before the Lord, Geoffrey's body is laid to rest where his soul can be freed and welcomed by Him.

Isabel is inconsolable and refuses to move from her house because, from the Abbey's drawing-room window, she can see the churchyard where her husband rests, and feel as if they were still together in life. Eventually, Jasper lures Isabel into marrying him. She does not love him, but she is «grateful for his devotion. She liked him because he had liked her husband»;¹⁹⁶ a son will be their offspring. Years pass by and Jasper becomes ill, holding faintly upon life. One day, the boy finds an old trunk while looking for some toys, and when he forces it open, he finds clothes covering old cups and tankards, jewelled swords and a broken silver hilt splashed with blood: the objects that had disappeared the night Geoffrey died. When Isabel sees them, she immediately puts the pieces together: Jasper is the murderer. He had framed some phantom thief to escape justice but, mainly, to avoid Isabel's hatred. The Abbey's familiar sacredness has been violated by family itself, a fact that makes the sin worse. Jasper's jealousy has completely blinded him and turned him into a criminal who murdered cold-bloodedly his own dearest friend. Before Isabel, who has become her ex-husband's avenging angel, he confesses his sin by saying that the devil had taken possession of him. From a place of monastic beatitude, the Abbey has become the theatre of murder, secrets, and scheming; it was stained by the devil's corruption, at

¹⁹⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 83-84.

¹⁹⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 93.

the hands of an impostor who claims to have been acting in the name of love. Jasper's soul plunged in the depths of hell the night of Geoffrey's murder; his only thoughts were how could he profit from his crime instead of making amends. Isabel has him moved to the King Solomon's room, which had remained closed ever since that dreadful night. While Geoffrey's soul had passed on peacefully in God's embrace, below the biblical image, Jasper must face Divine judgement instead, and Isabel's last words for him recite «hope for God's mercy if you can.»¹⁹⁷

Braddon sets another of her narratives in a deconsecrated monastery, but while Boscobel's Abbey retains in part its sacred nature thanks to Isabel's nurturing of her family, the Orange Grove in 'Herself', also known as 'Venetian Glass', is a demonic entity that drives its inhabitants to a slow death. The narrator tells the story of her dearest friend Violetta Hammond, who inherits from her grandfather a villa in the Italian town of Taggia, in the region of Liguria. Violetta, called Lota by Helen, the narrator, believes this house to be a gift of Providence, since she suffers from a «weak chest»¹⁹⁸ according to her doctors, presumably some kind of lung illness or respiratory issue. Violetta thinks that she has finally found the solution to her health problems, since this southern villa is surrounded by beautiful landscapes characterised by blooming flowers, gardens and orange groves, palms, olive trees, cypresses, and by mountains on one side and the sea on the other; moreover, the southern climate is ideal for health recovery. Lota's enthusiasm, however, is immediately cut short by her lawyer, Mr. Dean, who announces that the house is "unlucky": her grandfather had bought the house to spend a single winter in it and nothing more, since he died in a few months' time unexpectedly and with no apparent cause, being a perfectly healthy and stout man. Miss Hammond attributes the old man's passing to his too active habits, which made him grow older quicker than usual, so she does not waver and decides to leave for Italy as soon as possible, to spend the upcoming winter in Liguria despite her lawyer's warnings:

It was not merely that he was aged – he was mentally changed – nervous, restless, to all appearance unhappy [...] My position hardly warranted my questioning Mr. Hammond

¹⁹⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 101.

¹⁹⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 306.

on a matter so purely personal. I saw the change, and regretted it. Six weeks later he was gone.¹⁹⁹

Lota and Helen stipulate that the latter should join her friend in Taggia in January. When Helen arrives, she immediately notices the beauty of the surroundings:

There was a landau with a pair of fine strong horses waiting to carry us up to the villa. The road wound gently upward, past orange and lemon groves, and silvery streamlets, and hanging woods, where velvet dark cypresses rose tower-like amidst the silvery-gray of the olives, and so to about midway between the valley, where Taggia's antique palaces and church towers gleamed pale in the dusk, and the crest of the hill along which straggled the white houses of a village. The after-glow was rosy in the sky when a turn of the road brought our faces towards the summer-like sea, and in that lovely light every line in Lota's face was but distinctly too visible.²⁰⁰

Miss Hammond appears emaciated, haggard, anxious-looking, paler; she looks nervous, on the verge of depression. From what Helen can see, Mr. Dean was right in saying that the unlucky house drains its inhabitants of their lives. Lota seems to be going down the same deathly path as her grandfather. The house is enormous, it has almost thirty rooms and is, therefore, demanding in terms of care; the back rooms are damp and gloomy because the hill side comes too near the windows, but there are no molesting neighbours, nothing that could justify such a decline in Violetta's aspect and health. The back rooms, however, have a disquieting story as they were once the infirmary of a Benedictine monastery. Lota sarcastically jests about the origins of her newly acquired house, dismissing Mr. Dean's unease by saying that the monks who were so inconsiderate to die in her house centuries before should no longer be so inconsiderate as to haunt her villa as ghosts, and in any case, if there were ghosts at all, the servants would have seen them, being «champion ghost-seers.»²⁰¹ The sensation of discomfort assails Helen as well, who starts believing Mr. Dean's words, «I would take care that she never returned to the place that was killing her»,²⁰² and,

¹⁹⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 307.

²⁰⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 313.

²⁰¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 310.

²⁰²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 314.

even more so, when also Violetta's lover, Captain Holbrook, confesses that he wants her removed from that «depressing hole.»²⁰³ There is something «horrible, uncanny, mysterious»²⁰⁴ in the house that is looming over Violetta as it had loomed over her grandfather:

The change is too palpable. I see it every morning, see her looking a little worse, a little worse everyday, as if some dreadful disease were eating away her life. And yet our good English doctor from San Remo says there is nothing the matter except a slight lung trouble, and that the air is the very finest, the position of this house is faultless, for such a case as hers.²⁰⁵

Helen and the Captain join forces to find an answer to Lota's deterioration, scrutinising every possible aspect of the villa, even looking for supernatural factors, but nothing emerges from the investigation until Helen manages to talk to a physician from Taggia. This Italian doctor confesses that there is something mysterious in the place that affects the life of those who reside in it, making them slowly fade and die. He had witnessed some appalling cases of fast decay. Helen pushes the question forward by asking the physician about the monkish rooms at the back of the house, which are not damp as the lawyer believed, but certainly cold. Nobody is known to ever enter those rooms though, as the door at the end of the corridor that leads to them is locked and the key is kept by a governess. The only person who is known to have had access to the back of the villa is Lota's grandfather, who had installed his library in the old monkish refectory. One day, to Helen's surprise

There was an awning in front of the door, and the hall was wrapt in shadow, the corridor beyond darker still, and at the end of the corridor I saw a flitting figure in pale grey – the pale Indian cashmere of Lota's neat morning frock. I heard a key turn, then the creaking of a heavy door, and the darkness had swallowed that pale figure.²⁰⁶

²⁰³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 315.

²⁰⁴Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 316.

²⁰⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 318.

²⁰⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 322.

Helen steals along the passage after a few minutes and follows Miss Hammond into the library: Violetta eventually confesses to her friend that the queer old rooms of the ex-monastery are the only ones that interest her in the house. In the library, where some evil power seems to lure Lota, there is a Venetian mirror that makes people see themselves reflected but in a state of decay and decomposition, until the image of the Reaper itself appears, marking their death. Even though there are no ghosts haunting the building, there is some mysterious force lurking in it, a residual of the sickness and anguish that had inhabited the backrooms years before, still lingering in the air, affecting the walls of the house, a malevolent presence that draws its helpless victims to it and drains them of their life, day after day. The same destiny befalls Violetta, killed by a past that cannot rest or be forgotten, in the house that she had believed to be the providential site of her deliverance from painful physical weakness, but turned her, instead, into the ghost of 'Herself' until Death took her by the hand.

In this short story, the past, represented by the old monastery's rooms, lingers over the present and influences its course, namely Violetta Hammond's life and, literally, survival. The woman seems to be 'persecuted' by death: she is ill, she has some unspecified kind of health condition that debilitates her, but it is known it affects her lungs; the Italian villa seems to Lota the perfect solution to restore her well-being, but even though she cheers at the thought of moving to such a wonderful place, she is conscious that her grandfather had died there. Nonetheless, Lota dismisses all references to the house's bad luck, she convinces herself that the old man had died because of his unhealthy habits. Violetta is attracted by the darkest rooms of the place, by the ex-hospital where many souls have passed, and the more she spends her time in the library, precisely where her grandfather had died, the more her body deteriorates. Violetta tries to cure her illness through medical care and hopes the salubrious environment around the villa will do the rest; her transfer to Italy appears as an attempt to stop the inexorable advance of death, which she must fear without ever letting it transpire. Her arrival at the villa worsens her conditions to the point that any healing process becomes impossible, help from her friends probably comes too late as nobody really insists on taking her back to England, so Violetta dies. The metaphor of the Venetian mirror giving back images of bodily decay is possibly a representation of the woman's final realisation of her condition, of her acceptance of

what she must face. The medieval hospital setting, the infirmary where many monks had surely perished, reinforces the hopelessness about Violetta's possibilities of recovery, and sounds like a death sentence.

1.2.2 The Ancient Castle's Secret

As observed by Mighall while discussing haunted legacies,

A cursed family inherits an unwelcome legacy. History moves on, progress is made, enlightenment replaces barbarism and superstition, but still the curse – initiated by sacrilege, usurpation, or some unspecified dark deed – inexorably visits its punishment on successive generations. Curse narratives show how crimes belonging to the ancestral past can blight both the present and the future.²⁰⁷

The past sometimes becomes impossible to overcome. As Violetta miserably dies in her beautiful Ligurian villa, surrounded by her loved ones who have no power against such a long-existing evil, so young Lindores finds himself involved in a dark family secret that his forefathers had kept hidden for centuries in Oliphant's 'The Secret Chamber'. Oliphant set this narrative in an ancient Scottish castle, Castle Gowrie, which dates back to Celtic times and is characterised by towers, wide walls and turrets, labyrinths, hidden stairs, long and mysterious, that seem to lead nowhere. She was inspired by Glamis Castle in Angus, Scotland. It was the residence of the Lyon family since the fourteenth century; it is one of the most ancient and best-preserved castles in the country and, according to several legends, haunted. One of these legends in particular concerns the so-called Monster of Glamis,²⁰⁸ a deformed boy who appears to have been locked until his death in an area of the castle, whose rooms were subsequently bricked up. Another figure linked to the castle is that of the wicked "Earl Beardie" (possibly Alexander Lyon, Lord Glamis, who died in 1486), a mythical character with various legends connected to him, all versions involving cards

²⁰⁷Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, p. 80.

²⁰⁸In his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1830), Sir Walter Scott recalled a visit to Castle Glamis, during which he was told of a secret chamber whose location was known only to the earl, his heir, and the factor.

games that led the Earl to face the Devil himself, who eventually took his soul while the whole room disappeared into the castle's walls.

An object plays a particular role in the story, anticipating the identity of the antagonist: a portrait of the so-called wicked Earl, an ancestor of the Lindores's family possibly inspired by the legend of "Earl Beardie". It is a portrait of Earl Robert, an amateur's copy that has been removed from the castle's walls, but which young Lindores somehow remembers.²⁰⁹ Young Lindores is drawn to the portrayed image of his forefather, about whom he knows little apart from the tales of his cruelty, a foreshadowing of the events to come. In the castle there is a legendary chamber that is connected to a secret that the family hides even from its own members and has triggered speculation as to its location and function.

A secret chamber was nothing wonderful in so old a house. No doubt they exist in many such old houses, and are always curious and interesting – strange relics, more moving than any history, of the time when a man was not safe in his own house, and when it might be necessary to secure a refuge beyond the reach of spies or traitors at a moment's notice. Such a refuge was a necessity of life to a great medieval noble. The peculiarity about this secret chamber, however, was, that some secret connected with the very existence of the family was always understood to be involved in it. It was not only the secret hiding-place for an emergency [...] but there was something hidden in it of which assuredly the race could not be proud.²¹⁰

Some believe that the room was the theatre of a massacre and that the skeletons of the victims block the door, others conjecture that Earl Robert, also known as the Prince of Darkness, was locked in that room to suffer eternally as a payback for his gory doings, «playing cards with the devil for his soul»,²¹¹ as in the Scottish legend. This presentation of the room suggests that danger does not come from the outside, but from the inside. The Lindores are hiding a secret so terrible that they are thought to be ashamed of it, a mystery that endangers the family members themselves.

²⁰⁹Margaret Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories of the Seen and the Unseen*, ed. Mike Ashley (London: The British Library, 2021), p. 8.

²¹⁰Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, pp. 3-4.

²¹¹Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, p. 5.

In fact, one day Lord Gowrie leads his son to a room at the end of the corridor where the main bedroom is: it is a small, dusty, dirty chamber of no use, where, however, the protagonist used to spend his childhood happily and where he had first seen the picture of Earl Robert before it was removed.²¹² The young man is brought there to be tested and to be permanently consecrated as a member of the Lindores family. He can see the terror in his father's face, which grows pale and moist when an inner door within the chamber opens, and Lindores must enter a second room, an antiquated one with hanging tapestries, with faded colours. There is a panel of carved wood that, like the tapestries, is rude in design, a table covered in scientific tools, embroideries of faded velvet, a huge Venetian mirror, and an old Persian carpet. There is also a laboratory that suggests that alchemic experiments are secretly conducted there for unknown purposes. It all seems a blend of different styles crammed in the same room, as if to mimic the "grandeur" of the family member to whom the room belongs. However, the room is also dusty and faded, as if the owner did not deserve recognition. Lindores will soon discover he that has to survive a night in the company of the undead Wicked Earl, whose cursed soul has been granted the infernal power to linger in the castle to subjugate the members of his family. It is he who decides upon their actions, as Lord Gowrie explains, to perpetrate his vicious schemes:

He makes everything so clear; he makes wrong seem right. If I have done unjust things in my day [...] I have: there were these Highland people I turned out. I did not mean to do it, Lindores; but he showed me that it would be better for the family. And my poor sister that married Tweedside and was wretched all her life. It was his doing, that marriage; he said she would be rich, and so she was, poor thing, poor thing! And died of it [...] When there is any business it makes my heart sick. I know he will come, and advise wrong, and tell me – something I will repent after.²¹³

The Wicked Earl marked the past of his family with the stains of bloodshed, treachery, and cruelty, but the strength of his evil power has overcome death itself to prevent his descendants from progressing into a civilised lifestyle.

²¹²Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, p. 12.

²¹³Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, pp. 29-30.

Oliphant played on the power of the gaze and on the contrasting image of eyes watching others and eyes watching into oneself. Young Lindores had felt the portrait's eyes moving when he first saw the picture, and in the chamber, from which he manages to escape, he must make inhuman efforts to divert his eyes from the Earl's gaze that keeps him enchanted. His father confesses that Earl Robert watches them, eyes spying upon them. He is always present, unseen but seeing and luring them into his cobweb of malignancy when they grow of age. Lord Gowrie repents for the injustices he has committed in the Earl's stead for the sake of his pure malicious delight; nonetheless, Gowrie's fear is too overwhelming for him to look in his own heart and resist the will of his ancestor. He acknowledges the mistakes made in the name of his family, but he is too terrified to oppose Robert's orders. Instead, Lindores decides to step up for the name of his family, stained by blood and suffering, and while he looks away from the Earl he also looks inside himself, realising that he does not want to comply with this anymore. When Lord Gowrie states that if once resisted, the Earl's power is broken, Lindores needs no more to convince himself that the past can be laid to rest and from its ashes the family can rise redeemed. There is a moral in this, that from past mistakes we can learn to change for the better, and not err again: the Latin motto *errare humanum est et perseverare autem diabolicum* perfectly fits this short narrative's message. However, the tale remains suspended, the author does not tell whether Lindores's endeavours were successful, but the effort has been made, a step towards a brighter future has been taken and it might teach others to fight for what is right.

Haunted castles in Gothic fiction suggest an uneasiness with the past, as Oliphant's tale proves. In eighteenth-century Gothic fiction, medieval, ruined castles were stereotypically characterised by maze-like corridors, secret chambers, mysterious passageways, aspects that Oliphant retained in her personal Gothic castle-tale. In the nineteenth century, however, this type of Gothic setting is replaced by the domestic environment of houses, which sometimes retain the same labyrinthine and dark interiors.²¹⁴ The eighteenth-century Gothic presented castles that were regularly

²¹⁴Roland discussed this theme in relation to Dickens's *Bleak House*, where she claimed that Dickens made London his own Gothic ruin of "new generation"; see Ann Roland, «Dickens' Gloomiest Gothic Castle», *Dickens Studies Newsletter* 6, no. 3 (September 1975), pp. 71-75.

haunted and, in a way, anticipated Victorians in staging threats, either human or otherworldly,²¹⁵ that came from within the walls of an edifice supposed to be a safe space. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* had been a precursor of this theme, with Hamlet's father murdered by his own brother and usurped from his position as both king and husband. Oliphant also maintained the trope of the noble, aristocratic ghost recalling, for instance, Walpole's Alfonso in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) or Reeve's Lord Lovel in *The Old English Baron* (1777).²¹⁶ A further aspect that Oliphant introduced in her tale concerns heritage, but in a twisted way. As Belsey noticed:

Any number of Gothic hauntings had the effect of uncovering the legitimate owner of the property. Here is the climactic disclosure in *The Castle of Otranto*, when Alfonso comes from his tomb in the church of St Nicholas. Hereditary titles – entitlements to land – meant wealth and power [...] In many Gothic romances [...] the apparition ultimately brings about the reinstatement of the rightful owner.²¹⁷

In 'The Secret Chamber', Castle Gowrie's legitimate successor is not in question, but when Lindores comes of age he must face a trial that every generation in his family has faced to become 'worthy' of the title. As in *Otranto*, revelation comes by supernatural means. Oliphant's tale is constructed like a psychological thriller, the reader's attention can never relax because of the continuous feeling of being observed that the characters perceive throughout the story's development. The supernatural nature of the evil is certified in the end, but the apparently moving portrait, the secret of the chamber, the bloodstained history of the family, the room finally found and its alchemic laboratory, all wrapped in a medieval-like atmosphere, plunge the reader into a disquieting sensation. In the first preface to *Otranto*, Walpole wrote that «terror, the author's principal engine, prevents the story from ever languishing»,²¹⁸ but the

²¹⁵While Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* is undoubtedly haunted by a ghost, Radcliffe, for instance, played with the human versus supernatural thread until the end, when reason eventually prevails, and concrete explanations are offered to the reader.

²¹⁶Clara Reeve, *The Old English Baron*, ed. James Watt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²¹⁷Catherine Belsey, *Tales of the Troubled Dead. Ghost Stories in Cultural History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), p. 129.

²¹⁸Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, p. 6.

story is said to be set between 1095 and 1243, the dates of the first and last crusade, so remote in time that the reader can hardly believe this fancy from those «dark ages»²¹⁹ to be true facts.

Miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams, and other preternatural events are exploded now even from romances. That was not the case when our author wrote; much less when the story itself is supposed to have happened. Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark ages, that an author would not be faithful to the manners of the times, who should omit all mention of them. He is not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them.²²⁰

However, Oliphant set her story in her own time and narrates it in the present tense, to convey the idea that evil lurks with no time boundaries, that the past is not necessarily darker than the present, and that the consequences of wrongdoings and secrets sooner or later exact their payment. Walpole's novel ends with the restoration of good and legitimacy reigns over usurpation and violence, whereas 'The Secret Chamber' ends with words of intention, with the inconclusive search for the hidden chamber while a growling laugh echoes in Lindores's ears, heard by him alone. Nobody knows if the young man can defeat his enemy, as the author affirms, but the laughter of the ancestor-enemy of Castle Gowrie sounds as a victory and lingers as an omen of the incapability of unravelling the secret. On the outside, the family maintains its aura of respectability despite its history, while it is consumed from the inside. Oliphant exploited some of the conventions of eighteenth-century Gothic fiction to devise a nineteenth-century Gothic tale where a family keeps its secrets hidden from the public sphere, a shameful past that still haunts the house's walls forbidding the family from being redeemed, while suggesting the need to look introspectively into oneself to find the right path towards life's progress.

²¹⁹Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, p. 6.

²²⁰Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, p. 6.

1.3 Gateways to Other Lives: Windows, Doors and Corridors

In her essay about Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-1853), Williams discussed the importance of architectural spaces in the novel, attributing particular importance to windows:²²¹

Like architecture as a whole, the window spawns metaphors and facilitates stagecraft. Its structural uses (ventilation and illumination) give rise to a variety of metaphoric possibilities. It provides access to the outside (the inter-section of human space and nature); it is variously the eye (and thus, the 'I') and the lens; it is a frame for what is inside and what is outside (evoking comparison with pictorial art); it is a point of exit or entrance at its most fragile and furtive (indeed, locked-door mysteries often find their solution through some quixotic penetration of a window). It is a device that lets characters or the narrator or even the reader carry out various activities, often invisibly, either as observer or voyeur: focusing, interpreting, defining, analyzing, excluding, including, imagining, and connecting. And, of course, the window is useful in a narrative. The window allows characters to see in and out; it reveals and conceals; it may even seem to have a "viewpoint" and, as a consequence, display attitude or emotion.²²²

Thus, windows carry several metaphorical meanings that can be found also in the short stories within the corpus here analysed. Riddell's 'The House in Vauxhall Walk' has shown how windows, and doors as well, are spaces with symbolic meanings that become crucial to the unravelling of the mystery of the old house. Metaphorically speaking, windows and doors have a double meaning in that they represent a means of escape and safety from an oppressing environment and openness and impulse towards the external world; at the same time, they represent breaches in the walls of

²²¹In 1697, king William III levied the so called "Window Tax" for military purposes, an absurd tax that befell all householders possessing a house with windows and that lasted until the mid-nineteenth century. The tax obviously prevented people from opening more than a few windows in the house walls, causing evident hygienic and health problems due to the lack of ventilation and natural light. Charles Dickens heavily criticised this tax in an article that appeared in February 1851 in *Household Words*, where he stated that such a tax was the death of reform impulses for the improvement of life conditions.

²²²Katherine Williams, «Glass Windows: The View from "Bleak House"», *Dickens Studies Annual* 33 (2003), p. 59.

a house that are supposed to give a building its solidity and structure.²²³ Doors and windows are liminal spaces that stand between what is private and intimate and what is public domain, “other”. They are both a threat, in that they are passages that facilitate the invasion of the familiar “sanctuary” while also allowing people to interact with the outer world and be part of active life and society.

Oliphant’s ‘The Library Window’ is the story of the discovery of a family secret that starts in an old-fashioned drawing-room and, as the title suggests, revolves around a window. The protagonist is a young woman who visits her aunt, Mary, and stays at her city house during the summer: she spends most of her time reading in the recess of the drawing-room’s window, where she loves to get lost in her daydreaming hidden by the curtain that falls over it, careless of her aunt’s guests who believe her to be «fanciful and dreamy.»²²⁴

The window that the girl reads by is across the street from the city library where another window is located. Aunt Mary’s guests often debate about the ‘nature’ of the library window, for it is not clear whether it is real or fake. Some believe that it is just a regular window, whereas others think «it is a very dead thing without any reflection in it»,²²⁵ others are certain that «it cannot be a window to see through [...] not a window to give light»,²²⁶ another guest provides a scientific explanation suggesting that it is an optical illusion caused by the liver not being in perfect balance with the body’s demands.²²⁷ Aunt Mary herself suggests that there might be something more than one can imagine behind that window, thus fuelling the mystery. One evening, when the day is turning into night, the protagonist is sitting before the window and suddenly notices a «feint greyness of visible space within – a room behind»²²⁸ the library window, though it is not possible to see what is actually in the room. The aunt’s

²²³Lambert, *The Meaning of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell’s Fiction*, p. 11.

²²⁴Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 195.

²²⁵Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 196.

²²⁶Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 197.

²²⁷Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 198. Victorians were particularly interested in pseudoscientific phenomena that were, however, approached in scientific terms, as was the case of phrenology, mesmerism and clairvoyance theories further discussed in Chapter 3.1.

²²⁸Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 201.

drawing-room window becomes the lens or spectacles through which the young lady can see a world beyond magnifying in front of her. Night after night, more details of the room become visible: lights change within, pieces of furniture become more definite, an escritoire whose characteristics can be clearly distinguished appears, papers and piles of books, a picture,²²⁹ until, one day, the girl perceives a movement. There is someone in the room, whom she discovers to be a man sitting at his writing-desk, scribbling incessantly. Oliphant gave a magical aura to this tale: the protagonist observes that the library window becomes more clearly visible on Midsummer's Day, which is the fairy time, and the reference to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* comes naturally;²³⁰ again, she also speaks of her «enchanted hour» at the window.²³¹ Moreover, the girl recollects that:

Sometimes [...] he would turn round in his chair and turn his face towards it, and sit there for a long time musing when the light had begun to fail, and the world was full of the strange day which was night, that light without colour, in which everything was so clearly visible, and there were no shadows. "It was between the night and day, when the fairy folk have power."²³² This was the after-light of the wonderful long, long summer evening, the light without shadows. It had a spell in it, and sometimes it made me afraid: and all manner of strange thoughts seemed to come in, and I always felt that if only we had a little more vision in our eyes we might see beautiful folk walking about in it, who were not of our world.²³³

The girl becomes increasingly obsessed with the room and the figure within it, she has no idea of the man's identity, and the mystery triggers her fixation. She stares at the writer in awe, noticing every slight movement of his body, agonizing over his face,

²²⁹Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, pp. 203-204; 208-209.

²³⁰Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, p. 208.

²³¹Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, p. 223.

²³²Oliphant partially quotes from Sir Walter Scott's poem *The Lady of the Lake, Canto IV* (1810), where the poet recites: «It was between the night and day, / When the Fairy King has power, / That I sank down in a sinful fray, / And, 'twixt life and death, was snatch'd away / To the joyless Elfin bower.» Sir Walter Scott, *The Lady of the Lake. A Poem* (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne, 1816).

²³³Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, p. 220.

as he will not show it. The bond that the girl feels with the man she is so obsessed with is rendered graphically through the pronoun *He* written with a capital letter.

The mystery man will reveal his face eventually and glance at the girl across the windows, which will drive the protagonist almost crazy with longing.²³⁴ The aunt is obliged to tell her niece the truth about their family: the man in the window was a scholar who cared for nothing but his work, this is why he keeps writing without interruption. A woman of their family had noticed him and fallen in love with him, but he would not reciprocate her feelings, so her brothers, to avenge the affront, murdered him. The female members of the family are ever since condemned to see the scholar from across the windows and long desperately for a ghost. The library window hides the secret of a family that is ashamed of the crime committed in the name of honour, and wants this secret to remain concealed. The window opens only before the young woman in the story, who slowly starts a process that will lead her to understand the nature of her family. The girl will soon know that the story of her family carries a stain that cannot be left in the past, as she must face the consequences of actions that she is not responsible for.

At the same time, the window in the drawing-room represents an impulse towards life on the part of the young lady, as she feels restrained in the world that she is supposed to live in, and wonders with her mind and her imagination, seeking an escape from the rigidity of her social surroundings. In response, she is considered mad, an “Alice in Wonderland”²³⁵ who is unable to adjust to society. As the library window represents a barrier between the family’s history and its past fault, and between the family and society, the drawing-room window may represent the mind of the girl who feels the need to be free from the social role that she must take on. She is ready to embrace the uncomfortable experience that her family has put her through as she sees in the ghost of the scholar a novelty and a possible path to a new experience of life, even though she will be disappointed.

Doors might also symbolise the will to hide ugly truths. In Charlotte Riddell’s ‘The Open Door’, there is a door in a house that never closes. Mr. Carrison, a tea-dealer,

²³⁴The psychological aspect of the tale will be discussed in Chapter 3.2.2.

²³⁵Lewis Carroll’s book was published in 1865, almost twenty years before Oliphant’s short story.

hires a young penniless man with an unrewarding career, Phil, to solve the mystery of the door that will not close in his country house, Ladlow Hall. When Phil arrives at the house and sees the open door, he immediately enters the room behind to examine it. It is a well-furnished apartment even though it is not close to the core of the house, provided with a bedstead too; it is so dark that it could be the perfect theatre for any crime. In this room there is another door that is locked, the only one in the house. Also, the door that remains open has been secured with bolts that, however, are useless. As in 'The House in Vauxhall Walk', Riddell employs the open door as an expedient for the truth to be unveiled. It is as if her ghosts, whether directly as in 'The Open Door' or not, wanted the mystery of their death solved. In this story, Riddell repeats the scheme employed in 'Vauxhall Walk', which pivots on money and murder to obtain wealth: the former landlord had married a woman much younger than him and had initially planned his will so that all of his belongings should pass on to the woman upon his death. Later, the man changed his will in favour of his nephew: the will disappeared, and the man was found dead. Phil will find out that the widow kept coming and going from the house searching for the modified will and a letter that her husband had hidden, and she was the only one who could open the locked door within the gloomy room. Phil realises that she is the murderer of her husband, another woman subverting the role of angel in the house for avarice and the sake of money. The widow even escapes abroad with her maid: she has not obtained the inheritance, but has managed to preserve her freedom, avoiding the consequences of the crime that she had perpetrated.

Doors are ways to exit and enter physical spaces, to leave and return to familiar places one wants either to abandon or to find again. Passing through a door may signify that a change is occurring within one's body and mind, in search for something new. A door may open in front of us and indicate a path to change our life, as is the case of Graham in Riddell's 'Vauxhall Walk', whose experience in the haunted house teaches him the value of family and allows him to overcome the conflict with his father. Doors are thresholds that represent our renewal by coming or going, or the acquisition of a deeper conscience of where we are and what is our place in the world, in our family or social context. But ghost stories tell us that, sometimes, spirits too need to acquire a more mature awareness of their status in between life and death.

Ghosts, just like the living, must learn to let go when nothing remains to be done. In the corpus of short stories analysed for this study, doors recur sometimes to symbolise the incapability of certain souls to move on. In this perspective, the most emblematic example is Florence Marryat's 'Sent to his death!', where the protagonist and narrator, Dolly, decides to visit her friend Bessie, who has just had a baby, at her mansion called Poplar Farm, a «gloomy ramshackle old place»²³⁶ that is perfect as a haunted house. Bessie has hired a nurse that is described by Dolly as:

So colourless that it looked like the finest white wax, and her skin was of the texture of satin. Her large, clear, grey eyes [...] like agates with water running over them, had a startled look [...] and her delicately cut mouth drooped in the most pathetic manner. To add to the mournfulness of her appearance, her hair was almost completely hidden beneath her cap, and her dress was the deepest widows mourning.²³⁷

Mrs Graham is presented as a vampire-like creature who seems to be nursing the baby while sucking the life out of him,²³⁸ as Dolly notices a clear decrease in the child's weight. Moreover, Bessie believes the house to be haunted, as she has seen a figure walking in one of the house's corridors while weeping. The "spirit" even looks Bessie in the eyes. Dolly laughs at her friend's worry, but when one night she awakes only to hear the same wailing sounds and gets up to see a «white, tall shadow on the doorway of the spare room»,²³⁹ she starts to believe. The cries of the baby from his room make the situation even more disquieting, as suspicion falls over Mrs Graham's way of taking care of the new-born. If Bessie is an unsentimental mother and does not worry about her son's furious weeping, Dolly takes on the motherly role and rushes to the nursery. What she sees shocks her, but not as the reader had expected: in fact, Mrs Graham is sitting on her bed in a state of trance shouting disconnected sentences like «go away! And don't come back again. You let the water in each time you open

²³⁶Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 250.

²³⁷Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 252.

²³⁸A similar character is presented in Florence Marryat's most renowned tale, *The Blood of the Vampire*.

²³⁹Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 258.

the door.»²⁴⁰ Mrs Graham suddenly clasps her hands before her eyes and screams the name of a man, Edward, whom she believes to have sent to his death. On the following day, Dolly talks to the girl, who confesses that she has lost her husband at sea during a storm; the last time she saw him he was opening the door of the cabin to check on his wife and the other women and children, and she shouted the same words that she had spoken in her nightmare. Subsequently, she lost their baby too. Mrs Graham feels like a murderer, and her mood prevents her from taking good care of the baby. She is no vampire, no ghost, just a mourning woman who does not seem to be able to overcome her grief. The nurse keeps reliving in her dreams the events that destroyed her happiness, the cabin's door representing the end of her life as a fulfilled mother and wife, whereas the corridors she roams in the house while sleepwalking represent the labyrinths of her disoriented mind. She feels completely lost, believing that tending to the baby was the only solution to alleviate her pain.

The term “corridor” derives from the Latin *currere*,²⁴¹ whose root implies the concept of passage or path undertaken, as in *curriculum*. In architecture, corridors have the function of connecting different areas of the same building; in past times, they were also built as secret passages to hide people, or to deliver information, or to enter or exit a building unnoticed. For this reason, eighteenth-century Gothic writers began to exploit corridors as crucial spaces for their plots' development, attributing psychological interpretations to the corridor as a space. In *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole presents a structure governed by dreamlike logic, filled with portraits and secret passageways and tunnels, but he always avoids the term “corridor” to preserve the mock tale of the rediscovered manuscript.²⁴²

²⁴⁰Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 259.

²⁴¹Roger Luckhurst, *Corridors: Passages of Modernity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019), page numbers not available. The term “corridor” started to be used in architecture at the beginning of the eighteenth-century, namely in Colen Campbell's survey of grand buildings *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1715). The noun was rarely used as a technical term, but it was used in literature, for instance by Lord Byron in his 1814 poem *The Corsair*: «He pass'd the portal, cross'd the corridore / And reach'd the chamber.» Lord Byron, *The Corsair. A Tale* (London: Murray, 1814).

²⁴²Luckhurst, *Corridors*, page numbers not available.

Ann Radcliffe's abbeys are full of passages and labyrinths, as in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791),²⁴³ where the passages reproduce the paths in the forest in a maze-like confusion of corridors. The abbey's undergrounds are characterised by a series of tunnels and dungeons that threaten the protagonist's safety. Corridors built as these are opposed to all that is orderly and precise, thus representing the confusion and disorder that could reign in a person's mind. As Luckhurst explained, the protagonist of *The Romance of the Forest*, Adeline, escapes from the medieval abbey and arrives at the chateau de La Luc, a more modern space characterised by order and simplicity, providing relief from the «labyrinthine and confounding passages to the logical proportions and distributions of the modern domestic corridor.»²⁴⁴ The same happens in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, where Montoni's castle is a convoluted maze of galleries, staircases and passages, opposed to the more symmetric spaces in the chateau La Vallée.

The few haunted corridors in the corpus' short stories are not described as labyrinthine spaces but reflect modern canons of architecture, as simple passageways connecting one part of the house to another. In most cases, they are not centres of haunting in the stories and the action does not revolve around them, yet they carry the metaphorical meaning of passage to a new life. The stalkers of these corridors lack acceptance of their condition: in the case of the ghostly Mrs Graham it is the loss of her husband and child that shattered her (although she does not know that her husband has survived and will return to her in the end), in the case of the ghost of Mary Molesworth's 'Lady Farquhar's Old Lady', it is the loss of the family house and the impossibility of preserving a family heritage because of economic failure. The narrator reports the very brief tale of a friend, a girl, Maggie, who moved with her family to a country house on the south coast of Ireland to improve her health due to an «unusual anxiety of mind.»²⁴⁵ The house is a «moderate-sized, somewhat old-fashioned country, or rather sea-side, house, furnished, with the exception of one

²⁴³Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, ed. Chloe Chard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁴⁴Luckhurst, *Corridors*, page numbers not available.

²⁴⁵Mary Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories. "Troubles Never Come Singly"* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1888), p. 8.

room, in an ordinary enough modern style»;²⁴⁶ the sole exception in question is a bedroom whose door is not locked off, but that is not given up for use to the tenants. This room is characterised by gloominess in terms of furniture and decoration because of the «musty old furniture, packed closely together, and all of a fashion many, many years older than that of the contents of the rest of the house», the old-fashioned cabinets or bureaux, the regular four-post bedstead, the gloomy curtains, the spider-legged chairs and rickety tables, and the spinet.²⁴⁷ The fact that the door is closed is a no entry sign, yet it is unlocked. This corridor is not dark, on the contrary, it is well illuminated even at night, so it causes no dread in the sisters' heart.

One night, Maggie perceives a figure walking before her, an old lady dressed in old-fashioned clothes and a shawl, moving along the corridor, and then disappearing into the room, without opening the door. The atmosphere is tranquil, Molesworth neither created a frightful setting, nor designed an evil ghost, the spirit is just a quiet presence in the house. The ghostly old lady appears to be very discreet and never menacing towards Maggie, the only one amongst the house's guests to see the spirit. Some days after noticing the figure in the corridor, Maggie sees the phantom in her room, between her and the threshold: the entity approaches the girl, apparently inclined to communicate with her and parts its lips, a fact that disturbs Maggie as she realises what is happening before her eyes:

Oh no! A voice from those unreal lips would have been too awful – flesh and blood could not have stood it. For another instant I kept my eyes fixed upon her without moving; then there came over me at last with an awful thrill, a sort of suffocating gasp of horror, the consciousness, the actual realisation of the fact that this before me, this presence, was no living human being, no dweller in our familiar world, not a woman, but a ghost! Oh, it was an awful moment! I pray that I may never again endure another like it. There is something so indescribably frightful in the feeling that we are on the verge of being tried beyond what we can bear.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 8-9.

²⁴⁷Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 9-10.

²⁴⁸Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 29-30.

It took Maggie some time before she was able to talk to her family about what she had seen. Thanks to her brother she learnt that the room had once belonged to the former owner of the house, a member of a rich family. The woman had died the year before Maggie and her family moved to Ballyreina, on the exact day on which Maggie saw her ghost. The phantasm lingers on Maggie's bedroom's threshold and moves only along corridors or the staircase, it is not intrusive in any way, but its visits allowed Maggie to dig deep into her own mind, to let her fears emerge. She was tried maybe beyond what she could bear, in her words, but as soon as she left the house, the dreadful memory of the ghost began to vanish from her head, and along with it also the anxiety issues that tormented her, as she could tell the story of the apparition without dread ever since. The girl could then move on, but the ghost remained incapable of leaving the living world behind.

The following year, Maggie is at her aunt's house and a guest tells her that Miss Fitzgerald, the name of the spirit, and her family had been wealthy until they were brought down by misfortune. The last members of the family, three sisters, were obliged to sell their beloved home, Ballyreina, and travelled around the world since then, both ashamed and desperate at the loss of a place they loved. Miss Fitzgerald's spirit seems to be lingering on earth and returns to her house on the anniversary of her death, incapable of abandoning forever a place that she was bound to in life, but she could not keep as her own.

It is interesting to notice that the conception of the ghost changes towards the end of the tale, going from an abstract interpretation of the entity, referred to with the pronoun "it", to a more sentimental and personal recollection of its presence in the house, so the entity is recognised as a former human being and becomes "she", "her old lady". This realisation of the benevolent nature of this spirit leads Maggie to accept its uncanny presence and, therefore, to acknowledge it as familiar, 'canny', dissolving any feeling of fear that she might have perceived.

Grief for the loss of home and family recurs also in Margaret Oliphant's 'The Open Door': from the drawing-room window of their house, Brentwood, the family of a Colonel just returned from India can see a thriving landscape and, in the house's park, the ruins of the former mansion. In the oldest part of the dilapidated house, there

probably used to be the servants' entrance, a backdoor to keep their entrance separate from those of the house's tenants. The Colonel is struck by the fact that the opening is still standing, and comments:

No offices²⁴⁹ remained to be entered – pantry and kitchen had all been swept out of being; but there stood the door open and vacant, free to all the winds, to the rabbits, and every wild creature. It struck my eye, the first time I went to Brentwood, like a melancholy comment upon a life that was over. A door that led to nothing – closed once, perhaps, with anxious care, bolted and guarded, now void of any meaning.²⁵⁰

Initially, the Colonel considers the importance that he attributes to this door to be unjustified, but he will promptly be contradicted by his son, Roland. The child travels across the park on his pony to and from school every day, until he falls ill. Roland tells his mother of childish voices he had heard, moaning and crying «oh mother!», and shadows he had seen among the ruins, and he believes that he will be better if someone helps the poor child. When called back from Edinburgh by his wife, the Colonel too notices the horses' discomfort in crossing the park, and he even hears someone's lament, but thinks of some heckler that eluded the guards. The boy is interrogated by his parents and by the family doctor, who diagnoses hallucinations; his father decides to investigate, first alone and then with the help of the doctor, thus a man of science. In November and December, the darkest months of the year, voices are heard among the ruins of someone crying pitifully and calling out for a mother. Through first hand experiences among the ruins, the doctor will learn of the ghost of an orphaned child that stalks the ruins, who cries because he believes that his mother has abandoned him and will not open the door to let him in.

The voice went on, growing into distinct articulation, but wavering about, now from one point, now from another, as if the owner of it were moving slowly back and forward. "Mother! Mother!" and then an outburst of wailing [...] it seemed to me as if some

²⁴⁹This is how the servants' quarters (the pantry and the kitchen) were called in Scotland.

²⁵⁰Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, p. 78.

uneasy, miserable creature was pacing up and down before a closed door [...] All this close, close to the space where I was standing with my lantern – now before me, now behind me: a creature restless, unhappy, moaning, crying, before the vacant doorway, which no one could either shut or open more.²⁵¹

The spirit of the boy cannot rest for, being convinced that the door of his house has been shut in his face by his own mother, he feels lost because he has lost the security of home which, to him, still lies behind that vacant door. To the living it is a useless door that leads nowhere, but to the spirit it is a shard from the past, a past that is not ready to, or cannot, be forgotten. The door is closed on the side of the living, but it is still open for the boy to find peace and walk through it to move on to the afterlife. This door represents the possibility of change, of moving from a condition of suffering to tranquillity if we only manage to let go of the past that hurts. The ghost child will be eventually set free by a minister who knew him when he was alive:

Your mother's gone with your name on her lips. Do you think she would ever close her door on her own lad? Do ye think the Lord will close the door, ye faint-hearted creature? No! [...] Go home ye wandering spirit! Go home! [...] Man, take heart! If you will lie and sob and greet, let it be at heaven's gate, and not your poor mother's ruined door!²⁵²

The poor soul eventually crosses the threshold and enters the spiritual world, never to return among the living again. The door acquires a new meaning even for the living, as it symbolises the possibility of change in life, of redemption, an apparent vacant door that leads to peace in acknowledgement of one's condition. Furthermore, the door opens for those who are willing to learn, for those who are willing to accept that there is more to the world, while there is no hope for those who choose to remain ignorant and blind to the challenges that life presents to us. On one side there is the Colonel who, even though not entirely convinced of the existence of ghosts, is not blinded by his own beliefs, but investigates with an open mind; on the contrary, the

²⁵¹Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, p. 100.

²⁵²Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, pp. 114-115.

doctor never challenges his own convictions, but rather looks for evidence of human agency to confirm them. This door is an opportunity for renewal and learning if one decides to embrace them.

For other lost souls, doors are the gateway to closure with their loved ones, still living and, therefore, forever lost to them. It is the case of Rhoda Broughton's 'Poor Pretty Bobby' and Mary Molesworth's female ghost in 'The Story of the Rippling Train'.

Broughton's Bobby Gerard is the protégé of the protagonist's father, a post-captain who commanded a ship of His Majesty's navy in the Channel during the Napoleonic wars. Bobby fights with him, but when he gets wounded, he is granted a period of leave that he spends at the mariner's mansion. The protagonist and narrator, Phoebe, falls in love with Bobby; he reciprocates the love, but he does not wish to settle, being eager to return to the sea. Bobby convinces his beloved to forge a letter granting him permission to go. Her devotion to him makes her comply with his wish, but the consequences are tragic, as Bobby is killed, and the sea engulfs his body. Phoebe is distant from him, but has the feeling that something terrible has occurred to her Bobby until, one day, the boy appears at the house's door:

A feeling of cold disappointment steals unaccountably over me – a nameless sensation, whose nearest kin is chilly awe. He makes no movement towards me; he does not catch me in his arms, nor even hold out his right hand to me. He stands there still and silent, and though the night is dry, equally free from rain and 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, onto the dry ground at his feet [...] I stretch out my hand and lay 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 [...] He does not take my offered hand, but he follows me across the threshold and across the hall. I hear the water drops falling drip, drip, on the echoing stone floor as he passes; then upstairs, and along the gallery to the door of his room, where I leave him with Stephens. Then everything becomes blank and nil to me.²⁵³

²⁵³Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 66.

This was probably a dream, but in this vision, Bobby comes to Phoebe's door to say goodbye. It is an excruciating image presented with the onomatopoeic sounds of the water dripping on the stairs, beating to Bobby's last steps. Death at sea was considered the worst of fates, being regarded with great fear and, moreover, pathos, because it was impossible to salvage the bodies and give them a proper burial.

Bobby cannot touch his beloved, a fact that renders the agony of the separation worse, but he follows her as if to show he remains close to her even in death, before disappearing forever. Bobby's last act is that of crossing the threshold and walking up the stairs, symbolising his acceptance of his fate, his moving to the spiritual world and final ascension.

A similar manifestation occurs in Molesworth's tale entitled 'The Story of the Rippling Train'. Mrs. Snowdon asks her uncle Paul, Mr. Marischal, to tell a ghost story. The spectre in the tale was known to the man when alive: it is the spirit of Maud, a very pretty girl whom he would have married, but who had more suitable admirers. The lady seemed to have feelings for him too, but he moved to Portugal where he stayed for three years, losing the opportunity to be with Maud. Upon his return, Maud had been married for two years, while his feelings and memories had attenuated. One day in April, a beautiful spring day, Paul is in his studio writing some letters when the door suddenly, without a sound, springs open:

But suddenly I found my eyes fixing themselves on the carpet; something had come within their range of vision, compelling their attention in a mechanical sort of way. What was it? "Smoke", was my first idea [...] Then something faint and shadowy, that came slowly rippling itself in as it were beyond the dark wood of the open door, was yet too material for "smoke" [...] The wavy something that kept gliding, rippling in, gradually assumed a more substantial appearance [...] Till the whole of her figure and the clear profile of her face and head were distinctly visible, and when at last she stopped and stood there full in my view just, but only just beyond the door, I saw [...] That she was no stranger to me.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 241-244.

The unravelling figure is Maud's, who appears at Paul's door, like Bobby, to bid farewell. Maud used to be cheerful, but this vision is gloomy, looking at Paul regretfully. The fact that Maud never crosses the threshold to the room may be interpreted as her never being part of Paul's life: they had cherished each other, but they had given up on their feelings and taken separate paths, even though Maud's love remained. Her last thought before leaving the world of the living forever is for her failed love, so she appears to him in an attempt to confess her feelings before moving on. She accepts her fate like Broughton's Bobby and welcomes her spiritual life, but the sadness in her gaze upon seeing Paul is the heart-breaking sign of a door that was never fully opened to a life of sincere love, which both denied themselves. She comes silently to Paul one last time like a cloud of smoke because fire took her and killed her, and, as silently as she had entered and left his heart years before, she now departs forever.

Besides the possible symbolic meanings attributed to doors in literature, their primal role is that of hospitality or rejection of external agents from the domestic hearth, which implies the risk of violating the sacredness of home by introducing potential threats from the outer world. In connection with ghost stories, the question of the "familiar" has been often discussed with Freud's essay on the uncanny, *Das Unheimliche* (1919), as a point of departure. It could be useful to approach this question by providing an etymological analysis of the words involved. The German term *unheimlich* is made up of the negative prefix *un* and the noun *heim* (*lich* is an adjectival suffix), which means "home", so the compounded term refers to something that is "not home related". In the essay, Freud defined the *unheimlich*, translated into English as "uncanny", as the combination of all that causes dread, fear and horror,²⁵⁵ and as something familiar or having existed in the mind for a long time but marginalised through a process of repression.²⁵⁶ For this reason, such events are both familiar and strange, because the mind contains them but does not recognise them; uncanny events are thus invested with supernatural qualities of horror and fright until

²⁵⁵Sigmund Freud, *Das Unheimliche*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. XII, ed. Anna Freud et al. (London: Imago Pub. Co, 1947), p. 229.

²⁵⁶Freud, *Das Unheimliche*, p. 254.

they are recollected and recognised, returning to the sphere of the familiar. Tatar stated that «uncanny events are situated at the heart of the fantastic tale. Their ambiguous character almost invariably generates hesitation that defines the fantastic,»²⁵⁷ moving from Todorov's lesson. It is not so simple though, since the German adjective *heimlich*, without the negative prefix, has a further meaning, that is to say it designates something that is done secretly, sinister.²⁵⁸

So, the concept of home as a familiar space blends with the concept of concealment, of secrets and mystery, a union from which a sense of discomfort arises. As Tatar also notices,²⁵⁹ the word *heimlich* is so ambiguous that its second meaning is no longer an antonym, but a synonym of *unheimlich*, where the negative prefix *un-* acts not as a negation of meaning but as a «token of repression.»²⁶⁰ To Freud, the uncanny thus represents the restoration of events that had been erased by the mind and thus caused fear, for they were not recognisable. The *unheimlich* is deeply “domestic” to Freud, this is because the relations within the house can be deranged, as he showed in his theorisation of the Oedipus complex, according to which the male child between three and five years of age develops a form of love and desire towards the parent of the opposite sex and is thus perceived as a rival by the other parent.²⁶¹ The English adjective *canny* was originally a Scottish or northern, dialectal form meaning «knowing, wise; judicious, prudent; wary, cautious»²⁶² or «in accordance with what is right or natural; safe; *spec.* safe to be involved with»,²⁶³ while other meanings imply

²⁵⁷Maria Tatar, «The Houses of Fiction: Toward a Definition of the Uncanny», *Comparative Literature* 33, no. 2 (Spring 1981), p. 169. See also Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy. The Literature of Subversion* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 1988), pp. 63-72; Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings. Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), pp. 17-18.

²⁵⁸One should note that the term *Geheimnis*, “secret”, has the same root as “house”.

²⁵⁹Tatar, «The Houses of Fiction», p. 170.

²⁶⁰Freud, *Das Unheimliche*, p. 235.

²⁶¹Neo-Freudian Carl Jung developed the correspondent female “version” of the complex, the Electra complex, a girl's psychosexual tension towards the father and consequent competition with the mother for his possession. See «The Theory of Psychoanalysis», *Nervous and mental disease monograph series*, no. 19 (1915).

²⁶²*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

²⁶³*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

a sense of caution, quietness and comfort. “Canny” too has, however, a further meaning (now rare) that is «supernaturally wise, endowed with occult or magical power»,²⁶⁴ in turn coinciding with its contrary “uncanny”, whose meanings are, among others, «mischievous, malicious» (now obsolete), «of persons: not quite safe to trust, as being associated with supernatural arts or powers» or «partaking of a supernatural character; mysterious, weird, uncomfortably strange or unfamiliar».²⁶⁵ Intellectual uncertainty represents the source of the fantastic for Todorov,²⁶⁶ who used the term *étrange* to translate Freud’s *unheimlich*: the fantastic, including the Gothic, draws its power from events that shatter the stability of the familiar world and wreak havoc in a space that is now perceived as hostile, the people who live in it becoming potential threats. Once we acknowledge the nature of the uncanny, once we recognise and realise what it truly represents, the supernatural veil is lifted and all returns to a state of regularity.

The described process is what the doctor attempts to do in Oliphant’s ‘The Open Door’: he avoids any consideration of the existence of the supernatural, insisting that evidence proves that a human agent stalks Brentwood’s ruins; the doctor’s unease and turmoil at the thought of the supernatural origin of the events ceases as he averts the overturning of his beliefs.

²⁶⁴*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

²⁶⁵*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

²⁶⁶In discussing the importance of including psychoanalysis in literary criticism, Todorov argued that «in Freud’s study of the uncanny, we must acknowledge the double character of psychoanalytic investigation. It is as if psychoanalysis were at once a science of structures and a technique of interpretation. In the first case, it describes a mechanism – the mechanism, one might say, of psychic activity. In the second case, it reveals the ultimate meaning of the configurations so described. It answers both the question “how” and the question “what”.» Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 149. Todorov stressed the importance of relying on psychoanalysis even more than on literary criticism to perform a more efficient investigation by exploiting discoveries of the human functioning and avoid simple reiterations of initial presuppositions. Furthermore, Todorov stated that «psychoanalysis has replaced (and thereby has made useless) the literature of the fantastic. There is no need today to resort to the devil in order to speak of an excessive sexual desire, and not to resort to vampires in order to designate the attraction exerted by corpses: psychoanalysis, and the literature that is directly or indirectly inspired by it, deal with these matters in undisguised termsmilner.» Todorov, *The Fantastic*, pp. 160-162.

A similar process of acknowledgement of the uncanny occurs also in Marryat's 'Sent to His Death!': when Dolly sees the mysterious figure stalking Poplar Farm's corridors at night, already impressed by her friend's Bessie's tale of the haunting, she starts believing in the supernatural source of the vision even though she had laughed at her friend's conviction. The *unheimlich* is now "in power", but as soon as Dolly witnesses Mrs Graham's nightmare, she realises the truth behind the haunting, so the uncanny withdraws and gives way to the *heimlich*. The human nature of the fearful sight is acknowledged and stability within both house and mind is restored.

1.4 Through the Looking Glass, Into the Painted Canvas

1.4.1 Mirrors

From Greek antiquity and the myth of Narcissus dying transfixed by his own reflection in the water, the mirror has always been one of the most exploited literary tropes and metaphors, as for instance in Carroll's sequel to *Alice in Wonderland*, *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1871), where the protagonist falls through a mirror into a parallel world beyond the restrictive codes of Victorian society. The mirror is, as an object, an item of decor or an instrument meant to reflect one's image for aesthetic purposes, but to investigate our reflected image metaphorically means to peruse our own self. Our physical aspect changes with the passing of time and is influenced by the events that life puts us through, whose signs we carry on our skin. Our image thus evokes the internal struggles of our heart. We acknowledge our own identity by looking at our reflected image.

The Eighteenth century marked a shift in the interpretation of the mirror as a reflection of nightmares, dreams and obsessions, a fact spurred also by the scientific investigation of optics and optical items.²⁶⁷ Such explorations implied a deeper understanding of the human body as much as an insight into the visible and invisible, an aspect that was promptly absorbed by literature as a metaphor of what rests beyond humanity, therefore into the realm of the unknown and the fantastic. Thus, the mirror

²⁶⁷See Max Milner, *La Fantasmagoria. Saggio sull'ottica fantastica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989), pp. 13, 19-22.

becomes the frontier between our world and the surreal, occult and phantasmagorical, which characterised Gothic fiction since its origins.²⁶⁸ Optics and literature are connected because they are both sciences, in their own way, of the seen and the unseen: Milner spoke of “mental alchemy”,²⁶⁹ and connected scientific theories with the philosophic and cultural milieu of his time, quoting Goethe’s and Schopenhauer’s theories of colours.²⁷⁰

As in the myth of Narcissus, water and mirror are alike in that they both cause potential illusions of the senses and are deeply intertwined with the paranormal. Milner referred to Freud’s theory of the *unheimlich*: something that has been kept hidden comes to light metaphorically, echoing the reflection of subjects appearing in a mirror, and brings anguish because it implies a transgression.²⁷¹

As for Freud himself, he believed the mirror to be a hyperrealist and faithful representation of the immediate context surrounding us in both time and space. In 1949, post-structuralist Lacan²⁷² moved from Freud’s symbolic reading of mirrors to his mirror stage theory, according to which children between six and eighteen months begin to form a basic distinction between the self and the other as they see their image in the mirror. This reflection brings a primitive conscience of the autonomy of their body with respect to the mother’s, and in relation to the surrounding space. According to Lacan, this mirror stage, which corresponds to Freud’s primary narcissism, also marks the transition into the symbolic state of language acquisition, where the self is no longer unified, but it divides because of the contact with the Other, which leads to the fragmentation of the unity and the estrangement from the comforting pre-language / imaginary state. The child thus begins to understand that the world is made of Others

²⁶⁸Roberto Barotti Marchiò, *La Magia e gli inganni dello specchio gotico*, in *Gioco di specchi. Saggi sull’uso letterario dell’immagine dello specchio*, ed. Agostino Lombardo (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1999), pp. 129-146.

²⁶⁹Milner, *La Fantasmagoria*, p. 37.

²⁷⁰Milner, *La Fantasmagoria*, p. 57.

²⁷¹Milner, *La Fantasmagoria*, p. 57. See also Theodore Ziolkowski, *Disenchanted Images. A Literal Iconology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 149-226.

²⁷²See Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 1996).

than the Self, and with time he or she will acquire the knowledge of rules, and of differences like gender, subject, and object. During this phase, children are generally fascinated by their own image and become aware of their body as a form in itself. The identification is the crucial moment in this growth process, because it allows the infant to perceive himself / herself as a full human being. At the same time, however, the reflected image is alienating in that it is outside of the child's body, is "other" than him / her. The result of the reflected image is the ego, which is derived from the idea of being a wholesome person without internal fragmentation. The ego can thus blind our perception of ourselves, and our reflection can give back an image that is us only superficially. This interpretation fits with the description of the female ghost in the above-mentioned tale by Braddon, 'The Winning Sequence', where the "witchy" beautiful Sybilla is eventually unmasked for what she really is, a gambler who cheats her guests out of their money with her card tricks. In her drawing-room, where the games took place, the woman used to keep a mirror that was never illuminated, to prevent the guests from discovering her doings. However, when the deceit comes to light, the consequences are terrible, as her husband must face a duel against one of her victims to preserve his honour. Sybilla is crushed by grief and decides to use her charms to control her husband once more, to convince him to abandon the duel, but she sees her face in her bedroom's looking glass. The person who is looking back at her is a charmless hag, a rather decaying image that represents, like Dorian Gray's putrescent portrait, the real nature of the soul. Sybilla's narcissism prevents her from seeing her husband, as she is conscious that her ugliness cannot enchant the man as her former beauty did. Her ego gives him the *coup de grace*, for he is killed in the duel. The dark mirror in the drawing-room that reflected nothing was meant to conceal Sybilla's soul and crimes from others, including her husband, but the functioning glass in the bedroom, the private space where she can be herself, returns the image of her corrupted Self, from which she can no longer escape. She pays with the impossibility to find eternal peace.²⁷³

²⁷³Mirrors reveal the truth about others as well, as we have seen in Riddell's 'Vauxhall Walk', where the protagonist could see figures in the looking glass that will lead to the truth about the murder of the woman; furthermore, the treasure is found in the wall where the mirror used to hang, hiding it before falling into pieces. Again, in Broughton's 'Behold! It was a Dream', the narrator, dreaming once again,

Another story where a mirror plays a crucial role is Braddon's 'Herself': we have already described the medieval-like interior of part of Orange Grove²⁷⁴ and the old library where the looking-glass is. The Venetian mirror in question is huge, it

Reached from floor to ceiling, and [it had] a florid carved frame, from which the gilding had mostly worn away [...] The surface was so clouded and tarnished that [...] could not see a reflection of ourselves or of the room.²⁷⁵

As the doctor had noticed, all the former inhabitants of the house, including Violetta's grandfather, had a preference for the old library, where something cursed seems to eat away people's life.²⁷⁶ The mirror is in bad condition, so that nobody sees any reflection in it apart from Lota, who keeps looking at her own shadowy reflection:²⁷⁷ «it's strange that she should be so fond of looking in the glass, poor dear, when she can scarcely fail to see the change in herself.»²⁷⁸

Violetta is slowly dying and there is no apparent explanation for this until her friend Helen learns of a book that she keeps reading in the library, which turns out to be Lota's grandfather's diary. During the first period after the old man moved to the Italian villa, the atmosphere seemed cheerful as Lota's grandfather recalls his transformation of the refectory into the library. Then, suddenly, there is a change in tone:

I am living too much alone. I did not think I was of the stuff which is subject to delusions and marbled fancies – but I was wrong. I suppose no man's mind can retain its strength of fibre without the friction of intercourse with other minds of its own calibre [...] I have

sees the face of the murderer of her friends in their bedroom mirror and can warn them. They do not believe her, and this denial will have fatal consequences (see Chapter 3.2.1).

²⁷⁴See Chapter 1.2.

²⁷⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 323.

²⁷⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 327.

²⁷⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 323, 328.

²⁷⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 328.

begun to see ghosts [...] Looking up from my book in yesterday's twilight my casual glance rested on the old Venetian mirror in front of my desk; and gradually, out of the blurred darkness, I saw a face looking at me. My own face as it might be after the wasting of disease, or the slow decay of advancing years - a face at least ten years older than the face I had seen in my glass a few hours before - hollow cheeks, haggard eyes, the loose under-lip drooping weakly - a bent figure in an invalid chair, an aspect of utter helplessness. And it was myself. Of that fact I have no doubt.²⁷⁹

Helen realises that the mirror is somehow cursed, and those who dwell in the library start decaying and dying slowly, whereas the mirror gives back an image of them of utter decay, even beyond life. As her grandfather had seen Death in the mirror, so Lota eventually recognizes the same appalling figure in the looking-glass, and soon she passes away.²⁸⁰ Those who gaze into the mirror's depths find themselves enraptured by whatever they see in it, but they also lose vitality day by day, and find themselves hurtling towards the grave. This looking-glass distorts the truth, even the strongest minds of self-confident people like Lota are enthralled by the vision of their approaching Fate and let it eat them up in a sort of realization of the fragility of human life.

As much as life, mirrors are fragile items that can shatter and break into thousands of pieces. It is the case of a short story, dating back to the half of the century, by the Anglo-Canadian author Susanna Moodie, 'The Broken Mirror' (1843), where the item is a symbol of identity. A family of merchants from Edinburgh, made up of two sons and their widowed mother, the Hardens, faces bankruptcy; upon the death of the father, they find out that he had left no will, and because of speculation he had lost all his money to his creditors, thus leaving his relatives unprovided for.²⁸¹ Whether he had been deceiving others or vice versa none could tell, but the losses had been so extensive and he was so tormented by his ill fortune that this burden led to his premature departure. An uncle from Glasgow offers them the chance to emigrate with

²⁷⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 333-334.

²⁸⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 337.

²⁸¹Susanna Moodie, *Voyages. Short Narratives of Susanna Moodie*, ed. John Thurston (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1997), p. 67.

him to the Cape of Good Hope, an offer the sons accept willingly, but which destabilises the mother: she is concerned in particular with the wild animals and the extreme weather that she thinks she will meet, but the decision has been made and there is no use in staying in Edinburgh.²⁸² The family decides to sell the furniture since they wish to take nothing with them. There is just one item the widow is not ready to give up, her Italian mirror, which had been a present from her grandfather to her mother: «it had been many years in her family, and she prizes it very highly; she cannot bear to part with it.»²⁸³ This mirror represents Mrs Harden's identity, it is her family's heritage, something that cannot be disowned. The widow even believes that the object will make her family's fortune in Africa. On the ship, the mirror is precariously wrapped in an old carpet through which water filters, so that, when unpacked, the glass is destroyed. What seems to be a sign of bad luck will eventually turn out to be the most fortunate event for the family. The Hardens had established in a community of natives that was frequently visited by leading men of the neighbouring settlements to exchange goods and commodities. On one of these days, one of the Harden boys decides to make a dressing-glass out of the shards, and the strange item is noticed by the leaders who spend hours studying it and their own image reflected in it. The mirror moves from being the symbol of the identity of one family to the means through which others begin to discover their own, through the image of their faces that they had never seen before:

It seems a species of vanity inherent in man, to be delighted with the reflection of his own image. For hours the savage chiefs amused themselves with examining their features in these wonderful pieces of glass [...] The more enamoured they seemed with their sable visages. Nothing would satisfy them but the actual possession of these magic glasses; and, before they had left the valley, they had bartered with Robert Harden flocks of sheep and herds of cattle for these once despised fragments of broken glass.²⁸⁴

²⁸²Moodie, *Voyages*, p. 68.

²⁸³Moodie, *Voyages*, pp. 69-70.

²⁸⁴Moodie, *Voyages*, p. 83.

By involuntarily playing on the narcissistic instinct inherent in all humans, the Hardens find that the mirror truly reverses the family fortune as Mrs Harden had predicted. There seems to be a morale to this story, a warning that the cultural roots that shape our identity, here symbolised by the looking glass, should never be forgotten because it is thanks to them that we can progress in our development as human beings.

1.4.2 Portraits

Another item that recurs in Victorian houses is the portrait, sharing with mirrors the characteristic of returning someone's image. Portraiture has been a Gothic literary trope since the origins of the genre, and throughout the nineteenth century.²⁸⁵ In Elizabeth Gaskell's 'The Old Nurse's Story' (1852), the narrator, Hester, ventures with the little girl she is taking care of, Miss Rosamund, to the gallery where the Furnivalls keep anything from china jars to books and a variety of other items, including old family portraits. One of the portraits depicts the house's tenant, old Miss Furnivall, who was a beauty in youth, but Dorothy states that her dead sister was much fairer than her. The nurse finds and shows them the portrait, but is scared for some reason:

And then I helped Dorothy to turn a great picture, that leaned with its face towards the wall, and was not hung up as the others were. To be sure, it beat Miss Grace for beauty; and, I think, for scornful pride, too, though in that matter it might be hard to choose. I could have looked at it an hour, but Dorothy seemed half frightened at having shown it to me and hurried it back again, and bade me run and find Miss Rosamund, for there were some ugly places about the house.²⁸⁶

Elliott²⁸⁷ explained that the terms portrait and picture were used interchangeably in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to indicate the pictorial representation of a

²⁸⁵Moodie, *Voyages*, p. 67.

²⁸⁶Elizabeth Gaskell, *Gothic Tales*, ed. Laura Kranzler (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 17.

²⁸⁷See Kamilla Elliott, *Portraiture and the British Gothic Fiction. The Rise of Picture Identification, 1746-1835*, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2012).

person, but she differentiated between ‘portraiture’ and ‘picture identification’, defining the latter as a cultural use of the former. Picture identification serves the purposes of identifying a person in terms of names, kinship, nationality, gender, physical aspect, as do ID pictures today, for instance, but also from a moral and behavioural perspective. She confers to portraiture a further epistemological meaning in that portraits help reveal lost or unknown identities. Through its connection with empiricism, picture identification «‘proves’ the existence of ghosts, rationalising the uncanny.»²⁸⁸ Elliott highlighted the fact that, throughout the centuries, portraiture has always been a privilege of the higher classes. However, the Industrial Revolution led to the rise of the middle class, which coincided also with the increase of mass portraiture, meaning that resources were now extended to the upper middle classes in a context of growing rivalry with the nobles.²⁸⁹ She further argued that Victorian authors tended to use portraiture to reveal family secrets such as illegitimacy or corruption.²⁹⁰ By taking into consideration three different novels from the early, mid-, and late Victorian period, Elliott attempted to prove how Victorians continuously constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed the idea of «mimetic resemblance.»²⁹¹ Her selected early Victorian novel, Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839) establishes identity, or the loss of it, through resemblance, or lack of it, to one’s own embodied images with physiognomic readings of portraits. The mid-Victorian Gothic novel, Mary E. Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1861), demonstrates how bodies can be constructed to deceive, and that portraits can be even more authentic than the actual physical presence. As for the late Victorian Gothic novel, Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), problematises cultural conventions of picture identifications, taking it to the extreme. At the same time, late Victorian Gothic «returns to first-wave Gothic’s preoccupation with progeny’s resemblances to ancestral portraits» to dismantle concepts of bourgeois identity.²⁹²

²⁸⁸Elliott, *Portraiture and the British Gothic Fiction*, p. 7.

²⁸⁹Elliott, *Portraiture and the British Gothic Fiction*, p. 2-5.

²⁹⁰Elliott, *Portraiture and the British Gothic Fiction*, p. 134.

²⁹¹Elliott, *Portraiture and the British Gothic Fiction*, p.133.

²⁹²Elliott, *Portraiture and the British Gothic Fiction*, p. 134.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon frequently recurred to portraiture in her short narratives: in ‘His Secret’, Braddon only mentioned an «ample room for an independent existence in the spacious old Abbey. Mr. Dane had his own suite of rooms at the end of a southward-fronting wing, rooms which opened on the picture-gallery, where the effigies of departed Trevannions scowled or simpered under a top-light».²⁹³ Mrs. Trevannion’s husband has the feeling of being observed by the ancestors of his wife as if he were on a worth trial. In ‘Sir Hanbury’s Request’, a portrait of the late Sir Hanbury in his library seems to scrutinise the students that come to study.²⁹⁴ In ‘The Ghost’s Name’, in the haunted room called cedar-room hang the portraits, among others, of a boy and a girl, the first two children who died in there.²⁹⁵ In ‘The True Story of Don Juan Tenorio’ (1868), a miniature portrait of a lady is used to lure Don Juan to the monastery where he will be executed, playing upon his renowned nature of seductor.²⁹⁶

‘Eveline’s Visitant’ begins with the memory of a duel between the narrator, Hector de Brissac, and his cousin, André de Brissac, which took place on waste lands close to the church of Saint-Germain de Prés, Paris, to compete for the love of a woman. Hector wins, but before exhaling his last breath, André swears to his executioner that he will haunt him and all he will hold dear until the end.²⁹⁷ André’s death allows Hector to inherit all the family properties and wealth, but Hector despises his new condition because of the means through which it was obtained:

I lived a lonely existence in the old *château*, where I rarely held converse with any but the servants of the household, all of whom served my cousin, and none of whom liked me [...] It was a hard and bitter life. It galled me, when I rode through the village, to see the peasant-children shrink away from me. I have seen old women cross themselves stealthily as I passed them by. Strange reports had gone forth about me; and there were

²⁹³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 74.

²⁹⁴Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 151, 162.

²⁹⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 387.

²⁹⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 275.

²⁹⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 25.

those who whispered I had given my soul the Evil One as the price of my cousin's heritage.²⁹⁸

Hector hates himself and his life until he meets Eveline, the daughter of an ex-captain of dragoons who falls in love with him and changes his life for the better. André keeps his promise, and often visits Eveline, now Hector's wife, whenever she strolls about the park and the woods alone, every day the ghost reaches the woman without her ever realising that she is meeting a supernatural entity. The spirit follows everywhere they go and causes much distress to Eveline, whose health declines to the point that, eventually, she dies. Hector lives in his cousin's *château* at Puy Verdun for three years «pacing the corridors that had echoed his footfall»,²⁹⁹ yet he had slowly forgotten André's threat because, as he says, there are no images of the dead man on the walls.

It was the age of *boudoir* art,³⁰⁰ and a miniature set on the lid of a gold *bonbonnière*, or hidden artfully in a massive bracelet, was more fashionable than a clumsy life-size image, fit only to hang on the gloomy walls of a provincial *château* rarely visited by its owner. My cousin's fair face had adorned more than one *bonbonnière*, and had been concealed in more than one bracelet; but it was not among the faces that looked down from the panelled walls of Puy Verdun.³⁰¹

Hector suffers from the discrepancy between him and his cousin in terms of beauty as André was handsome and, apparently, had women at his feet: the bracelets and *bonbonnières* were probably his gifts to his lovers. Portraiture was a tradition that

²⁹⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 26. Hector attributes the circulation of these gossips in part to his darker skin, as if this physical trait could justify some sort of discrimination towards him other than him being, *de facto*, a murderer.

²⁹⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 28.

³⁰⁰*Boudoir* art developed in France in the eighteenth century. A *boudoir* is a lady's private room, a sitting room or a dressing room, whose denomination comes from the French verb "boudier", which means "to pout".

³⁰¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 28-29.

André was not interested in carrying on, but he rather preferred to be admired while living. The lack of an image, to use Elliott's words, identifying André made Hector forget, if not about him, about the words he had spoken while expiring. The only memento of André's existence in the castle is a picture in the library, where Hector spends most of his time, of an ancestor who had lived at the time of Francis the First³⁰² depicted with the hunting-dress André had copied and wore at the masquerade the night of his death. Hector cannot bear the sight of the portrait, so he has it covered with a drape.

Elliott's assumption, in relation to *Lady Audley's Secret*, that portraits can provide «truer identifications of character than bodies»³⁰³ could be applied to this tale as well, in that Hector identifies his cousin not through physical resemblance to a portrayed man, but through a character artfully constructed by the artist. The association is automatic for Hector, who thinks that he has forgotten the "curse" but cannot gaze at André's image, as he cannot accept what he has done. At first, he was the only one to suffer the consequences, but after his marriage to Eveline, he realises there is more at stake than his own happiness; the life itself of the person he loves. After Eveline's many warnings, Hector decides to show her the picture in the library: «this is witchcraft»,³⁰⁴ she replies, as she can recognise the dress but not the face; however, the expedient of the dress, which was masterfully recreated by André, makes the identification certain and the escape impossible.

A portrait is the key element and gives the title to one of Margaret Oliphant's best short stories, 'The Portrait'.³⁰⁵ The protagonist and narrator, Philip Canning, has spent

³⁰²First of the Valois-Angoulême dynasty, Francis the First was king of France from 1515 to 1547.

³⁰³Elliott, *Portraiture and the British Gothic Fiction*, p. 219.

³⁰⁴Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 33.

³⁰⁵Oliphant used portraits as expedients for recognition in two stories: in 'The Library Window', the protagonist sees a portrait hanging on the walls of the mysterious library room; one night, in the house of her aunt's friend, she is attracted by a similar portrait, a vision induced by the thought of her library man, whom she yearns to see; see Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, pp. 225-226. In 'Earthbound', Edmund falls desperately in love with the ghost of a young woman to the point of madness; Mr. Beresford shows him the portrait of the same woman, from the previous century, to make

his life in the family mansion, The Grove, with his father as his sole parent, since his mother died soon after his birth. In fact, Philip comments that:

The drawing-room I was aware of only as a place of deadly good order, into which nobody ever entered. It had three long windows opening on the lawn, and communicated at the upper hand, which was rounded like a great bay, with the conservatory. Sometimes I gazed into it as a child from without, wondering at the needlework on the chairs, the screens, the looking-glasses which never reflected any living face. My father did not like the room, which probably was not wonderful, though it never occurred to me in those early days to inquire why.³⁰⁶

The female space of the house has remained empty for years without the angel in the house to administer it, and the loss of his wife clearly made entering the room unbearable to Mr. Canning. Despite their being alone, the relationship between father and son never flourished, leaving them rather aloof, in fact «I had not been without dreams of warmer affections, but they had come to nothing»;³⁰⁷ the man also appears to have some secret occupations he does not share with his son and will not even accept counsel about his management of the family property, which is making the workers poorer. Philip dislikes the way his father treats his tenants by crushing them economically, and even defines him a «tyrant, an oppressor, a bad landlord.»³⁰⁸ One day, Philip is called to his mother's drawing-room, unusually illuminated for the occasion, and his father shows him a portrait:

It was a full-length portrait of a very young woman – I might say a girl, scarcely twenty – in a white dress, made in a very simple old fashion, though I was too little accustomed to female costume to be able to fix the date. It might have been a hundred years old, or twenty, for aught I knew. The face had an expression of youth, candour, and simplicity

him realise his condition and convince him to see a doctor, but Edmund replies that dead or alive, that woman is his love and nothing less. See Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, pp. 66-73.

³⁰⁶Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 122.

³⁰⁷Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 125.

³⁰⁸Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 143.

more than any face I had ever seen, - or so, at least, in my surprise, I thought. The eyes were a little wistful, with something, which was almost anxiety - which at least was not content - in them; a faint, almost imperceptible, curve in the lids. The complexion was of dazzling fairness, the hair light, but the eyes dark, which gave individuality to the face [...] A face which so invited love and confidence I never saw. One smiled at it with instinctive affection.³⁰⁹

Philip feels instinctively attracted to the young woman in the portrait, her appearance emanates positivity, but the look in her eyes reveals that something worried her. However, Philip is not able to recognise the figure in the painting as his mother, he sees no resemblance and, above all, he built his identity, throughout his life, without ever having his mother as a reference:

I may say here, though it will probably be disappointing to those who form a sentimental idea of the capabilities of children, that it did not occur to me either, in these days, to make any inquiry about my mother. There was no room in life, as I knew it, for any such person; nothing suggested to my mind either the fact that she must have existed, or that there was need of her in the house.³¹⁰

As soon as Mr. Canning tells his son that he is facing his mother, Philip bursts into laughter and then tears, in a mixture of astonishment and thoughts that come in vertiginous succession. He spends a good amount of time studying the face in the portrait;³¹¹ he believes that there is a change of expression in her eyes, as if she were

³⁰⁹Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, pp. 133-134.

³¹⁰Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, p. 122.

³¹¹Philip's attraction to his mother's portrait brings to mind Christina Rossetti's poem *In an Artist's Studio*, where she tells of how her brother Dante spent hours looking at the portraits he had done of his dead wife and model Lizzie: «One face looks out from all his canvases, / One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans: / We found her hidden just behind those screens, / That mirror gave back all her loveliness. / A queen in opal or in ruby dress, / A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens, / A saint, an angel — every canvas means / The same one meaning, neither more or less. / He feeds upon her face by day and night, / And she with true kind eyes looks back on him, / Fair as the moon and joyful as the light: / Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim; / Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright; /

no longer anxious about something, but inquiring about her son's reaction, and he thinks to have perceived a change in her features and a movement in her lips. The aspect of his mother should be familiar to Philip, he should be able to recognise her and trust her even though she is not present: there should be a link between them provided by the child's recollection, but that missing he only feels «the incongruous incongruity.»³¹² This unfamiliarity with the motherly figure generates the uncanny, Freud's *unheimlich*, represented by the impression of the painting's changing features. Despite their mutual distance, father and son share an intimate moment before the hung portrait, as if the return within the house walls of a female figure had allowed emotions to run more freely than usual, and in this image of family apparently reunited, Mr. Canning confesses how he feels about the woman he loved, expressing his concern at the idea that, should we be able to grow and mature in the afterlife as we do in life, he will find her changed and not bonded to him anymore, as if they were two strangers who had been separate for too long to mend the void between them.

The will to restore the family nucleus, which had been torn years before, is clear: the portrait being full length, it is hung low so that the painted woman seems to be entering the room for real, and Philip cannot cease to admire the piece of art, always noticing different details and new changes of expression in the figure; his eyes fill with tears when he gazes at her, his heart with gratitude for the «benefactor, indeed, who had given her back to us.»³¹³ Philip often wonders what their life could have been had she lived, he regrets the deprivation of «the warm domestic centre, the hearth

Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.» See Christina Rossetti, *Poems* (New York City, NY: Everyman's Library Pocket Poets, 1993), p. 59.

³¹²Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, p. 135. Philip says to himself that he should have known his mother by child's recollection, feeling a thread bonding them, which is a reference to the eighteenth-century Romantic poet William Cowper. His poem *On Receipt of My Mother's Picture* recites: «Oh that those lips had language! Life has pass'd / With me but roughly since I heard thee last. / Those lips are thine—thy own sweet smiles I see, / The same that oft in childhood solaced me; / Voice only fails, else, how distinct they say, / "Grieve not, my child, chase all thy fears away!" / The meek intelligence of those dear eyes / (Blest be the art that can immortalize, / The art that baffles time's tyrannic claim / To quench it) here shines on me still the same» (ll. 1-5). See William Cowper, *Selected Poems*, ed. Nick Rhodes (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2003), p. 23.

³¹³Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, p. 139.

which would have been a common sanctuary, the true home»,³¹⁴ but he wonders whether she would have been estranged by her husband as Philip was by the same man, or by Philip himself, too concentrated on his melancholic thoughts. Amidst the vertigo of these thoughts, Philip feels the sudden urge to visit the drawing-room, and then he has the impression of hearing a door opening and shutting in the far distance. His heart starts racing and he feels dizzy as if he had received a sudden shock, his mouth dries, his eyes grow hot, and he feels overcome by a sense of being possessed, «like a maddened living creature making the wildest efforts to get free.»³¹⁵ Now and then, with the corner of his eyes he catches movements but nothing is ever there when he looks in their direction. This pressure leads him out of the room, but instead of driving him where he believed, it brought him straight to his father's library, where the old man spent most of his time. Mr. Canning is obviously surprised by his son's behaviour, he does not believe the explanation that Philip tries to give him. The young man notices his father is handling a letter with a black border: whatever or whoever had pushed Philip there, wanted him to know something, or to speak to his parent. However, Philip once again remarks the distance between him and his father, saying to himself that they are more like friends than father and son, but never on confidential terms.³¹⁶ Philip's symptoms return again, and in a moment of strife with himself, trying to figure out what to do, he screams to whatever presence has possessed him and, suddenly, some kind of «gentler force, a more benignant influence»³¹⁷ takes over him, moved by love. The symptoms are masterfully described by Oliphant through a series of metaphors which, as explained in a metatextual comment, are the only way of rendering the idea of what goes on in Philip's body:

The first symptom, as before, was that my heart sprang up with a bound, as if a cannon had been fired at my ear [...] I was like a rider of a frightened horse, rendered almost wild by something which in the mystery of its voiceless being it has seen, something on the road which it will not pass, but wildly plunging, resisting every persuasion, turns

³¹⁴Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 144.

³¹⁵Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 146.

³¹⁶Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 147.

³¹⁷Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 152.

from, with ever increasing passion [...] I felt the contagion growing upon me [...] I was like a ship at sea straining and plunging against wind and tide.³¹⁸

Philip is hurried once again to his father's library, where he sees more letters with the black border, and it comes to his mind that those letters have a relevance he should be aware of. In fact, he finally braves his father:

Father, don't let us deceive one another. I am neither a man to go mad nor to see ghosts. What it is that got the command over me I can't tell: but there is some cause for it. You are doing something or planning something with which I have a right to interfere [...] I am not here by my own will. Something that is stronger than I has brought me. There is something in your mind which disturbs – others [...] Someone – who can speak to you only by me – speaks to you by me; and I know that you understand.³¹⁹

His father does not really grasp the sense of this supernatural message, though: he allows Philip to administer the tenants of the household whom he had so poorly treated, but there is more to it. His son knows, and the answer is to be found in the drawing-room. In his heart, Philip realises it is his mother who has been guiding his actions, and he feels drawn to her portrait to see if her gaze has changed into approval, as if she were alive and he a boy who wanted to make his parent proud. He keeps feeling as if she were stepping out of the portrait, as if she were looking at him differently, but then attributes his impressions to simple conditioning. Philip is caught by the symptoms a third time and, as usual, in a moment of tranquillity. This time he first attempts to enter the drawing-room, as if to find refuge at the portrait's feet, the closest possible to his mother's embrace, but is swept past it and pushed towards his father. Eventually, Philip makes the discovery that has tormented the entity that possessed him: Mr. Canning had meant to hide the existence of a young woman, his wife's cousin, who had no other relations in the world. It is not clear what kind of history the old man has with the girl's family, but her sight certainly unsettles him, as

³¹⁸Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, pp. 150-151.

³¹⁹Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, p. 153.

Agnes, her name being the same as Philip's mother, also shares with her cousin a striking resemblance:

She was clothed in black from head to foot, instead of the white dress of the portrait. She had no knowledge of the conflict, of nothing but that she was called for, that her fate might depend on the next few minutes. In her eyes there was a pathetic question, a line of anxiety in the lids, an innocent appeal in the looks. And the face the same: the same lips, sensitive, ready to quiver; the same innocent, candid brow; the look of a common race, which is more subtle than mere resemblance. How I knew that it was so, I cannot tell, nor any man. It was the other – the elder – ah no! Not elder; the ever young, the Agnes to whom age can never come – she who they say was the mother of a man who never saw her – it was she who led her kinswoman, her representative, into our hearts.³²⁰

This was the message. Philip now knows with certainty that it was his mother who pulled the strings all along. The restoration of her portrait in the drawing-room, in the room which was her reign and from which she ruled the house, allowed her son to acknowledge her existence. Philip's thoughts fill with questions about the mother he never knew, about her role in his life and the one that she might have had had she lived, and this is the cue for the mother to make contact with her son. It is a strong image of motherly bond that outlives death, resisting beyond the boundaries of life and death, as Agnes seems to understand her boy's needs even now that he is a grown man, and even though she never had the chance to care for him. Philip perceives this bond, and eventually his terror subdues to the acceptance of his role as messenger. This passage turns the terrible, the dreadful uncanny into the warm homely: Agnes's face and character were unknown to Philip, but once he builds a sort of relationship with his lost parent he comes to full comprehension, and his fear vanishes. In turn, Agnes has played the role of angel in the house even in her spiritual form, through her son: she saved her family from a future of discord and regret and saved her kinswoman from being neglected. By bringing Agnes to her former house, the spiritual Agnes has given a reason to her son to be happy, as Philip marries the girl, and a reason to her husband to open his heart once more. Young Agnes, possibly the physical

³²⁰Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, p. 162.

reincarnation of the other one, establishes her “kingdom” in the drawing-room, beneath the portrait; the house regains the female presence it had lacked for years, returning to life. The bond between father and son is restored and reinforced, Mr. Canning no longer spends his hours alone in the library, but in the company of his reformed family. Once her duty is done, Agnes returns to the silent world of spirits:

It is supposed by strangers that the picture on the wall is that of my wife; and I have always been glad that it should be so supposed. She who was my mother, who came back to me and became as my soul for three strange moments and no more, but with whom I can feel no credible relationship as she stands there, has retired for me into the tender regions of the unseen. She has passed once more into the secret company of those shadows, who can only become real in an atmosphere fitted to modify and harmonise all differences, and make all wonders possible – the light of the perfect day.³²¹

Oliphant’s portrayed figure is a benevolent representation of a member of the family who is still tied to her house and her family: if we were to use the canonical definitions of portrait crafted by Ziolkowski, we would have to define this portrait as in between the *genius loci* and the *figura* categories. In his groundbreaking study on literary iconology, Ziolkowski started from the “superstitious” consideration that if the portrait is the receptacle of the soul, then the soul or spirit of the deceased might well continue to animate the portrait long after the original body has died.³²² He stated that no Gothic novel could be complete without a case of mistaken identity caused by the resemblance between a living individual and a portrayed, deceased one, and that the general conclusion to this kind of trope is the realisation that there is indeed a descendant who strikingly looks like the portrayed deceased relative,³²³ a resemblance that triggers the action,³²⁴ as in the case of Oliphant’s ‘The Portrait’ and the two

³²¹Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 163.

³²²Theodore Ziolkowski, *Disenchanted Images. A Literary Iconology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 80

³²³Ziolkowski, *Disenchanted Images*, p. 86.

³²⁴Pierluigi Pellini, «Il Tema del quadro animato nella letteratura del secondo Ottocento», *Belfagor*, Vol. 56, no. 1 (gennaio 2001), pp. 10-13.

Agneses. Ziolkowski identified three different categories of haunted portrait: the *genius loci*, a portrait tied to a place and its ancestry, usually the representation of a malevolent, diabolic ancestor who still holds power over the household; this is also the dominant category in Gothic literature. The two remaining categories are the *figura* portrait, a painting of the past that foreshadows future events, and the *anima* portrait, painted in the fictional present that stands in a supernatural relationship with its model, as in the case of Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray* (1891). Oliphant's portrayed Agnes is a *genius loci* if we consider her "afterlife" bond with her house, husband and son, but she is also a *figura*, for her intervention upon her family's vicissitude determines, while not foreshadowing it, the positive outcome of the plot and her men's future perspectives. Agnes's portrait actively determines the course of events, but it also possesses a revelatory function of feelings, troubles, and truths untold by the protagonists: echoing Poe's 'Tell-Tale Heart', we could speak of "tell-tale portrait", which causes, at first, confusion, uncertainty, destabilization and even surprise³²⁵ before the internalization of the truth unfold. Oliphant staged a perfect *genius loci* in her 'The Secret Chamber', where the apparently moving portrait of the late Lord Gowrie torments the young protagonist, who has the constant sensation of being spied on. The portrait in question showcases a cruel man who had committed gruesome crimes, but to whom the family is compelled to swear fealty that, if transgressed, generates the *unheimlich*, anxiety and fear, feelings that keep it from being challenged. In 'The Secret Chamber', portraiture becomes an issue of hereditariness, privilege and power,³²⁶ and it often involves the sight or the fact of being observed, what Pellini called the «perturbing look», which he connects to the trope of the pact with the Devil,³²⁷ typical of fantastic literature; he also discussed the relationship between the portrait of a malevolent ancestor, as is the case of Oliphant's former Lord Gowrie, and the theme of hereditariness, of a young man led to bequeath an evil legacy, which he

³²⁵Sergio Perosa, *L'Isola, la donna, il ritratto. Quattro variazioni* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1996), p. 83.

³²⁶Pierluigi Pellini, *Il Quadro animato. Tematiche artistiche e letteratura fantastica* (Milano: Edizioni dell'Arco, 2001), pp. 35-36.

³²⁷Pellini, «Il Tema del quadro animato nella letteratura del secondo Ottocento», p. 14.

described as «hereditary uncanny», that is to say a genetic correlation between the living and the portrayed ‘devil’.³²⁸

1.5 Domestic Violence and Murder

In many of the narratives in the corpus analysed for this study, the incorporeal entities that haunt houses have become ghosts following their murder by members of their family, mainly for economic reasons.³²⁹ These domestic crimes epitomise the idea brought along by sensation fiction of peril coming from inside the house, and not from the outside, defying the more reassuring Victorian conception of the house as a safe sanctuary. In 1946, George Orwell wrote an essay published in the *Tribune* entitled *Decline of the English Murder*,³³⁰ where he argued that the Golden Age of murder in Britain was between 1850 and 1925, covering a great part of Victoria’s reign; he mentioned a series of nine murderers including Dr. Palmer of Rugeley,³³¹ Thomas Neill Cream,³³² Bywaters and Thompson,³³³ and also the best known British

³²⁸Pellini, «Il Tema del quadro animato nella letteratura del secondo Ottocento», p. 13.

³²⁹In Braddon’s ‘His Secret’ the victim is a man, Captain Wyatt, murdered because of jealousy by his friend Jasper, who is in love with Wyatt’s wife, Isabel.

³³⁰George Orwell, *Decline of the English Murder* (London: Penguin Books, 2009).

³³¹William Palmer (1824-1856), called the Rugeley Poisoner (after the name of his hometown in Staffordshire) or the Prince of Poisoners, was a doctor found guilty of the murder of a friend by poisoning with strychnine; he was also suspected of the murder of other people, including his brother, his mother-in-law and four of his children. He was sentenced to death and hanged the year after his conviction. In the *The Demeanour of Murderers* (*Household Words* XIII, no. 325, June 1856, available at *Dickens Journals Online*, www.djo.org.uk), Dickens called him «the greatest villain that ever stood in the Old Bailey.»

³³²Thomas Neill Cream (1850-1892), also known as the Lambeth Poisoner, was another doctor known to have poisoned several people in both America and Great Britain; he was convicted and sentenced to death after he attempted to frame others for his crimes, a fact that made him the police’s first suspect.

³³³Edith Jessie Thompson (1893-1923) and Frederick E. F. Bywaters were an English couple having an affair while Edith was married to Percy Thompson, and both were accused of Percy’s murder. The man was stabbed to death one night while returning home with his wife after a *soirée*, ambushed by Bywaters. The culprit was immediately arrested. The love letters that Edith and Frederick had exchanged during their relationship were exploited during the trial as evidence of murder instigation, since the woman admitted that she wanted to be freed from her husband. Despite Bywaters’s claims

serial killer, Jack the Ripper.³³⁴ Orwell explained that the majority of the murder cases he discussed were triggered by sexual motives, but that in more than half the cases the principal cause was «to get hold of a certain known sum of money such as a legacy or an insurance policy, but the amount involved was nearly always small», and that the background of these murders was essentially domestic: of twelve victims, seven were either wife or husband of the murderer and some belonged to the middle class.

In his 1856 essay “The Demeanour of Murderers”, which appeared in *Household Words*, Dickens discussed the case of Dr. Palmer, who had killed a friend and probably some members of his family for money, as he was in financial distress because of his vices, namely gambling on horses. His ascertained victim and friend John Cook died one night after having won £800 at Shrewbury Races, feeling sick after sipping at a grog prepared for him by Palmer to celebrate. Palmer was also known for having defrauded his mother of her large wealth.³³⁵ As Trodd stated, starting from mid-Victorian times domestic spaces became theatres of crimes because of the difficult relations between the private and the public sphere, due to the necessity of keeping a façade of respectability while struggling with internal crisis. Trodd and Showalter noticed that Victorian sensation fiction drew its power from the exposure of secrecy in middle-class life,³³⁶ the flaking of the domestic wall behind which secrets and mysteries lurk, unseen by others but eroding the family from within. The

that Edith was innocent and was unaware of his plans, and that he had no intentions of killing his rival but of simply confronting him, they were both sentenced to death. Edith became hysterical in court upon hearing the verdict, but she was considered the controlling mind of the situation and was not spared. Bywaters uselessly tried until the end to save his lover, who was also believed to be pregnant when she was hanged. This case attracted particular attention even after the execution, because many believed that Edith had been treated unfairly, and that a climate of prejudice was created in court to make her appear as a vulgar adulteress who seduced a man eight years her junior.

³³⁴One of the most famous serial killers of all times, whose identity remains unknown still today. He murdered at least five women, all prostitutes, namely Mary Ann Nicholls, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes, and Mary Jane Kelly, all horribly mutilated and disfigured.

³³⁵Murders and trials were comparable to actual spectacles, both in fiction and in reality: see Judith Flanders, *The Invention of Murder: How the Victorians Revelled in Death and Detection and Created Modern Crime* (London: HarperCollins, 2011).

³³⁶Trodd, *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel*, p. 2.

representation of domestic crime in sensation fiction, especially in mid-Victorian times, became a way of describing the relationship of middle-class families with the external world and between family members themselves. Novels and short narratives staging domestic crimes as their main plot triggers allowed to open discussions regarding the oscillating Victorian tension between privacy and domesticity, public life, and appearances. This kind of discussion involved women as guardians of the house, as the angels whose duty was to safeguard their family against the threats of the external world and intestine tension.³³⁷ Some plots contradicted this idealisation of the female role by turning the feminine pillar of the house into a criminal, where the «criminal angel»³³⁸ acquires disruptive powers and destabilises the domestic equilibrium. There are male criminals too, of course, but they lack the representative force of the angel as not directly involved with the preservation of the sanctuary.³³⁹

George Eliot was particularly interested in the topic of secrecy and deception contaminating the household. Her horror³⁴⁰ novella *The Lifted Veil* (1859) sees the disruption of the marriage between Latimer, the narrator who believes to have premonitory abilities and knows when he will die, and Bertha, his dead brother's ex-fiancée, after he discovers the manipulative nature of the woman. After Bertha's maid, Mrs. Archer, dies, she is momentarily brought back to life through a blood transfusion performed by the scientist Charles Meunier, who transfuses his own blood into Mrs. Archer's veins. During her few moments of reanimation, the woman accuses Bertha of intending to murder her husband out of jealousy and reveals the location of the poison which Mrs. Archer herself had fetched her lady.³⁴¹ At this point, Bertha flees and Latimer dies soon afterwards as he had predicted. Poisoning was particularly associated with murderous women in Victorian times, a devious lethal weapon

³³⁷See also Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon. The Life of a Victorian Myth*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

³³⁸Trodd, *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel*, p. 9.

³³⁹Trodd, *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel*, p. 9.

³⁴⁰The tale is valued as one of the forefathers of horror fiction along with Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886).

³⁴¹George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil and Brother Jacob*, ed. Sally Shuttleworth (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 41.

because often undetectable, which could easily be concealed inside the house. Poison clearly reminds of the snake, highlighting the serpent, or demon, side of the so-called angel in the house.³⁴²

Jealousy is another powerful fuel for murder or removal of family members in many narratives, both novels and short stories. Shakespeare's «green-eyed monster»³⁴³ makes two sisters turn against one another in Gaskell's 'The Old Nurse's Story' (1852), where Miss Grace and Miss Maud Furnivall fall in love with the same foreign musician who visits their house every summer; he hunts two rabbits at a time for a while, but eventually marries Maud in secret. This wedding is opposed to by the girl's father, Lord Furnivall, and when a baby girl is born from their relationship, Maud must keep her hidden in a farmhouse. Despite their marriage, Maud sees her husband courting her sister, which makes her extremely jealous of Grace. The musician returns the following summer for the last time, having grown weary of the sisters' mutual envy, while the women hate each other at this point. In a fit of frustration, one day Maud confesses that she was married to the musician, a mistake that she will regret, as a furious Grace tells their father everything. The man banishes his disgraced daughter and granddaughter from the house and prevents anyone from sheltering and feeding them, he even violently hits the child in an attempt to kill her. Maud runs into the moors with her daughter, who does not survive the freezing cold. Maud is found «all crazy and smiling»³⁴⁴ nursing the dead child. She is not murdered by a human agent, but the lack of empathy shown by her aunt and grandfather led to her premature death, an innocent victim of her aunt's jealousy and yearning for revenge. The musician eventually abandons both Maud and Grace, but they prove incapable of teaming up against the man who mocked them both and, instead, fuel their mutual hate until it consumes their family. The consequences are the ghosts that never leave the house and accompany Grace's exhausting consciousness of her actions until she

³⁴²Scientific advancement made poison harder to detect, and as it was more easily produced it became less expensive, easier to administer and to retrieve. See Cheryl B. Price, «Poison, Sensation, and Secrets in "The Lifted Veil"», *Victorian Review* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2010), p. 204.

³⁴³Act 3, Scene 3. See William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

³⁴⁴Gaskell, *Gothic Tales*, p. 28.

dies, death-stricken before the re-enactment of the night her sister and niece were expelled.

Another story where jealousy is the trigger of the malevolent actions of a character is Riddell's 'Walnut-Tree House': the protagonist, Mr. Stainton, who belongs to the ascending middle class, buys a house that had been uninhabited for seven years since its previous owner had been admitted to an asylum. This specific amount of time is reiterated thrice in the same page to highlight the unwillingness of people to find out the truth about the events that the narrator tells, as if it were a judgement *a posteriori* of the community who does not seem to collaborate.³⁴⁵ The new owner, as Mr. Stainton is often referred to, is deaf to the community's talks about the haunting of the house, he sarcastically comments «the sooner it gets unhaunted the better»,³⁴⁶ and moves in. On the same night he first meets the ghost of a child, a poorly dressed boy with the saddest look in his eyes, peering around as if in search for something. The ghost's appearance is presented quite cinematographically with a series of sounds, first a knock on the door while Stainton is lost in thought, then sounds as if someone was looking for the door's handle, and the tension rises as the man takes out his gun; then some jump scares come as the door opens suddenly and the child enters the room. Stainton's bewilderment soon turns into interest as the ghost-seeing becomes more and more frequent, and the owner decides that it is time to find out who that child is. At the end of a whirlwind of people more or less willing to speak, Stainton learns that the boy was the legitimate heir to the mansion, but his grandfather's will, certifying this, went lost. He was an orphan who was raised with his sister by his grandfather and uncle, who grew jealous of the child and terribly mistreated both him and his sister. The girl, May, was rescued by an aunt, who would have returned to save her nephew too, had the boy not died prematurely. The narrator explains that the boy had let himself wither progressively and died of a broken heart after being separated from his sister. His uncle's refusal to cure him led to the child's death and to his becoming the heir to the family's fortune. However, he grew mad as the child immediately manifested his ghostly presence looking for his sister and not the will, as the reader

³⁴⁵Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 3.

³⁴⁶Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 4.

might initially think. The pieces come together in the end: May returns to the house and is reunited with her brother, who finally finds peace. The will is found in the room where their grandfather had died, May and Stainton marry, and equilibrium is re-established.

The representation of women in narratives about domestic murder or deviancy is often softened to render female characters less threatening. For instance, as Walsh noticed,³⁴⁷ Lady Audley in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* is almost asexual, as having a woman both criminally and sexually oriented would be too great an affront to Victorian sensibility and the bourgeois consciousness. Walsh recalled the 1857 trial of Madeleine Smith³⁴⁸ accused of the murder of her lover Emile L'Angelier. Her sexually explicit letters to the victim were not considered as evidence against her, but she was somehow represented as having been plagiarised by her lover instead of being herself the most sexually 'aggressive' in the couple. Nonetheless, not all Victorian female authors compromised with this 'technique', in particular Charlotte Riddell presented her female criminal characters quite explicitly. She is the author who most often exploited homicide as the triggering event of the narrative. Scholars³⁴⁹ have generally discussed Riddell's murderous characters in terms of their relationship with money, given the strong presence of the economic subject both in her short stories and in her novels. The thread linking money, home, inheritance and death is strong in Riddell's works, and it often recurs also in short stories like 'Walnut-Tree House', 'Nut-Bush Farm' and 'The Open Door', discussed above. These three can all be defined as revenge tales, as their plots revolve around the restoration of truth, and all but 'Nut-Bush Farm'³⁵⁰ present family ties compromised by lost wills, problems of

³⁴⁷See Walsh, *Domestic Murder in Nineteenth Century England*, page numbers unavailable.

³⁴⁸For more information about Madeleine Smith and other female killers of the Victorian Age see Randa Helfield, «*Poisonous Plots: Women Sensation Novelists and Murderesses of the Victorian Period*», *Victorian Review* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1995), pp. 161-188.

³⁴⁹See Edmunson, *Women's Ghost Literature in Nineteenth-Century Britain*.

³⁵⁰The narrator moves to Nut-Bush Farm, a countryside mansion whose previous owner had left, abandoning his family, apparently to escape with a younger woman. Eventually the truth will be revealed, and the rumours proved false; the good name of the man is restored after an investigation: he had been killed by a woman, the landowner who currently rents the property, who murdered him in the desolate countryside and robbed him.

inheritance and legitimacy.³⁵¹ In 'The Open Door' in particular, family ties are severed by a wife who murders her husband for her economic independence, a figure that stands in stark contrast with the narrator, who is a man but still incapable of maintaining his own economic status (even his father had incurred into bank failure, having to rely on his son's insufficient income). This causes anxiety to the young man, as his very modest economic conditions prevent him from providing for his own living and his family's. Furthermore, the narrator makes it plain that, even though he detests his job, he is not allowed to look for another occupation, as his parents request that appearances remain intact.³⁵² The family's anxiety for respectability consumes its unity, as the narrator recalls the episode of his aunt's marriage, taken out «so dreadfully below, that my mother refused to acknowledge the relationship.»³⁵³ The narrator encounters Lord Ladlow, who owns an uninhabitable house, Ladlow Hall, where a door stands constantly open for unknown reasons. He asks the narrator to investigate and offers him a good sum of money, which, of course, the narrator accepts. He will discover that the door stays open because of the ghost that haunts Ladlow Hall, the former owner and uncle to Lord Ladlow. The lord had been disinherited by his uncle in favour of his young aunt, but, three days before his death, his uncle had changed his mind and, consequently, the will, redirecting his wealth to his nephew for reasons «that involved his honour.»³⁵⁴ Lord Ladlow had asked his uncle to preserve the appearances of a happy couple by providing his wife with part of his wealth, for «people may think she has not been the source of happiness [you]

³⁵¹Also, some short stories in Mary Molesworth's second collection of ghost stories, *Uncanny Tales*, present unresolved questions of inheritance. 'The Shadow in the Moonlight' stages a ghost whose haunting presence relates to a tapestry, which he follows wherever the item is moved. This tapestry used to conceal a door leading to a hidden room in the ghost's mansion where he engaged in gambling. People who witness the ghost's appearance see claw-like hands feeling about as if trying to grab a handle to open a door, and the tapestry is found to perfectly match a spot in a wall where a door used to exist. The tapestry thus covers a door leading to a secret wing of the palace where orgies and other degrading activities used to take place. Mary Molesworth, 'The Shadow in the Moonlight', in *Uncanny Tales* (London: Hutchison & Co., 1896), pp. 1-81.

³⁵²Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 30.

³⁵³Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 31.

³⁵⁴Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 50.

expected»,³⁵⁵ but the question could not be brought further for the following morning, the body of the old man was found, with marks of shooting. Lady Ladlow proved «very vindictive, spared no expense in trying to prove my guilt, and said openly she would never rest till she saw justice done.»³⁵⁶ Lady Ladlow's behaviour is quite suspicious, and full of animosity, as the coroner himself detected after the analysis of the crime scene. The tragedy and the initial supremacy of Lady Ladlow, who could count on the old will, which was still in existence, caused the young lord's loss of both title and wealth, obliging him to move abroad.

The investigation leads to the realisation that the enemy is not the ghost, who simply keeps the door open for the truth to be discovered, but a physical, tangible, real enemy, easier to fight on one side, but as unpredictable as the supernatural on the other, for the human mind is unfathomable. The narrator will indeed literally wrestle with the killer and risk his life: the culprit is revealed to be Lady Ladlow, who kept stalking the house, disseminating evidence such as a hairpin, in search for the will. The will itself represented the motive of her crime, for if found, it would have demonstrated her interest in silencing her husband. The final verdict of guilt comes directly from the ghost, so far unseen, who appears for a fraction of a second before his wife and the narrator, «an awful figure, with uplifted hand»,³⁵⁷ indicating the murderer. The will is found in the room where Lord Ladlow had been killed, and his nephew legitimately obtains his wealth and name back.

Despite these representations of female criminals both in the press and in fiction, Victorian women were bound to a system of male dominance that they tried to escape even through the most extreme means, but their role remained mainly attached to the ideal of domestic candour and fulfilment of the husband's wishes. In this context, popular culture became women's outlet to discuss this issue, especially in the form of sensation fiction or Gothic narratives. Authoresses wrote to question male power and sexuality in radical terms by codifying them within the frame of the fantastic, thus being free to discuss such delicate themes without risking being censored. This is well

³⁵⁵Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 49.

³⁵⁶Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 49.

³⁵⁷Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 57.

illustrated, again, by Charlotte Riddell in some of her short narratives, where women are brutally murdered because of their wealth.

Many tales staged male characters, symbolising the ideal of Victorian masculinity, who soil their hands by committing crimes and whose victims are frequently women. Middle-class men were supposed to be the heralds of economic and scientific advancement, while being dominant in their domestic role as fathers and husbands yet proving to be caring and devoted to their families. This was required by the nineteenth-century ideal of family union. According to Surridge, many Victorian works showed the tendency to scrutinise male behaviour within the domestic walls and connect manhood with the ideal of domesticity.³⁵⁸ In an essay that starts by mentioning the wedding tradition of blowing the bride on the head with a wedding shoe to mark the transfer of authority to the husband, Tromp argued that, in the mid-nineteenth century, marriage in itself implied violence from the very beginning, meaning that family stability was achieved if the wife submitted to the husband's authority: basically, if the bride followed social strictures and kept her place, the bridegroom might not feel compelled to resort to knocking her with his shoe, literally beating her or worse.³⁵⁹ Masculinity was being particularly "threatened" by various Acts promulgated from the mid-nineteenth century like the Divorce Act of 1857 and the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, which granted property rights to married women, and an 1891 Act that forbade the detention of wives on the part of their husbands, reinforcing the legal status of women in Britain. Furthermore, women often remained unmarried: a census mentioned also by Walsh³⁶⁰ shows that almost 2.5 million women had not contracted marriage in 1891. Feminist movements were rising under the banner of The New Woman; middle-class or high-class women could receive better education towards the end of nineteenth century, especially in terms of higher education: «by 1897, there were nine women's colleges in Oxford, London and

³⁵⁸Lisa Surridge, *Bleak Houses. Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), p. 46.

³⁵⁹Tromp, «"Throwing the Wedding Shoe": Foundational Violence, Unhappy Couples, and Murderous Women», *Victorian Review* 39, no. 2 (Fall 2013), pp. 39-43.

³⁶⁰See Walsh, *Domestic Murder*, page numbers unavailable.

Cambridge, with a total of 748 students.»³⁶¹ Education led to employment for many women, who were particularly requested in hospitals, schools and offices. Such progress in the treatment of women and their rights obviously destabilised masculinity, defined by Sussman as a historical construction,³⁶² a stereotype of heterosexual masculinity with a specific dominant role in both the private and public sphere. As Walsh stated,

Since the model developed alongside that of separate spheres, which emphasized gender segregation and celebrated men's public virtues and women's domestic containment, it is hardly surprising that tensions developed rapidly. Critics were quick to equate manly emotion and tenderness with effeminacy and weakness, and the passionate outbursts associated with Romanticism gradually fell into disfavour, to be replaced by a more controlled and rational male demeanour.³⁶³

Walsh reported a case of murder whose development was recorded by the *Times* throughout 1849, from August to November, exemplifying this concept of Victorian male virility. In November 1849, Frederick Manning and his wife Maria were executed for the murder of Patrick O' Connor, the woman's lover. The man's body was found a few days after the homicide, he had been shot twice in the head and repeatedly hit *post-mortem*. The couple escaped, but they were both found and jailed for murder. It is possible that the motive was related to money, but the press and the jury concentrated on the relationship between the spouses: the representation of the two, also in terms of physical aspect, changed and became increasingly negative with the unravelling of the plot, as Maria was the leader in the couple, while Frederick was found to be the weak side, only submitting to his wife's bidding.

The press also reported a huge number of crimes committed against women, which occurred much more frequently than felony against men, testifying to attempts to

³⁶¹See Walsh, *Domestic Murder*, page numbers unavailable.

³⁶²Tromp, «“Throwing the Wedding Shoe”», pp. 39-43. See Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³⁶³See Walsh, *Domestic Murder*, page numbers unavailable.

affirm male authority over women. In fact, reports of marital violence and abuses against wives became ordinary in Victorian newspapers, feeding the public macabre interest in crime stories. In an unsigned article published in the *North British Review* in 1896, “Outrages on Women”, the author wrote that «in the criminal annals of England, outrages upon women have of late years held a distressingly prominent position.»³⁶⁴ Such articles led to discussions about the husband’s control over the wife’s body, and about how to improve women’s life quality within their houses, considering that fits of violence were frequently reported. The debate concerned the law and when it was appropriate to intrude upon a family’s private business, what limits should be attributed to the husband’s management of his wife’s person and possessions. Laws like the Divorce Act and the Married Women Property Act were the offspring of this growing consciousness of women’s rights. Surridge reported that from 1850 to 1900 laws enforcing sentences for violence against the wife were implemented in 1853, the maximum penalty for aggravated assault on women was raised to one year; in 1875, many members of the judiciary reportedly considered current penalties for marital cruelty insufficient, so that they were embittered with The Wife Beaters Act of 1882 authorized flogging and public pillory of abusers.³⁶⁵

As for domestic abuses on women in the corpus,³⁶⁶ it is once again Charlotte Riddell the most prolific author in this direction. ‘The Old House in Vauxhall Walk’³⁶⁷ has a particular denouement because, as previously explained, it evolves through the visions that the protagonist, Graham Coulton, has in his sleep. The ghost of Miss Tynan haunts the house where Graham can provisionally stay thanks to the generosity of his friend

³⁶⁴«Outrages on Women», *North British Review* 25 (May 1896), p. 233.

³⁶⁵Surridge, *Bleak Houses*, p. 2. In relation to abuses on women, Surridge also discussed domestic animals abuse: she suggested that the beating of pets on the part of a husband was often interpreted as a sign that violence was perpetrated against wives as well. This implies that a link between violence against humans and against animals existed in many cases, also suggesting an analogy between the position of women within the household and that of animals.

³⁶⁶Florence Marryat’s ‘The Invisible Tenants of Rushmere’ presents a story of femicide perpetrated by a father against his daughter because of her falling in love with a man not deemed worthy. This act of cruelty leads to the girl’s restless soul lingering in the world of the living in an eternal re-enacting of the night of her death, pervading the house with a sense of deep sorrow.

³⁶⁷See Section 1.1.

and its owner; she is bound to earth by her excessive attachment to money, her «accursed greed of gold»;³⁶⁸ her materiality prevents her from ascending to the spiritual life. Graham's visions always stage many people who surround Miss Tynan asking for her support, but her avarice allowed her no acts of generosity. One man stands out, her brother, as Coulton guesses, who implores her to help him in the name of family ties that she is not interested in keeping, for family means to share. The scene unravels before another ghost, an ancestor of the siblings, possibly their father:

In his eyes there was a dark look of anger, on his lips a curling smile of disgust, and, somehow, even in his sleep, the dreamer understood it was the ancestor to the descendant he beheld – that the house put to mean uses in which he lay had never so far descended from its high estate, as the woman possessed of so pitiful a soul, contaminated with the most despicable and insidious vice poor humanity knows, for all other vices seem to have connection with the flesh, but the greed of the miser eats into the very soul.³⁶⁹

Miss Tynan represents the exact opposite to the angel in the house, never welcoming, isolated from society of her own will, her house a heap of dirt and dilapidated, as is her own person. A rotten soul beyond redemption, and yet, still a human being unjustly murdered. During one of his visions, Graham sees a bedchamber and

The outline of someone lying huddled on the bed. Drawing nearer, he found it was that of the person whose dreadful presence seemed to pervade the house. What a terrible sight she looked, with her thin white locks scattered over the pillow, with what were mere remnants of blankets gathered about her shoulders, with her claw-like fingers clutching the clothes, as though even in sleep she was guarding her gold! [...] Then he saw first one man and then his fellow steal cautiously into the room. Another second, and the pair stood beside the bed, murder in their eyes.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 107.

³⁶⁹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 106-107.

³⁷⁰Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 108.

Graham empathises with the endangered woman and tries to scream to warn her when he realises their intentions, but of course he cannot be heard, and he lies unable to act, witnessing the men hitting and stabbing Miss Tynan. This appears as a domestic murder, committed by a member of a family against another member of the same family, until the end of the story, because Miss Tynan's brother is the first and sole suspect: it is known that he had come to ask her for some money the day before the murder and, considering that the money could not be found, he could never clear himself of the accusations. The actual murderers are eventually identified as two wretches who had tried to strip the old woman of her property apparently not possessing any of their own. Miss Tynan's greed is presented by Riddell as the worst sin possible, the most despicable quality, which yet does not justify slaughter. Miss Tynan appears as a Victorian woman who gains and administers her own wealth without the brokerage of men. She could be read as a New Woman, developing and protecting her own independence; Riddell brought it to an unacceptable extreme in the period of transition between the rise of women rights' movements and the conservatism of Victorian ideology, that still tried to relegate women to the domestic corner. Men were still those supposed to pull the strings of the economic, social, and scientific panorama. The robbery of Miss Tynan's money, though failed, symbolically stands for the subduing of women to a still chauvinist vision of the world.

The same interpretation can be attributed to Old Mrs. Jones, the ghost of Riddell's homonymous tale, a woman this time murdered in her own house and, in addition, by her husband, fully fulfilling the concept of domestic murder. The first character to be presented in the story is Mr. Richard "Dick" Tippens, the proud and happy *pater familias*, as Riddell puts it, a perfect father and husband as middle-class Victorian codes demanded, but with two faults: «one, a tendency to be extra generous; the other, a perhaps undue fondness for an extra glass»,³⁷¹ which appears to be 'justifiable' if one thinks of his profession as cab-driver and its difficulties. Mr. Tippens's greatest pride lies in the old house he has bought, once belonging to the famous Doctor Jones,

³⁷¹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 130.

which is at this point a ramshackle building and thus rented for a small sum. But it is enough to satisfy this middle-class family's aspiration to rise to the upper stratus of society. On the other side, Mrs. Tippens is 'generous' in her own way, for behind her haughtiness she is a spendthrift: she receives a liberal allowance from her husband, hosts paying lodgers in her house and takes on little works such as needlework, yet she would always spend more than she could afford without saving. Seeing small amounts of money coming in regularly, an uncertain income being the product of occasional work, makes her less careful about expenses, for she deludes herself that she will continuously gain the same amounts. A flashforward reveals that, eventually, the woman's extravagances will make her destitute. As Riddell commented: «it is a pity someone, thoroughly up in financial questions, does not inform us why uncertain incomes lead almost invariably to extravagant living.»³⁷² This is probably why she complains about Richard's generosity, directed above all towards Mickey, his employer, whom Mrs. Tippens detests because he leeches on her husband, being a «drunken, dissolute, lying, discontented, carneying old vagabond»³⁷³ who threatens the family's respectability. Yet, Mickey is the only one who warns the Tippenses about the presence of Mrs. Jones, who

Troubles everybody that tries to live in the house you're so set up with. Why, the last people did not stop a fortnight. It's well known she walks the place over, from the second floor down; and, if you take my advice, you won't go into the back-cellar alone after night.³⁷⁴

Riddell's cinematic style of presenting her ghosts develops clearly in this tale: one night, all is calm, and husband and wife are talking before the fire when a sudden shriek fills the air, then a thud as if someone had fallen. They find the governess, Mrs. Pendell, unconscious on the floor. When she returns to herself, she explains that Mrs. Jones had appeared before her eyes; while the household is taking care of the woman,

³⁷²Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 135-136.

³⁷³Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 132.

³⁷⁴Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 134.

from the children's bedroom comes a climax of screams, "mother!". The children are afraid of a woman who, they say, came to their room holding a light, and touched one of them.

What is known is that Mrs. Jones was enormously rich, and people believe she was an arrogant miser whom her husband married only for her wealth. Gossips say the doctor murdered his wife and buried her into the cellar, and since all the digging brought no body to light, the matter was dismissed unceremoniously, also because Doctor Jones himself disappeared into thin air. Others say the woman had been mistreated her whole married life by her husband, his violence culminating with murder and the denial of a dignified burial. Rumours say he used to drag her about by her hair, he starved her and hit her. Doctor Jones, who succeeded to his father in the profession, hid this cruelty under the façade of the good reputation earned amongst his circle of patients; never lazy or self-indulgent, he was basically adored by anyone, especially women. Then rumours began to circulate about him, concerning things deemed intolerable by Victorian codes of decorum and virtue: Jones was a drunkard and a gambler who led a loose lifestyle, living at the expenses of his sister, with whom he cohabited.³⁷⁵

The day came when Miss Jones could endure the drinking and the smoking and the card-playing and the boon-companions no longer [...] She packed up her belongings and left the house where she had been born. Further, she employed a lawyer to disentangle her pecuniary affairs from those of her brother. Then all their little world knew dreadful things must be going on at Dr. Jones's. His character, or rather lack of character, was discussed both by church and chapel goers. His doings added a fresh zest to parish visiting, for, of course, the poor knew even more about the doctor's sins than their betters. His tastes led him to prefer bold, flaunting women to their more modest, if not less frail, sisters; and the brazen impudence of the "dreadful creatures" he successively selected for housekeepers furnished as constant theme for comment and gossip as the shortcomings of Doctor Jones himself.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 146.

³⁷⁶Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 146.

The doctor's indecorous behaviour leads to a resonating collapse of his reputation. It is believed a wife could steady him, and surprise reverberates upon the announcement of his imminent wedding to a lady older than him and wealthier. The house improved, the drawing-room was ameliorated, respectable housekeepers were engaged, and all signs of the doctor's vices disappeared from view. However, after three years of marriage, the doctor's conduct worsened and was even more terrible than before. All sorts of rumours circulated, mainly regarding him being violent and her not providing her husband with a single shilling of her wealth. Rumours said that she was seen with «rolls and rolls of banknotes and with such diamonds and rubies as the 'queen of Sheba or Solomon himself could have had nothing more splendid'.»³⁷⁷ Mrs. Jones was jealous of female servants and would not hire any, so the house grew dirty and neglected, comparable to Miss Tynan's Vauxhall Walk house. Dr. Jones returned to his 'hobbies' in the slums and grew indebted, but his wife would not pay for him. One day, nothing more was heard of them. Through a tell-tale dream, the dynamics of Miss Jones's murder are discovered:

I was in a room I had never seen before, with three windows to the street, and one long, narrow window [...] well furnished with chairs and tables [...] she was the strangest woman [I] ever beheld, so little, she was forced to stand on a footstool to see herself in the glass; she had a brown face and grey hair, and her dress was unfastened, and a necklace, that sparkled and glittered, clasped her neck, and she pinned a brooch, that shone like fire, in the front of her under bodice; and on a little table beside her lay an open jewel case, in which there were precious stones gleaming like green and yellow stars.³⁷⁸

Through the reflection in the glass, the dreamer, the young cousin of Mr. Tippens, sees the door open and a man come in. The woman screams and tries to hide her jewels with her clothes, but he is too quick and snatches the necklace while grabbing the case. She has her fingers tightly bent around the necklace and screams furiously, but the man holds on to it strangling the lady.

³⁷⁷Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p.149.

³⁷⁸Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 159-160.

One could imagine the doctor observing his wife from behind the door, seeing her basking in her riches while he is heavily indebted, obsessed by his vices and money loss. His wife exerts her power over him by refusing to help him economically, which makes Jones livid, and he cannot resist anymore. He eventually gives in to the worst of sins, murder, aggravated by the brutality Mrs. Jones has been victim to. She is a woman of power in economic terms, but she fears her husband: the moment she sees him, she seems to realise his intentions, as she was used to being mistreated, and screams for help but there is no one in the house. Even though Mrs. Jones can be considered as a miser who does not want to share her wealth, she can also be interpreted as a woman who tries to save her husband from further decline. At the beginning of their marriage, the house is well kept and good housekeepers inhabit it, helping the angel Mrs. Jones in domestic administration. It is only after the doctor's mistreatments and relapse into vice that things fall apart. She had tried to fulfil the role of domestic sanctuary-keeper, but her husband's shameful behaviour caused her and her house's decline into a state of neglect and turned her into a miserly person. In order to preserve her wealth and attempt to save her husband from further getting into debt, Mrs. Jones refused to lend him money, which the doctor considered as a pure affront to his manliness; he tried to re-affirm his dominance over her through brute force and, when this was no longer enough, annihilation.

Victorians were attracted by journalistic reports of crimes, trials and executions, and fiction inevitably drew inspiration from reality. Many cases of female murderers were presented, either the result of evil, criminal minds or desperate attempts to be free of social strictures. Fiction often embraced real accounts and transformed them into tales that contradicted the ideal of the angel in the house by staging criminal, or potentially lethal, ladies like Braddon's Lady Audley, all this happening in a context of social developments involving a growing consciousness of women's rights. However, at the same time, the new pro-women laws and movements jeopardised the ideal of male authority and dominance within and without the domestic walls. In Riddell's 'The House in Vauxhall Walk' and 'Old Mrs Jones', two economically independent women are murdered by men, in one case a suspected brother, in the other a husband, who forcibly attempt to restore their role of 'alpha' from both a social and

private point of view, by taking the life and wealth of the women who had dared threaten their authority.

1.6 Ghosts: Guests or Hosts?

In haunted houses, ghosts occupy spaces even though they are no longer physical, tangible bodies but are incorporeal entities. The houses they inhabit in death are the same they used to inhabit in life. These beings are still dwellers of their houses but do not legally possess them anymore, for obvious reasons, and new residents take their place. Amongst the short stories here examined, many feature haunted houses where the ghosts either ask or reject the living's help through symbolic means such as shut or open doors and windows as in Riddell's 'The House in Vauxhall Walk', 'The Open Door' and 'Old Mrs Jones', or Oliphant's 'The Open Door'. Some spirits keep stalking their former dwellings because they have been deprived of them when they prematurely died, or their life was taken from them. Their lingering presence is thus simultaneous to the establishment of families who rent or buy these haunted mansions: this fact raises a doubt regarding the role of ghosts within the household, which is useful to discuss since they still occupy physical spaces despite their condition of non-living phantoms. Are ghosts guests or hosts in relation to the human agents? Thurston argued that:

The genre often features [...] a deliberate exploitation of the equivocal sense *hostis* in the artful deployment of words like "hostile" or "hospitable." The ghost story can thus [...] be seen as both a host story and a guest story.³⁷⁹

Etymologically speaking, the word "ghost" comes from Old English *gāst* or *gæst*, "the spirit, soul, ghost",³⁸⁰ also meaning "breath",³⁸¹ thus showing an ever-existing

³⁷⁹Luke Thurston, *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism*, p. 3.

³⁸⁰Joseph Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. Thomas Northcote Toller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2013), p. 362.

³⁸¹Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 357.

correlation between the living and the dead. “Guest” derives from Old English *gast* or *gæst*, with the short vowel this time, meaning, of course, “guest”³⁸² but also “a stranger, an enemy”,³⁸³ suggesting that the presence of an external member of the house’s nucleus, be it a friend or not, may represent a threat to the family. The last word making up the ghostly semantics of hospitality is the noun “host”, which has no Germanic origins, as it comes from Latin *hospēs*, come to middle English through France after the Norman conquest of 1066. It is equally important in that it has different meanings like those of “host, person being hosted or hosting someone” and “stranger, foreigner”.³⁸⁴

In ghost stories, the line between who has the right to be called host rather than guest is fine. The idea of unfamiliarity, easily associated with risk and peril, contaminates the positive image of sociability: being hosts or having guests might endanger the equilibrium within the house and threaten the private sphere by allowing the public to enter through social gatherings. In this perspective, the introduction of outsiders within the domestic walls turns them into representatives of the uncanny as “not home-related” and, consequently, generates feelings of dread. When families enter a haunted mansion, they are crossing the threshold of their new dwelling and are either ignorant of the supernatural entities they must share the rooms with, or are purposefully moving in, as in the case of Riddell’s ‘The Open Door’. The ghosts might be dead but remain bound to the building that they used to own: the analysis of some short stories discussed above shows that the living may adopt different attitudes after they discover spirits stalking the house, but ghosts never seem to pose real threats to human life, on the contrary, they generally appear to seek help from them, or at least accept human quests for truth. In this perspective, ghosts welcome into their former domestic space the unfamiliar human entities who come to occupy the same area, and the living subdue willingly to the cries for justice coming from the afterlife, acknowledging, in turn, the presence of the “foreign” entity within their family. Amongst others, the Walnut-Tree House’s boy, Miss Tynan, and Lord Ladlow have

³⁸²Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 357.

³⁸³Bosworth, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 357.

³⁸⁴*Dizionario Latino Olivetti*, www.dizionario-latino.com.

all been stripped of life and goods, so feeding their thirst for truth and justice. This urge is so intense that the ghosts 'engage in a cooperation' with the human guests-hosts, in some cases achieved through rather coercive means, namely dreams and a door that will not close, but successful, in that the house's occupants' intervention allows the re-establishment of truth and legitimacy. It is thus possible to interpret positively the presence of human guests from the ghostly side of the narrative, in that it is functional to the development of the plot leading to the attribution of faults to the appropriate subjects and thus represents a warranty of justice. At the same time, the supernatural presence that people perceive as hostile, naturally, for it is beyond human comprehension, is gradually recognised as acceptable because the human strife behind the presence is detectable; every living person demands justice and hopes for peace when death comes: the characters of the stories mentioned above recognise this need and fulfil it because it is understandable from a human perspective. The uncanny, the unfamiliar presence of what our mind cannot really grasp, is turned into the 'canny' in the sense that the desires of the ghosts are understandable and can be satisfied, humans have the power to do what the dead cannot anymore. Eventually, the haunting is accepted as one with the house, as in the case of Molesworth's 'Lady Farquhar's Old Lady', where the protagonist, Maggie, understands the Old Lady's impossibility to part with her house and realises that she poses no threat to her. Maggie ceases to be afraid, she learns that she can share the domestic space that she now occupies with the spirit of the woman, to whom she also feels a sort of sentimental attachment as she calls her "her" old lady. Both phantom and living girl perform the duties of host and guest, coexisting harmoniously in Ballyreina. When the moment of leaving the mansion comes, Margaret is not sorry to go, but she nonetheless wants to find out more about the story of the house and of the woman who used to inhabit it, not shrinking from the memory in fear or horror, but willing to give a name to her lady.

Thus, the living are concerned with the question of the guest / host role as much as the spirits. In Oliphant's 'Old Lady Mary', the only story in the corpus told from the point of view of the ghost, Lady Mary is an elderly woman over eighty whose only affections are oriented towards her eighteen-year-old goddaughter Mary. Her lawyer, Mr. Furnival, repeatedly suggests that she draws up a will to secure Mary as her heir, but the woman's vanity makes her believe that death is far from coming and that she

still has time. When she eventually dies, all her fortune passes on to her grandson, who is already rich, while Young Mary remains unprovided for. Old Mary could have used her wealth for good, but is chastised by Heaven for her carelessness with her return to earth and a path of redemption to be taken. She returns to her house as a stranger, unseen, unheard, whereas once she was mistress of it. In fact, Old Mary cannot be seen nor heard by anyone, not even Mary; nobody can perceive her presence but children, who are too little to be able to talk, and when they can talk, they are not taken seriously. Old Lady Mary is obliged to analyse her values and acknowledge her mistakes, which led to her goddaughter's status of guest in a house where she was supposed to be lady and host. Young Mary had not expected to inherit her godmother's possessions, she believed that her grandson was the rightful heir as descendant by blood, so she was the only person in the vicarage who never blamed Old Mary for her negligence, but loved her dearly and suffered greatly for her loss. In the purity of her heart, she tries to reach her benefactress hoping that she might hear her, not knowing that she actually can, to tell her that she has nothing to be reproached for. The girl is allowed to stay in the mansion out of pity, for there is no other place she can go to, until a will written by Old Lady Mary is found in her bedroom's drawer by chance, as the ghost has no power of intervention over the living; Mary's role is reversed, and she ceases to be a mere guest.

Braddon's 'The Dreaded Guest' is the most striking example in the corpus of a challenge to the guest - host dichotomy. The tale begins with the description of the weather on a frosty December night in London and continues with the reference to corners of the city where the snow lies untrodden, like the dead-end street where Dr. Prestwitch, the protagonist of this tale, lives. In fact, on the front of the house the snow remains as white «as in some silent Alpine gorge known only to the eagle and the chamois.»³⁸⁵ On the extreme left corner of the dwelling there is a very narrow passage that leads to the back premises: here, the doctor keeps the instruments of his work and has a room, with a long deal table on trestles and a smaller one with a sink, a room his family never approaches because a mould odour comes from it. The protagonist's profession is a typically bourgeois one, but the doctor is not particularly successful,

³⁸⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 240.

and the family is economically unstable; moreover, from Braddon's description of this suspicious room we can detect some kind of deviancy in the personality of Prestwitch or in the society he entertains. The mentioning of the pure snow outside seems to contrast with the mysterious room and the possible illicit events going on inside. The same night, two men defile the pure white snow covering the narrow street, carrying a "ghastly" burden from Newgate prison: the corpse of a coiner just executed for the doctor to dissect,³⁸⁶ thus making the function of the stinking room clear.

The term "ghastly" is repeated thrice in reference to the corpse that has been carried to the strange, damp-smelling room at the back, plus once related to the "performance", along with the terms "horror" and "awful", spelt *orful*³⁸⁷ in dialect by the governess Barbara, indicating a certain repulsion for the practice of dissecting bodies, which were frequently smuggled from graveyards or prisons like Newgate after executions, as in this case, as an easy way to obtain material for the study of the body. However, this dead body presents a little problem: it is not dead at all. As Prestwitch is about to sink his surgeon blade in the body, he gets a glimpse of a rapid movement, and he stops:

The coiner sat upright, and looked about him; and at this moment it occurred to Martin Prestwitch that he had perhaps been guilty of a kind of felony in giving back life to a man whom the law had doomed to death.³⁸⁸

The idea of returning the dead to life cannot but recall Mary Shelley's masterpiece *Frankenstein* (1818). Unlike Frankenstein's Creature, the coiner is still human and never died, so he can articulate a speech when revived, and asks his 'saviour' what had happened to him. At the same time, the figure of the «square-built ruffian»³⁸⁹ towering over Prestwitch near six-feet high, capable of killing him with his bare

³⁸⁶On the stigma of dissection see Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

³⁸⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 244.

³⁸⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 247.

³⁸⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 247.

hands, reminds of the Creature looking upon his creator lying on the bed, with his hand stretched out towards the man seemingly to detain him. Both men are terrified by their creation, both immediately realise the seriousness of their actions perpetrated for the sake of scientific advancement. The coiner is described as a beast, as having “paws” and being very muscular³⁹⁰; he asks the doctor for something to eat, but «the measure of [my] appetite»³⁹¹ seems monstrous indeed. As Victor’s creation escapes and tries his best to adapt to the new life that has been given him in spite of himself, so the coiner wonders about his future as a criminal, now that all his instruments have been taken from him (the thought that he might live honestly does not even cross his mind), and he demands the doctor’s help:

You brought me back to life, and you’re bound to provide for me. I didn’t ask you to come any of your reviving dodges over me, did I? I was brought here to be dissected, and it was your duty to dissect me. But you scientific parties are never satisfied without trying your blessed experiments! [...] I didn’t ask to be restored, did I? [...] Life’s no favour to such as me! Howsomever, you’ve revived me, and now you must keep me going.³⁹²

Later the man leaves the surgeon’s room with the threatening promise to return regularly to seek his help, becoming a «pensioner»³⁹³ upon Prestwitch with the excuse of having been revived by the doctor’s volition, who consequently must acknowledge his responsibility and provide for him. This speech echoes the Creature’s in *Frankenstein*’s Chapter 10, when Victor meets him amongst the ice of the mountains and his rage explodes in the face of the being, who has in the meanwhile acquired the ability to speak fluently:

All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art

³⁹⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 249.

³⁹¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 249.

³⁹²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 251.

³⁹³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 258.

bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends [...] Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.³⁹⁴

The Creature is here demanding help from his creator, as the coiner asks Martin Prestwitch for provisions. At the end of a long recollection of the Creature's experiences amongst the living that lasts until the end of Chapter 16, the Creature asks for a female with whom to share the interchanges adequate to his nature, a desire, he insists, Victor cannot deny it to him because he had never asked to live and yet he does; he would at least like to be spared a life of misery and solitude. The Creature expresses a profound distress for a life that he had not requested to live, a fact that Shelley exemplifies with an epigraph that is a quotation of Adam's words, to whom the Creature compares himself, from Milton's *Paradise Lost*: «did I request thee, Maker, from my clay to mould me man? Did I solicit thee From darkness to promote me?»³⁹⁵ As Adam, and indirectly, the Creature, asks why he has been moulded from clay, so the coiner's "corpse" is compared to «inanimate clay.»³⁹⁶ The coiner, whose name is Jonathan Blinker and who is even called a "creature" devoted to his creator,³⁹⁷ asks for far less from Prestwitch because, as a human being, he still has the possibility of living a full life if he wants, but the sense of constant oppression takes over Prestwitch's body and mind as it happens to Victor in Shelley's novel.

Blinker initially enters the house of the doctor unconsciously, as a dead man, with a knock on the door (on the part of the couriers) and is allowed to enter by Barbara:

³⁹⁴Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus. The 1818 Text*, ed. Nick Groom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 70.

³⁹⁵Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 1.

³⁹⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 244.

³⁹⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 261.

like vampires who must be welcomed in to be able to cross a building's threshold, so Jonathan has been granted free passage to and from the doctor's house. With his domination of Prestwitch's will based on an unwanted return to life, Blinker has turned the house's master and host into a guest. The surgeon's role is metaphorical and borrowed from the biological language, he has become a mere host to a parasite, who feeds upon him like a vampire. The coiner disappears for some time only to return at Christmas, when the Prestwitch family is hosting a dinner with their elder daughter's fiancé and his father. The pressure is skyrocketing, because the fiancé's father, Mr. Clemmory, is a physician with many patients in the West-end, thus a member of a middle-class family, wealthy and respectable, far more successful than modest Prestwitch. The doctor is obviously terrified as he feels his nightmare return, also because his daughter's future economic stability is at stake, but the dinner is a total success thanks to Blinker himself, who entertains everyone and impresses even the stern future father-in-law, who comments «an honest jovial fellow, cast in a good mould»,³⁹⁸ resuming the metaphor of Adam-like man sculpted out of clay.

The tale ends surprisingly in the best possible way for the family. After the Christmas dinner, Blinker confronts Prestwitch and proves that his devotion to him has not faltered, admitting that he has not forgotten the good that had been done to him; to repay the doctor's kindness, Blinker also states he will leave all his riches to Prestwitch upon his death. The turn of events reverses roles again: Blinker sets Prestwitch free from his parasitic behaviour, restoring his role of master of the house and, therefore, of one who can welcome whoever he wants, whenever he wants to his property. As he abandons the role of undesired, "dreaded guest", Blinker is welcomed to the family not as a mere guest, but as a member of it, becoming a godfather to the children of the doctor. The path of redemption and gratitude undertaken by the coiner has led him to the final act of forgiveness: all that he has produced, even if by illegal means, he gives to the person who had helped him return to life, unwillingly, yet acknowledging his responsibility. Blinker now gives back what he had taken.

Blinker had already started to repay his "creator" by sending fellow criminals to him for medication, thus boosting his medical activity, which was hardly fecund. The

³⁹⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 268.

consecration of the Prestwitch's family as fully middle class at the end of the narrative is achieved thanks to the coiner himself, who charms Mr. Clemmory to the point that he is enthusiast of the Prestwitches, so Molly can marry his son. For three years, the once "dreaded guest" becomes a welcomed guest, even more, part of the family, and his wealth passes on to the Prestwitches upon his death, improving their social status. Martin Prestwitch is an honest but poor doctor, relegated to a limbo between the lower and the upper middle class that becomes unsustainable, as he cannot even feed his children properly. His thirst for knowledge is the spark that sets events into motion, and by involuntarily creating his own "monster", what he believed to have been a misfortune becomes the key to his successes. Blinker belongs to the lowest stratus of society, the criminal underworld, but he toys with the respectable middle-class gentleman Prestwitch, whose fortunes depend on the forger's will. Blinker comes only at twilight, unseen, unheard, the uncanny that stalks the good family but is eventually normalised and made familiar, no longer a source of terror but of stability, a moral and economic support to the middle-class family aspiring to the top of the ladder.

Chapter 1 concentrates on the house as a Gothic space. The stories analysed in this chapter exemplify the deviance from the idealised role of the house as sanctuary. They testify to the discomfort created by the consciousness that evil can originate from inside the safe space of "home", at the hand of trustworthy members of the family. The drawing-room represents women's management of the house on one side, while symbolising their public "face" on the other. Chapter 1 presents narratives that defy the angel in the house trope, staging female characters that do not fulfil the Victorian requirements of decorum and delicacy. These stories written by women spotlight a theme that is pervasive in the corpus: that of women who do not accept the chauvinist role and rules of Victorian society. Authoresses exploited fiction to comment upon this sexist tendency, and especially Gothic fiction, in that the fantastic frame allowed them to denounce the inequality they experienced and women's relegation to the domestic space. In their narratives, these authors, Riddell and Braddon above all, portrayed female characters who faced in different ways this kind of repression of their sex, either by introducing into their drawing-rooms dissolute behaviours, or as perpetrators or victims of crimes. The tensions between private and public sphere were

epitomised by Victorian sensation and Gothic fiction by showing that the outside world was not the only threat that respectable families could face; these tensions were aggravated by the presence of strong female characters who openly defied the male members of their families, further destabilising the domestic equilibrium as much as the social order: movements for female rights were the factual proof of a change in consciousness about women and their rights, granted by a number of laws and acts promulgated in the course of the nineteenth century. Fiction fostered female strength in other ways. Many female characters in the corpus claim their economic and social independence by resorting to illegal actions, the sole means that they perceive as available to them to overcome male superiority. Characters like Miss Tynan and Old Mrs Jones can be interpreted as symbols of the 'New Woman', a term referring to movements promoting women rights. These two characters are independent ladies who can rely on their own economic strength, which they self-administer, but are killed by men who were not equally successful in economic terms. These killers force their masculine, physical force upon the ladies because brutality is the only means that they can rely on to defeat such powerful women. Murder is the culprit's solution to punish women who refuse to comply with the norm of the woman submitted to the husband's wishes, violence being the last resort of frustrated masculinity in the face of economically and intellectually superior women.

The last section concentrates on the distinction between ghost, guest, etymologically cognates, and host. Since ghosts and the living occupy the same physical space in various narratives within the corpus, it appeared interesting to analyse whether spirits can be considered as guests in their former houses or hosts of the living that come to share that space. This discourse is strictly connected with the concept of *unheimlich* devised by Freud, the unfamiliar associated with danger: ghosts are presences that do not belong to the familiar nucleus of the living, who consequently tend to reject their presence because they represent a threat to its equilibrium. However, in the corpus's short stories, the phantoms seem to ask humans for help by means of different expedients, for instance the open doors in Riddell's 'Vauxhall Walk' and 'The Open Door', and they never appear as threats to the living. The only exception to this is in Braddon's 'The Dreaded Guest', where the guest is not a phantom but a human being whose presence will be positive for both the middle-

class family and its unwanted guest. On the other hand, people are terrified by the uncanny presence, but they respond positively to the otherworldly desperate calls for justice, engaging in investigations and indulging in the entities' "unorthodox" methods to finally achieve truth. The combined presence of the living and the dead in the same environment is not easily accepted, especially by humans, because death and the afterlife are scary, they are beyond the limits of our comprehension and, therefore, they are uncanny. Yet, humans and the dead's interchanges can be interpreted as mutual assistance in a process of acceptance of one's condition, understanding of the necessity to move on.

This exploration of different spatial contexts continues in Chapter 2, where haunted nature will be discussed.

Chapter 2

Ghosts of Nature

Any discussion of literary representations of nature cannot but rely on the aesthetic concept of the picturesque and the sublime. The publication in 1757 of Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*³⁹⁹ challenged all rational ideas about aesthetics, derived from the empiricism and classicism of the eighteenth-century literary and artistic discourse. Burke's concept originated from the Greek tradition of the sublime, described by Longinus in the first century in relation to the art of rhetorical speech, and was later transformed into an aesthetical principle. Burke considered the two ideas of beauty and sublimity as complementary forms of sub-rational sensations, connected with the two extremes of human passion: the beautiful represents smoothness and fragility, thus the feminine gender, while the sublime is roughness, irregularity, power, thus the male gender. The sublime is rooted in terror and causes a sensation that brings horror and pleasure together. Addison described this sensation as an «agreeable kind of horror» in his *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy*, a country that he visited from 1701 to 1703, where he described the precipices and steps that “break” the mountains around Tonon, close to Lake Geneva, forming «one of the most irregular, misshapen scenes in the world.»⁴⁰⁰ The passion provoked by the sublime is astonishment suspended in terror, where the object of the observation completely absorbs the attention of the onlooker, who is overwhelmed by the majesty of the sight and cannot control his emotions. However, the subject's observation is carried out in a position of security granted by the distance between himself and the object, and the pleasure derives from the consciousness of being safe from any possible danger. Furthermore, Burke often

³⁹⁹Edmund Burke, *Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Vol. 1*, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁴⁰⁰Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy*, ed. George Washington Greene (New York City, NY: Derby and Jacson, 1858), p. 341.

equated terror and physical pain, suggesting that the sublime and terror cause similar sensations that appear as physical manifestations:

I say a man in great pain has his teeth set, his eye-brows are violently contracted, his forehead is wrinkled, his eyes are dragged inwards, and rolled with great vehemence, his hair stands on end, the voice is forced out in short shrieks and groans, and the whole fabric totters. Fear or terror, which is an apprehension of pain or death, exhibits exactly the same effects.⁴⁰¹

The picturesque, on the other hand, originated towards the end of the eighteenth century as a sort of mediation between the concepts of the beautiful and the sublime. The picturesque has been best defined by Andrews:

When we describe something as ‘picturesque’, we usually have very little sense of how that adjective differs from ‘beautiful’, ‘pretty’ or ‘quaint’. A rich sunset, a Caribbean beach, a ruined Greek temple, a thatched cottage, a gnarled fisherman mending his net, a morris dance: these have little in common except that, in different ways, each is visually attractive and enriched with sentimental associations [...] [‘Picturesque’] means ‘like a picture’ and implies that each scene fills some pictorial prescription in terms of subject-matter or composition.⁴⁰²

The term was borrowed from the Italian *pittresco* and the French *pittoresque* and, initially, it was not specifically related to landscape, but it indicated sceneries or human activities suitable for painting. Reverend William Gilpin is the father of the picturesque aesthetic. His *Observations on the River Wye* (1782)⁴⁰³ further shaped the concept as something symmetrical, proportioned in its parts, that is then mutilated to become a ruin of itself, thus more irregular and wilder. Gilpin’s theory of the

⁴⁰¹Burke, *Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, p. 285.

⁴⁰²Michael Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1990), p. vii.

⁴⁰³Reverend William Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, etc., Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty Made in the Summer of the Year 1770* (London: Blamire, 1789).

picturesque was further developed by Sir Uvedale Price in his *Essay on the Picturesque* (1794),⁴⁰⁴ but the scholar Richard Payne Knight was the one who brought the picturesque even further. In his 1805 essay *Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, Knight interpreted the 'picturesque' as «after the manner of painters»,⁴⁰⁵ perceivable by people who have «correspondent ideas to associate; that is, by persons in a certain degree conversant with art.»⁴⁰⁶ He referred to people who had received a high level of education and were art consumers, familiar with landscape painting and thus capable of appreciating and recognising the picturesque.⁴⁰⁷ As Austin affirmed, Knight's picturesque observer belongs to the category of cultural nobility, that is to say that only the privileged members of high society, whose cultural experiences are mediated through their educational process, could access the picturesque experience.⁴⁰⁸

The tradition of the picturesque and the sublime aesthetics, which had developed in the eighteenth century, was central to Victorian fiction. The picturesque influenced various aspects of nineteenth-century artistic life, from painting and photography to gardening, which reached further levels of professionalism. Parks and gardens became the setting of many fictional works, including Gothic and sensation fiction. Section 2.1.1 explores the haunting of gardens and parks in various tales and investigates the application of the principles of the picturesque to the description of such locations, which are outside the domestic space but still strongly tied to it. This section thus operates as a bridge between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

The sublime, which is correlated to the Freudian concept of *unheimlich*, suits Gothic and sensation fiction in that it contributes to create an atmosphere of dread,

⁴⁰⁴Sir Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful, and on the Use of Studying Pictures for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape* (London: Robson, 1794).

⁴⁰⁵Richard Payne Knight, *Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (London: Luke Hansard, 1805), p. 148.

⁴⁰⁶Knight, *Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, p. 149.

⁴⁰⁷Linda M. Austin, «Aesthetic Embarrassment: The Reversion to the Picturesque in Nineteenth-Century English Tourism», *EHL* 74, no. 3 (Fall 2007), p. 634.

⁴⁰⁸Austin, «Aesthetic Embarrassment», p. 635.

horror and anxiety that is reflected in the actions and reactions of the characters in the texts. For this reason, while Section 2.2.1 offers a discussion of the tradition of this aesthetics from the eighteenth century on, Section 2.2.2 investigates the integration of these principles into the short stories under study.

Gardens, parks, the picturesque countryside, and the sublime mountainous landscapes pervade the variety of sceneries in the corpus, but there are two stories staged in specific settings that are worth discussing separately. Section 2.3.1 explores the marshes, considered inhospitable places, not suitable for civilised life and, therefore, the perfect nest for criminals, exiles, and monstrous and supernatural beings, including ghosts, since the origins of British literature. Section 2.3.2 considers the Arctic region: the haunting, and haunted, northern pole was particularly attractive for Victorian explorers as much as for mariners from all over Europe: in fact, a sort of frenzy for the discovery of the Northern Passage took over the continent throughout the nineteenth century.

Finally, Section 2.4 presents a brief analysis of precursive ecocritical discourses. Certain passages from the stories in the corpus might be considered as non-anthropocentric reflections, but rather as ecocritical responses to the social, economic, political context of the Victorian Era. It seems therefore worth attempting an analysis in the direction of ecocriticism, without the pretension of a thoroughly ecocritical investigation, since this is not the theme of this work. Many of the short narratives analysed both in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 2 concentrate extensively on the natural landscape where the stories are set. They do so through shades of sublimity and picturesqueness, describing gardens, ruins, or majestic natural sceneries far from the chaos of the city; they all somehow point to the beauty of these often-uncontaminated areas and to the mental and physical benefits of life in a natural context, in stark opposition to the polluted, industrialised, urban spaces.

2.1 Haunted Landscapes Close to Home: Gardens and Parks

In the eighteenth century, landscape gardening became a prominent form of artistic expression, often intertwining with literature and the figurative arts. In Bellorini's words,

Literary production and its related pictorial production offer ‘gardening art’ as the new muse of British Parnassus, whereas the garden becomes pivotal in the cognitive game that builds, through imagination, the patrimony of ideas in both the creator and the consumer’s perception. The different poetics of gardening propose the objectification of an aesthetic category, and more: the pictorial garden (English landscape garden) involves a particular vision of life and being, it means objectification of nature’s beauty in her relationship with identity, values and planning of a society in its own time.⁴⁰⁹

Landscape gardening has a long history and a strong relationship with literature, poetry in particular, as different artistic languages ‘completing’ each other aesthetically.⁴¹⁰ Artists, poets and architects attempted to create ideal worlds where man and nature mutually interacted and aided each other.⁴¹¹ Across the eighteenth century, various intellectuals have analysed garden landscape; for instance, William Hogarth’s *Analysis of Beauty* (1753)⁴¹² concerns the principle of ‘variety’, which must be provided in order to avoid confusion of designs, and introduces the idea of the ‘waving-line’ as a symbol of beauty. Hogarth drew inspiration from contemporary painters to express the idea that symmetry is suitable only for wide areas, whereas gardens must contemplate some degree of variety, in the form, for instance, of exotic species of trees, to promote questions and dynamic dialectics.

Many poets were also garden architects: among them, Alexander Pope associated the garden with classical poetic genres such as the ode, the elegy, and the idyll. The idea was that of creating an aesthetic ensemble that could reflect the coeval cultural trends that harmonise the relationship between nature and the divine as proposed by

⁴⁰⁹Mariagrazia Bellorini, “*First Follow Nature*”. *Riflessioni e note sulla semantica del giardino nella poesia e nella cultura inglese del Settecento* (Milano: Università Cattolica, 2001), p. 7; my translation from Italian. Bellorini discussed the semantics of the term ‘garden’ focusing on two aspects: first, the allegorical garden as a symbol of specific concepts, events, people or divinities; secondly, the philosophical, stylistic and conceptual interpretation of the garden according to specific philosophical tendencies.

⁴¹⁰Bellorini, “*First Follow Nature*”, p. 11.

⁴¹¹The first to theorise the requirements that gardens must fulfil to be ‘artistic’ was Francis Bacon in *Of Gardens* (1612).

⁴¹²William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (London: Reeves, 1753).

natural philosophy, theology, and Deism.⁴¹³ Garden design in eighteenth-century Britain incorporated the taste for the picturesque: the art of gardening began to be considered as akin to landscape painting, so the same principles of the picturesque could be applied to both and improve landscapes. Andrews referred to «gentle hills and valleys, glades for contemplation, and fragments of ancient architecture»⁴¹⁴ as characteristics of the proper picturesque garden landscape. Some gardens, like Aaron Hill's Moral Rock Garden, were even planned so as to have multiple passages that visitors could go through in a sort of moral test, with each passage labelled after virtues or sins to offer a kind of spiritual journey. Later in the century, the creation of garden landscapes was particularly influenced by landscape painters, especially for what concerned the distribution of colours and the study of distance between decorative elements. 'Moral sense' became one of the guiding principles of landscape gardening in this period. It is the beginning of «a sentimental phase in which the garden, now largely shorn of significant statuary and classical monuments, becomes a landscape of variety, to be *felt* as a medley of moods.»⁴¹⁵

Landscape gardening continued to be one of the most practiced activities throughout the Victorian Age as well, considered as a training both for the body and the mind, also thanks to great innovations and new decorative possibilities derived from colonial enterprises. In fact, new plant species could be imported from overseas countries as well as Southern Europe, thus changing the look of British private and public gardens, conveying a touch of exoticism that Victorians particularly appreciated. Technological improvements in the design and building of gardening tools simplified the gardeners' work; the frenzy for glass houses⁴¹⁶ took over households.

⁴¹³Bellorini, "*First Follow Nature*", pp. 18-19.

⁴¹⁴Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 50.

⁴¹⁵Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p.51.

⁴¹⁶Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Margaret Flanders Darby, *The Hothouse Flower: Nurturing Women in the Victorian Conservatory* (Brighton: Edward Everett Root, 2020).

However, the most important development in nineteenth-century gardening was the access of women to this kind of activity.⁴¹⁷ The figure of the professional woman gardener rose,⁴¹⁸ as testified to by the career of Gertrude Jekyll, who devised several garden designs and published a series of books and articles about her activity.⁴¹⁹ Gertrude Jekyll became a key figure as an ‘artist-gardener’: she was trained at the South Kensington School of Art, where she initially studied to become a painter, a career that she was prevented from pursuing because of her failing eyesight. Even though the garden was strongly gendered in the Victorian period, Jekyll made it a space where to claim responsibility for developing herself both professionally and personally. She established a reputation for herself outmanoeuvring the obstacles to women’s professional career, first as a horticultural writer, then as a scientist, thus negotiating gender restrictions.

Victorian literature often exploited the gardens of country villas and urban spaces as a setting for its plots. Bilston argued that this happened mainly because the Victorian Era suffered from a sense of loss of natural, agrarian life and, for this reason, gardens represented a sort of paradise away from urban pollution, an Eden amidst the greyness of the city. The contrast between the quietness of the garden and the polluting noises coming from the crowded streets is another fascinating factor for many Victorian authors.⁴²⁰ Furthermore, women gardeners often also authored texts where

⁴¹⁷Sarah S. Bilston, *The Promise of the Suburbs: A Victorian History in Literature and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 115. See also Anne Wilkinson, *The Victorian Gardener* (Stroud: The History Press, 2006).

⁴¹⁸Women gardeners were often also authors of manuals. Some examples, quoted also by Bilston, are Theresa Earle’s *Pot-Pourri from a Surrey Garden* (1896), Eleanor Vere Boyle’s *Garden of Pleasure* (1895) and *Seven Gardens and a Palace* (1900), Alice Dew-Smith’s *Confidences of an Amateur Gardener* (1897), Elizabeth von Arnim’s *Elizabeth and the German Garden* (1898), and Maud Maryon’s *How the Garden Grew* (1900). Another famous woman gardener was Jane Wells Webb Loudon (1807-1858), who, apart from composing the first popular gardening manuals, was also a pioneer in science fiction and the author of Gothic, horror and fantasy works.

⁴¹⁹Christen Ericsson-Penfold, *Gertrude Jekyll: Cultivating the Gendered Space of the Victorian Garden for Professional Success*, in *Gender and Space in Rural Britain, 1840-1920*, eds. Gemma Goodman and Charlotte Mathieson (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2016), pp. 117-130.

⁴²⁰Bilston, *Women and the Suburban Garden*, p. 118.

the garden became the field of their political and social battles as New Women: like the domestic space of home, the garden seemed to be the only other allowed stage of their activity. The role of angel in the house was extended to the garden, but no farther than that, so that female authors began to stress their gardening competence and connect it with what they could do if allowed to be socially, politically, and economically engaged. Garden literature became another means for women to discuss their limited chances to advance in the chauvinist Victorian society, to have a voice outside of the private sphere. Since they belong to the category of natural landscape, even if more or less man-made, gardens and parks adorning Victorian villas are amongst the most exploited settings for Victorian plots, and Gothic and sensation fiction are no exceptions. From the mid-Victorian period,

The garden appears as a Wordsworthian image of Eden. Novelists such as Charlotte Brontë, Eliot, and Dickens expressly borrow the imagery of Eden to describe the landscape of childhood and use the analogy of fall and redemption to portray a character's progression from innocence to maturity. Correspondingly, on the sociohistorical axis, the Eden myth comes to stand for the "fall" of timeless rural England into dynamic urban industrialism [...] The Romantic Eden realm, incorporating the natural virtues of an idealized rural past, is neither totally defeated [...] nor totally upheld [...] Rather, it is looked back on nostalgically as externally lost in the face of present realities but symbolically sustainable through an internalization of the values it embodies.⁴²¹

Finney referred to novels, but this observation can be applied to short fiction as well. Gardens and parks in nineteenth-century stories are often "Gothicised", meaning that Gothic tropes are either attributed to them, or they become the setting of Gothic and sensation narratives. Gardens and parks thus lose the paradisiac aura granted them

⁴²¹Gail Finney, «Garden Paradigms in 19th-Century Fiction», *Comparative Literature* 36, no. 1 (Winter, 1984), pp. 22-23. Representations of gardens in Victorian literature are also prominent, for instance, in the early works of Bulwer Lytton and Disraeli. Especially Disraeli depicted gardens of the "picturesque" kind. Elizabeth Gaskell's novels *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1858) stage gardens as part of their main setting, as well as some of her short stories including *The Old Nurse's Story* (1852) and *The Grey Woman* (1861). Rhoda Broughton also filled her novel *Doctor Cupid* (1887) with garden scenes.

by authors such as Charles Dickens in *Great Expectations*, where the author remembered the rural past of England preceding the Industrial Revolution and described Pip's evolution throughout the text through the recurrent metaphor of the Garden of Eden, suggesting the fall and then redemption of the protagonist.⁴²²

The best-known counterpart to the Edenic garden setting is Collins's Blackwater Park in *The Woman in White*. The name of Sir Percival Glyde's villa is already a manifesto of gothicism in itself. The first character to describe it is Marian Halcombe upon her arrival there:

The house is situated on a dead flat, and seems to be shut in and almost suffocated, to my north-country notions, by trees. I have seen nobody but the man-servant who opened the door to me, and the housekeeper, a very civil person, who showed me the way to my own room, and got me my tea. I have a nice little boudoir and bedroom, at the end of a long passage on the first floor. The servants and some of the spare rooms are on the second floor, and all the living rooms are on the ground floor. I have not seen one of them yet, and I know nothing about the house, except that one wing is said to be five hundred years old, that it had a moat round it once, and that it gets its name of Blackwater from a lake in the park.⁴²³

The reader is immediately struck by the oppressive foliage, the cluster of trees that looms over the house, and by the lake after which the villa is named, which is indirectly described as a dark body of water: this already foreshadows the entanglement of secrets and mysteries as much as the threats and difficulties the female protagonists of the story will have to face. This stifling natural landscape also reminds of a cage where Marian and Laura, Lady Glyde, are locked and kept silent: it could thus be the representation of the snare-like situation these women must subdue to. Another claustrophobic garden is described by Mary Elizabeth Braddon in her novel *The Doctor's Wife* (1864), whose plot revolves around George Gilbert, a young surgeon who works in a little town in the fictional county of Midlandshire, and his

⁴²²Finney, «Garden Paradigms in 19th-Century Fiction», p. 31.

⁴²³Collins, *The Woman in White*, p. 222.

love Isabel Sleaford. Isabel is a dreamy girl who spends her time reading novels and poetry whenever she is not engaged in taking care of her large family of half-siblings. The novel features a garden that is described as having once been Edenic, in full bloom and rich in clustering roses and clematis, which have now, respectively, withered and «choked with wild convolvulus tendrils, that wound about the branches like weedy serpents, and stifle[d] buds and blossoms in their weedy embrace.»⁴²⁴ The sense of smell is particularly exploited in this description, as the personified flowers that have surrendered to human negligence still have their roots in the garden that they used to love, yet their odour has been covered by that of the pigsties nearby.⁴²⁵ This and other metaphorical botanical images in the novel suggest Braddon's regret for the progressive eclipsing of Britain's past, as suggested by Hassan,⁴²⁶ in a period characterised by crucial transitions resulting from the Industrial Revolution. This idea is here reinforced by images of suffocation and by the alliteration of *w* in *withered*, *wild* (where also the *l* alliterates in *convolvulus* and *tendrils*, and the vowel *u* as well), *wound*, *weedy*, repeated twice, and the *b* in *buds* and *blossoms* to highlight the elements that get stuck in the middle of the infesting plants. In this passage, sounds are carefully placed in order to make the sentences difficult to read, convoluted, and convey the idea of something entwined, intricate like the garden's vegetation itself and, above all, like the social, cultural and political revolutions that Britain was undergoing at the time.

⁴²⁴Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* (London: John Maxwell and Company, 1864), p. 34.

⁴²⁵In *Dracula*, Bram Stoker frequently recurred to the sense of smell, if we think in particular of the garlic necklace that Van Helsing gives Lucy to be protected against the Count: the professor refers to the necklace as made of flowers or garlic blossoms, possibly to make it more appealing to Lucy. On another occasion, a party comprising Van Helsing and Jonathan Harker investigates a mansion where Dracula supposedly hides. When they open a door, the smell of blood and rotteness is so pungent that it takes a while to the men to defeat the fits of nausea, but they are so determined to flush the vampire out that they do not desist. Jonathan writes in his diary that they went on pretending to be in a garden of roses. See Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (London: Constable and Company, 1897), pp. 124-125, 127.

⁴²⁶See Narin Hassan, «"Hothouse Flowers and Despair": Reading the Victorian Garden in M.E. Braddon's "The Doctor's Wife"», *An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 38, no. 4 (December 2005), pp. 67-81.

Braddon was particularly skilful in offering an image of change through a descriptive passage, showing that nature in Gothic and sensation fiction acts as the filter for something to be read between the lines. Braddon resorts to natural images in her short narratives as well. In the fable-like⁴²⁷ tale ‘Eveline’s Visitant’, the first image that strikes the reader is the description of the love that the protagonist, Hector, feels for Eveline, his sole source of joy since the murder of his cousin, André, at his own hand. The *énamourément* is depicted as «the bosom of a verdant valley, in the sweet atmosphere of home»,⁴²⁸ in contrast with «the frozen seas of an Arctic region, remote from human love or human companionship.»⁴²⁹

As Section 2.3.2 will show, Arctic explorations became rather frequent especially at the beginning and towards the end of the nineteenth century, exalted by magazines and included in the imperialistic propaganda of the country. The Arctic was often depicted as a void, a desolate land dominated by solitude like the frozen seas of the Old English elegy *The Wanderer*, crossed by lonesome travellers in exile. Hector never actually travelled to the polar region, but he lives in the castle that once belonged to his cousin and that he has wrongfully inherited after having killed him. Consequently, the employees working in the ancient edifice despise and possibly ignore him. This is why Hector feels lonely, while acknowledging the reason why his servants are against him. He lives like a man in exile in his own property. Eveline’s coming represents his return home, his reintegration into the social fabric of contemporary England. His servants start to appreciate him through the figure of his newly wed wife; Hector finally finds redemption for his own sin thanks to the feeling of love that beautifies even a “damned” soul.

The verdant valley of the metaphor translates into the park and woods annexed to the castle, which are never particularly connoted. However, they will turn out to be

⁴²⁷The tale could be read as a fable in that it stages a protagonist that goes from being a brutal murderer of his own kin to redemption thanks to the love of a beautiful young lady. It resembles *The Beauty and the Beast* in the most famous version of the tale, the one produced by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont in 1756, published in her *Magasin des enfants, ou dialogues entre une sage gouvernante et plusieurs de ses élèves*.

⁴²⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 28.

⁴²⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 28.

the place representing the collapse of Hector and Eveline's happiness. In fact, it is here that the phantom of André makes his appearances whenever Eveline strolls alone in the park. The park and the woods acquire the negative connotation typically attributed to them in fables, especially to the forest setting: the hungry wolf follows the defenceless girl and hunts her down, the trees hide the evil that lurks in the shadows. The spirit never approaches Eveline, but he is always there, except when Hector starts to accompany her, as her knight and protector. André does not show himself in the presence of the living cousin, to the point that the young woman is suspected of madness. But Hector could not protect his loved one from the effects of the curse cast upon him by the antagonist in this fable, André, who swore that his relative would never maintain his happiness, which is even more painful than never even finding it. The punishment inflicted by André upon Hector is particularly cruel and involves the sacrifice of an innocent victim who is totally unaware of her fate.

The fable-like story comes with a sort of morale in the end, an implicit acknowledgment on the part of Hector that to exceed in pride is a sin that leads to tragic consequences. Could Hector's pride be considered as Britain's hubris originated from its imperialistic power? It is possibly exaggerated to read a metaphor for the nation between the lines of this tale, but if the weeds in *The Doctor's Wife* can be interpreted as industrialization slaying Britain's roses, that is, its pastoral, rural history, why not interpret Hector as Britain crushing its conquered countries, here represented by André? It is possible that Braddon believed that Britain's imperialistic rule over the colonies had reached an extreme, and that she was concerned by imperialistic policies. The morale of the fable could thus be an underlying warning to the country: too much pride led Hector to kill his cousin and to the illegitimate appropriation of his properties. This is the path followed by the nation, and the risks of incurring tragic ends are not so distant after all.⁴³⁰ A similar interpretation could be attributed to another short story by Braddon, 'Sir Luke's Return'. The protagonist is Sir Luke

⁴³⁰For more information on Braddon and the question of the Empire see Saverio Tomaiuolo, *Sensation Fiction, Empire and the Indian Mutiny*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. Andrew Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 113-126.

Cadbury, who in his youth had inherited his father's mansion alongside his debts and mortgages, as explained by the author in a rather bitter tone:

Old Sir Luke, steeped to the lips in debt, and with every acre of his estate encumbered, used to keep open house, and entertain the country in a liberal and large-hearted fashion, at the expense of the local tradesmen. Having mortgaged his last acre, and plunged as deep in debt as his creditors would allow, old Sir Luke found himself at the end of his tether; so he took the easiest way out of his difficulties by dying, and leaving the empty shell of his estate to his only son.⁴³¹

Old Sir Luke represents the worst example of economic management and is also an awful example as a father: he does not properly administer his wealth in order to produce more for his family or favour the local tradesmen, instead he causes their impoverishment. Sir Luke does not even secure his son's future, because he squanders all his money to sustain his lavish lifestyle. Consequently, being unfit both for the kind of life his father used to live and for working life, Young Luke decides to follow a different path:

He turned his attention to commerce. People were beginning to look towards our antipodes as the source of fortune for adventurous spirits, and to associate Botany Bay with the wool trade, as well as with the exportation of our criminal classes. Sir Luke Cadbury made up his mind that Sydney was the place for him, and wool his way to fortune.⁴³²

The young man will prove more successful and, above all, responsible than his late father, as he will regularly send money back to England to repay his parent's obligations. Before sailing to Australia, Sir Luke sells all of his properties except for his mother's Italian flower-garden, which now appears as a «wild loveliness of untrodden woods», a wilderness where «a painter would have revelled.»⁴³³ This garden

⁴³¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 172.

⁴³²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 173.

⁴³³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 177; 180.

is, in a word, picturesque, according to the definitions that have been previously illustrated. It is not in perfect order as a proper Italian garden should be, like the one owned by Mr Grynde, a distant relative of Sir Luke, characterised by «[a] sunk croquet lawn, raised banks, geraniums in square, geraniums in single file, like soldiers; no trees, except plums and peaches skewered against the new walls.»⁴³⁴

The perfectly tidy and neat garden of Mr Grynde reflects his personality, as the old man is depicted by Braddon as extremely scrupulous in administering his finances, to the point of avarice; he appears to be moved by a kind of religious fervour according to which hunger is the sin of gluttony rather than the need to eat.

Mr Grynde was spare in person, a man who eats very little himself, and objected to large appetites in other people. The young Grundes had rather a hard time of it while they were growing and hungry – their father denouncing a fourth slice of bread-and-butter as an indulgence of the lusts of the flesh. Mr Grynde had a long nose, sharp as a bird’s beak, a long neck, and a habit of lifting up his coat tails as he hovered on the edge of a sewer, or bent over a drain-pipe, which suggested a resemblance to a stork on the edge of a marshy pool.⁴³⁵

Opposite to the villa’s garden, there is a little cottage described as “Gothic”, whose surroundings are characterised by

an old-fashioned garden and orchard, all in one, full of queer, crooked old trees, deep soft grass, all hillocks and hollows, a wilderness of hazel and elder for a boundary between cottage garden and villa ‘grounds’. There was an old tumble-down fence dividing the wilderness from Mr Grynde’s kitchen-garden, which that gentleman would assuredly have replaced with a ten-foot wall had he cherished hopes of getting that cottage and garden a bargain some day, in which event he would have pulled down the cottage, and added the garden to his own domain.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 177.

⁴³⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 175.

⁴³⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 177.

Sir Luke's picturesque garden has been beautified by neglect⁴³⁷, a ruin of the past that resists as a vestige. Also in Riddell's 'A Strange Christmas Game', the author describes the mansion's garden as neglected, full of weeds overgrown with shrubs and bird weed, an example of «uncivilised picturesqueness»,⁴³⁸ which is delightful in its own way. Both these gardens seem to reflect Gilpin's theory of the picturesque: a place that has lost all symmetry and harmony to become a ruin of itself. Furthermore, in the case of 'Sir Luke's Return', this is even more true if we consider that the garden is appreciated by a young boy, Waller, who spends his summers rumbling about it, carrying his Latin books, Thucydides and a lexicon, under his arm. This complies with Gilpin's belief that the picturesque can be enjoyed only by those who have an education and, therefore, have the cultural tools to comprehend and relish the view.

The perfect symmetry of the beautiful Italian garden, by contrast, is about to be invaded by the Gothicism of the little cottage garden, which is the real Gothic element in this tale, a distorted vision, confused and chaotic, yet not terrorising because familiar in the panorama of the villa's surroundings. The presentation of these natural elements may suggest an imperialistic interpretation to this tale. Mr Grynde immediately comes to mind as the representation of Britain's ideals of decorum, social anxiety, and tension towards the preservation of a respectable social façade to camouflage internal struggles. On a wider level, Britain's strength as an imperial power constantly challenged the country's national identity due to its continuous expansion and, consequently, constant contact with the Other, the foreigner that was a source of anxiety and danger against which Britishness had to be protected. Mr Grynde's garden could be seen as Britain itself, trying to annexe new territories that are seen as untidy, disorganised; these new colonies would thus improve when enclosed by the motherland, shaped after its own "whims".

The colonies are "Gothic" like the little garden until they are moulded after the homeland's necessities. The cottage garden threatens to contaminate the perfection of the Italian garden, but without consequences because the fence, although fragile,

⁴³⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 180.

⁴³⁸Riddell, *A Strange Christmas Game*, p. 16.

keeps the corruption of the foreign and its unfamiliarity at bay. In ‘Sir Luke’s Return’, Australia, originally a penal colony then also turned into a precious outpost for trade, becomes Luke’s destination. As an integrated and essential part of the Empire, Australia is seen positively by Sir Luke as a land where to make fortune, a land to be exploited for the economic and commercial benefits it grants Britain and its citizens.

On the other hand, we find the picturesque garden, Sir Luke’s preserved flower garden. His mother’s garden is the sole property Cadbury decides to maintain, because it has a sentimental value to him: in the perspective offered so far, this garden represents Britain’s past, it is the ensemble of the historical and cultural values of a country with a rich history that must be saved from the implacable growth of the Empire and from any impulse towards modernity. In an age when nationalism escalates, the country’s past is the load-bearing pillar that supports the construction of identity and the foundation of its future. The morale to this interpretation is that the Empire might either keep growing or it might collapse, but the country will always remain. Sir Luke is not scared by the expansion and integration of new territories, but he is conscious that what is properly distinctive as “British” must be preserved, if not nurtured, whereas Braddon’s work seems to reflect a rather cautious attitude towards imperialistic growth.

The conclusion of this short narrative follows this line of reasoning: Sir Luke returns from Australia under a false identity only to disclose his true self at the end, after testing the community’s worth. His miserly, assertive and ambitious distant relative, Mr Grynde, is ridiculed, while the young Waller, who used to wander Sir Luke’s garden in a contemplative state, is granted a brighter future.

There is one further story by Braddon in the corpus that stages a garden, but with no particular symbolic meaning behind it. ‘The Ghost’s Name’ presents a garden that is described as

The most delicious old garden in Yorkshire, or so Beatrice Halverdene called it when she came as a bride with the husband of her choice to the old north-country manor. A garden needs perhaps to be a hundred years old to be perfectly beautiful. This was a garden planned in Bacon’s time, and with many of the quaint features of that time still remaining, but without the sage’s more fantastic and tea-gardenish ornamentation, the mere

suggestion of which in the famous essay might convince any reasonable person that if Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays, Shakespeare did not write Bacon's essays: for he whose lightest line can conjure visions of Arcadian beauty would never have recommended stately arches upon pillars of carpenter's work, crowned with little turrets containing bird-cages, or 'broad plates of round coloured glass, gilt, for the sun to play upon', in his scheme of an English garden.⁴³⁹

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) published the essay *Of Gardens* in 1625, to be read in conjunction with the essay *Of Building*, which opens as follows:

God Almighty first planted a Garden. And indeed it is the purest of human pleasures. It is the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man; without which buildings and palaces are but gross handyworks: and a man shall ever see that when ages grow to civility and elegancy, men come to build stately sooner than to garden finely: as if gardening were the greater perfection.⁴⁴⁰

The quotation is coherent with the general style of garden literature, which tends to accentuate the mystical and symbolic meanings of gardens and their structure. The first part of Bacon's essay concentrates on the flower and plant species appropriate to each month of the year and season, a discussion that continues in the second part, where he suggested the cultivation of flowers that release sweet scents in the air, like roses or rosemary. Part three concerns the pattern according to which a garden should be designed:

For gardens (speaking of those which are indeed prince-like, as we have done of buildings), the contents ought not well to be under thirty acres of ground, and to be divided into three parts: a green in the entrance, a heath or desert in the going forth, and the main garden in the middle, besides alleys on both sides [...] The green has two pleasures: the one, because nothing is more pleasant to the eye than green grass kept finely shorn; the other, because it will give you a fair alley in the middle, by which you

⁴³⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 366.

⁴⁴⁰Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, eds. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis and Douglas Denon Heath, 14 vols. (London: Longman and Company, 1857-1874), vol. VI, p. 485.

may go in front upon a stately hedge, which is to enclose the garden [...] The garden is best to be square, encompassed on all the four sides with a stately arched hedge. The arches to be upon pillars of carpenter's work, of some ten foot high and six foot broad, and the spaces between, of the same dimension with the breadth of the arch. Over the arches let there be an entire hedge of some four foot high, framed also upon carpenter's work. And upon the upper hedge, over every arch, a little turret, with a belly enough to receive a cage of birds. And over every space between the arches, some other little figure, with broad plates of round coloured glass, gilt, for the sun to play upon. But this hedge I intend to be raised upon a bank, not steep, but gently sloped, of some six foot, set all with flowers.⁴⁴¹

From part four to part nine, Bacon continued to suggest the most appropriate solutions about alleys, hedges, fountains, and other possible ornamentations for the successful planning of a garden. The Halverdenes thus possess a most refined garden that has been part of the family mansion for centuries, suggesting the prestige of this house. Beatrice Halverdene sees her enclosure as an Eden during the first idyllic moments of marriage, but it all dissipates with the passing of time because no children are born from that love. This garden has little space in the story, but it is located next to a haunted room, the former nursery, where two children had died years before after seeing the ghost.⁴⁴² The garden possibly recalls Eden after Adam and Eve sinned and caused the Fall of Men: the garden's beauty and symmetry counteract the mysterious events that take place within the house, horrible to the point of causing the death of innocent children, a fact that echoes different biblical episodes and fuels the religious aura that characterises the tale. This room is located in the old wing of the house, originally built in Charles II's times, at the end of a long corridor and isolated⁴⁴³, and, despite its reputation, it is not hearse-like in the least. Eventually, a cesspool will be discovered under the floor of this room and identified as the cause of possible toxic emissions that are thought to have caused typhoid fevers, which were fatal for the poor children.⁴⁴⁴ What is peculiar here is that the room is referred to as "picturesque":

⁴⁴¹Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, page number unavailable.

⁴⁴²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 372.

⁴⁴³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 393.

⁴⁴⁴Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 397-398.

This room would be pernicious to infant health, and possibly fatal to infant life. I know what country houses are – cesspools under drawing-rooms, rotten brick drains. None of my family will be allowed to occupy this old wing. Ceilings low, floors too near the earth, windows with one small casement made to open; picturesque – abominable!⁴⁴⁵

The term “picturesque” is here referred not to nature, but to a man-made edifice, and it is used negatively. One of the definitions the *OED* gives of this adjective is «*figurative*. Of language, narrative, etc.: strikingly graphic or vivid, colourful; (*ironically*) careless of the truth, esp. for effect. Also of a person: using language of this sort; behaving in a striking or unusual manner»;⁴⁴⁶ the term “graphic” is employed to indicate the use of realistic language or the display of realistic images, possibly disturbing, as is the case of the room’s description in the text. The term could also be interpreted ironically in the context of this sentence, implying that Mr Halverdene would call the country house not picturesque at all, but rather “abominable” given its reputation.

Also ‘Earthbound’ by Oliphant is garden centred. The mansion of the Beresfords at Deintry is surrounded by a green terrace with marble steps and vases on each one, as in an Italian garden, separated by the parterre of a flower garden; the garden is connected to another side of the house by a lime-tree walk. All is very beautiful apart from a little square corner that joins them; in fact, a hundred years before, a high brick wall had been built, with a pedestal surmounted by an ornamental, possibly funerary, vase. This confers a certain gloominess to the environment, a detail whose function is unknown but that disturbs the beauty of the gardens. The wall has a door which opens into the byway through the park: «there stood the wall built to shut out no one knew what; there loomed aloft the funeral urn upon its pedestal raised to commemorate no one knew what.»⁴⁴⁷ Sadness and melancholy are the dominating feelings that run throughout the whole story, which begins with the Beresfords mourning the loss of

⁴⁴⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 398.

⁴⁴⁶*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

⁴⁴⁷Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 41.

their youngest child right before Christmas time. Even wintry nature is beautiful, in contrast with the dark mood and black clothes worn by the characters, who are,

Even in the sharpness of the air, pleased to hear the crackling under [the] feet which betokened the frost, and admiring the fairy whiteness in which the great trees had robed themselves. All lit up with those red rays, with warm and gorgeous belts of colour upon the sky, and every prospect of cold and fine weather, the things most desirable when there is a frost and it is Christmas [...] The park at Daintrey was lovely always, but it never was more beautiful than it was now, with that red sunshine lightning up all those stately white giants in their robes of rime.⁴⁴⁸

The frosty landscape of wintertime is typically Romantic and reflects the melancholia lingering in the air and pervading the souls of the characters. The paintings by Caspar David Friedrich immediately come to mind as the perfect epitome of the Romantic artist whose production comprises a variety of wintry landscapes reflecting the inner soul of the observer. An example is the renowned painting entitled *Winter Landscape* (1811), where we can see a panorama fully covered by thick snow, possibly at the closing of day. The contour of a Gothic church emerges from the clouds and matches the conifers that come out of the snowy terrain and project themselves towards the sky, a symbol of hope and resurrection reinforced by the presence of a wooden cross at their feet. An injured or disabled man sits before the trees and the cross in contemplation, representing the solitary state of mankind before the greatness of the divine and sublime nature. The last red flashes of the sun are a further sign that the light of hope and faith shines for mankind. As in this painting, in Oliphant's tale the red rays of the sun lit up the desolation of the park and, on another level, symbolise the possibility of "resurrection" from tragedy and pain, a guiding light towards a new phase of life in acceptance of the fate that has befallen the family. In this perspective, the mysterious urn in the garden acquires a certain significance in the story: it is a relic from the past, now standing as a memento that death spares no one, but also that it is not the end if those who remain are willing to remember. The dark atmosphere is

⁴⁴⁸Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, p. 42.

counteracted by the country houses close to the park, which offer a nice sight echoing warmth and softness, the idea of family; the noises are in the distance, soft but vivid at the same time, yet not penetrating as they would be in a city:

There was a sound of dogs and human voices populating the stillness, and the cluster of low red roofs, the smoke from the chimneys, the cheerful blaze of firelight out of the uncovered windows, seemed to cheer and warm the whole landscape.⁴⁴⁹

On one side, this description of human activity around the park offers a reassuring image that partially removes the heavy layer of solitude and cold, opposed to the smoke and fire that symbolise family and the warmth of the domestic hearth; the whiteness is contrasted by another note of colour given by the glimpses of the fire that are visible through the open windows. On the other side, the cheerfulness of the families gathered for Christmas counteracts the sorrow that the Beresfords are experiencing in this time of mourning, further highlighting this unhappy moment for the family.

During Christmas time, the Beresfords invite young Edmund Coventry, the former ward of Sir Robert Beresford, with whom Maud, the eldest daughter, is in love. One day, while strolling in the park on his way to the lake that completes the property, Edmund notices a shadow moving swiftly near the dark wall in the park, separating the park's side of the mansion from that of the lake. The encounter is described in a suggestive way:

He started lightly, closing the door after him with a cheerful bang, and turning his steps towards the lime-tree walk, through which one great beam of sunshine like red gold had pierced in the opening between the two greatest trees. This looked like a golden bridge cutting the little avenue in two; beyond it there was the shadow of the wall already described which thrust itself straight in front of the low sun. While Edmund admired this great broad blaze of light he was startled by seeing something move beyond it in the

⁴⁴⁹Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, p. 49.

darker part – something white [...] a woman, a lady, walking along with the most composed and gentle tread.⁴⁵⁰

The woman is dressed in white and moves lightly as if she was not even touching the ground, like a snowflake falling from the sky. She stands in contrast both with the shadows cast by the wall and the red and golden flares produced by the setting sun through the trees. In this image, darkness and light coexist and clash: the fiery colours of the light, symbol of hope for a possible joyful future, are in part shaded by the semidarkness caused by the wall, which seems to be blocking Edmund's path towards the light. In the middle, between darkness and light, stands the mysterious white woman (who also wears a black fichu). Edmund almost immediately falls in love with her, «a creature born to influence him»:⁴⁵¹

Her hands were clasped before her. Her white dress trailed a little behind her, but seemed to have no stain upon it, or mark of the wet. Her head was a little thrown back. Ah, yes! Surely they were blue, those eyes; they could not have been anything but blue. And she had very little colour in her face, just enough to make it lifelike, and give an appearance of health and perfection; no sickliness, no incompleteness, was in the hue. The soft little half-smile was still upon the lips – lips that were like rose-coral, not very red, but warm and soft. She came on without paying any attention to Edmund, as if, indeed, she did not see him. And this piqued him a little. But his heart leaped so at the sight of her that he was not capable of cool judgement or criticism.⁴⁵²

The story continues with Edmund and the girl slowly growing more familiar, and with him intending to marry her. However, those shadows on the path to happiness eventually will prove real, for the young man will learn that the girl, named Maud like young Miss Beresford, is but the ghost of a lady who had died a century earlier. This will throw Edmund into a state of utter misery, to the point of obsession, until he marries the living Maud and leads a regular and happy life, all in all.

⁴⁵⁰Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p.42.

⁴⁵¹Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 46.

⁴⁵²Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 53.

Ghostly Maud is a particularly interesting character, for she raises two questions that are worth speculating about. Firstly, during one of her conversations with Edmund, she confesses:

“I go all about”, she said, very softly, “sometimes into the house; but no one sees me. That is what made me so glad when you spoke. I have seen you often, but you are confused with the other ones. So many, so many I have seen. Now that you have spoken to me I will always remember which is you” [...] “I have seen a great many, a great many”, she said; “they all come and go, but they do not see me. That is the punishment I have. The house is altered. But I take great interest in it: I was always fond of it.”⁴⁵³

When one night they walk together to the urn, and Edmund exclaims that it is a gloomy corner, she replies:

“Not gloomy to me. I was always fond of it. When it was put up we were all pleased. That was what was wrong in me. You know”, she said, with her little soft laugh [...] “That is why I am here so much.” She paused, and gave a little sigh: but then added, brightening, “It is not hard: when you are used to it, when now and then you meet with someone who sees you, it is not hard. I am a little sad sometimes, but very happy now.”⁴⁵⁴

On another occasion, she states once again: «“it is so long since I have spoken to anyone – since I have seen anyone run to meet me,” she said, “I wonder how it is that you, out of them all”».⁴⁵⁵ Maud’s words express a strong wish to be heard and listened to: she could be seen as a symbol of Victorian women, unheard and relegated to the domestic space, rarely included in the milieu of scientific, political and cultural discourses. Maud is surprised and cheerful when someone finally listens to what she has to say, or simply proves concerned about her well-being. When she is given the occasion to speak, Maud screams her heart out in favour of her most cherished

⁴⁵³Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 55.

⁴⁵⁴Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 56.

⁴⁵⁵Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 61.

interest: earth itself. As the title of this tale announces, Maud is “earthbound” both *de facto* and figuratively: as she explains to Edmund, she is unheard and unseen for she is serving her punishment, “exiled” on earth to expiate the guilt of being too fond of it: «“I was so fond of the house and trees, and everything that was our own. I thought there was nothing better, nothing so good. I was all for the earth, and nothing more. That is why I am here so much.”»⁴⁵⁶ At the end of the narrative, Edmund eventually discovers that Maud is a spirit, yet he still implores her to stay and be with him, but she once more tries to explain that a superior will prevents her from further interacting with the living:

“It is not permitted. I told you I had loved the earth and all that was on it: and now I am earthbound. I could not go if I would, and I would not go if I could. What we have to do, is what we love the best. But I never thought that you would mistake so much – that you would not understand.”⁴⁵⁷

Maud expresses with passion her love for the earth and all that exists upon it, implicitly suggesting her will to protect it all. She would prefer to wander there even if she had the chance to choose eternal rest, at the cost of being ignored and unnoticed by the living, in order to watch over the earth that is most precious to her. Maud is immensely generous in her sacrifice, giving up her eternal rest for the sake of the planet she cannot bear to leave behind.

Edmund initially seems to be the right one, the sole person who can comprehend the importance of her pledge, but he turns out to be interested in her devotion alone, not in what she has to say. Disappointed by him, she abandons her hope of finding someone who could hear her voice and understand it; at this point, Maud’s sacrifice is doubled, for she is not liberated from her penitence, and, at the same time, she imposes an eternity of silence on herself. Her cause, the earth, is thus indirectly denied a voice. Maud eventually bids farewell to Edmund in a rather cold, aloof manner, reproaching

⁴⁵⁶Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 56.

⁴⁵⁷Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 72.

him for his misunderstanding and by calling him «brother»:⁴⁵⁸ by addressing him as her Christian brother, as children of the same God, Maud widens the gap between her suitor and herself, establishing once and for all that she cannot entertain any human relation other than exchanging words. She seems to imply that the love for the earth is the sole motive of her permanence on it. Contrary to Maud, Edmund allowed his fancies and lust to overcome his judgement, silencing the woman's voice and reducing her to an object of desire. The urn in the park could be Maud's, and if so, the fact that it lacks an epitaph commemorating the girl is a strong reminder of her impossibility to be recognised, if not remembered and, consequently, her cause is doomed to remain ignored.

In 'Earthbound', the funerary urn placed in the park brings to mind an unknown soul who is silenced both by the passing of time and by the incapability of the people she meets to figure her voice out. Furthermore, certain tales here analysed stage ruins of man-built constructions that evoke the past and play a symbolic role in the *dénouement* of the narratives. Oliphant's 'The Open Door' is set in the park of a villa where the ruins of the house once inhabited by the servants still stand; in particular, the cavity that used to be the front door plays a fundamental role in the tale, representing the possibility of change both for the living and the ghost-child who haunts that space, crying out for his lost mother. The presence of these ruins in the tale reflects the "mania" that took over Britain in the eighteenth century and that continued well into the nineteenth century. Ruins became an influential theme and were included in discussions on various subjects, from nature to the memory of the past and the building of national identity. Britishness and ruins are closely related, as British intellectuals have often demonstrated an attachment to the past, «the contemplation of absolute pastness of the past»,⁴⁵⁹ and a fascination for decline. Ruins represented the heritage of British past, fuelling national pride as a world power. Janowitz stated that

Into the later eighteenth century aesthetic of the picturesque, ruins were admired as blending into the countryside, while the sense of "country" as rural terrain and "country"

⁴⁵⁸Oliphant, "The Open Door" and Other Stories, p. 72.

⁴⁵⁹Janowitz, *England's Ruins*, p. 1.

as nation also began to melt one into the other. In such a seemingly self-evident and therefore “unimagined” coincidence between country and country – the “naturalizing” of the nation – was born the myth of rural England, as well as the myth of the homogeneous coherence of the nation [...] The hegemonic English group which imagines the community of “Britain” calls upon the figure of ruin to secure its past.⁴⁶⁰

The picturesque aesthetics leads to the blending of the ruin as cultural item into the ruin as natural item, also theorised by Gilpin in his description of Fountains Abbey in 1772, where the edifice is described as having been rooted in the soil for so long that it has become assimilated to the surrounding natural environment, to the point that it is impossible to discern where the work of men starts and ends. In *Observations on Several Parts of the Counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex* (1809)⁴⁶¹ Gilpin discussed the appeal of the ruins that were to be considered picturesque: in fact, ruins create irregularity through form, as dilapidated architectural elements that are no longer intact and have, therefore, become ragged, or through colour, as the stains left by the weather and the green of weeds and vines growing over the walls of ruinous edifices. Romantics celebrated ruins in various works, from Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey* (1798) to Percy B. Shelley’s *Ozymandias* (1818). The contemplation of ruins became “picturesque” also thanks to Ann Radcliffe, who applied the term to the observation of castles and ruins to evoke the sense of age and define the typically British attraction to the derelict remnants of the past.⁴⁶² Victorians followed in the steps of their predecessors: some of the best-known ruin poems are by nineteenth century authors such as William Barnes, *The Castle Ruins* (1862), Robert Browning, *Love Among the Ruins* (1855), Christina Rossetti, *A Castle-Builder’s World* (ca. 1880). As Andrews argued, ‘pleasing melancholy’ and ‘agreeable’ horror⁴⁶³ are emotional

⁴⁶⁰Janowitz, *England’s Ruins*, p. 4. A recurrent image is that of the monasteries, because it reminds British people of royal absolutism, which appeared reinforced with the dissolution of the monasteries and the schism exacted by Henry VIII.

⁴⁶¹Reverend William Gilpin, *Observations on Several Parts of the Counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Also on Several Parts of North Wales, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1809).

⁴⁶²Austin, «Aesthetic Embarrassment», p. 645.

⁴⁶³Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 41.

experiences felt during the contemplation of ruins. The dominating feeling is, therefore, melancholy, which has been defined as typically British, the ‘English Malady’, ascribed to various reasons, from the rainy climate to sedentarism to the overcrowding in urban areas. The feelings of ‘agreeable horror’ and ‘pleasing melancholy’ are «nourished by images of decay, by monstrous, broken, irregular forms, in both natural scenery and the works of man.»⁴⁶⁴ Picturesque travellers prefer landscapes that are irregular, vast, punctuated by ruinous edifices, because these represent a return to the state of nature.

Andrews recognised five different responses to the admiration of ruins: the first one is *sentimental*, the second one is *antiquarian*, which recreates the ruin’s former state on an imaginary level, and possibly requires architectural expertise; the third response is *aesthetic*, derived from the decorative nature of the ruin, its colours and form. The fourth type of response is *moral*, according to which the ruin becomes a *memento mori* of the past; the last kind of response is *political*: ruined castles represent the liberation from medieval feudalism, while ruined religious buildings, namely abbeys and monasteries, stand for the banishment of the papal authority from British soil. Ruins in literature represent liminal spaces that overcome oppositions of past and present, nature and man-made culture; they represent features of the landscape that emerge from past eras and have no specific functional value in a modern historical time, but it is amongst their remains that the present happens in fiction. They symbolise the prevailing of nature on culture, but, at the same time, ruins trigger the production of culture in that they lead onlookers to use their creative imagination and picture the events that took place amongst those dilapidated walls, ideally bringing them back. Ruins are ghosts in themselves, the remnants of a past long gone by that, if carefully scrutinised, can be re-enacted and given new value. The ruins’ liminality, qualifying them as border spaces between the world of the living and the dead, the known and the unknown, the Other, are at first cause of dread because they are unfamiliar, the Freudian *unheimlich*, before their place is restored and a new meaning is given to them, liberating them from the vines and dust of the past. Similarly, in Oliphant’s stories the ruins eventually acquire new significance and become symbols of the

⁴⁶⁴ Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 45.

liberation of the souls from the boundaries of earth as they are finally understood or, at least momentarily, heard.

2.2 The Sublime and the Picturesque

2.2.1 Representing Nature in Nineteenth-Century Literature

Chaudhary interpreted nineteenth-century picturesque as the symptom of a change in the relationship between bodily perception and the image world, which can be translated as the practice of «converting the world into a picture in order to experience it.»⁴⁶⁵ Andrews stated that by the 1790s, obsolescence and disproportion acquired aesthetic appeal compared to utility and proportion, and that variety became a prominent feature along with the «notorious Picturesque fondness for ruins, hovels, gypsies and beggars.»⁴⁶⁶

The Victorian Age saw the naturalization of processes meant to alter natural landscapes in order to make them ‘picturesque’, literally picture-like.

Combinations of classic figures from the picturesque, such as stillness, roughness, mountainous terrain, shades of strong light and deep shadow, gleams of water, and foreground features (often rocks or fallen trees) framing the view, all became stock paraphernalia of the ideal landscape.⁴⁶⁷

What was suitable for painting in the eighteenth century, in the following century became photographable. Be it in photograph, painting or textual description of nature, Wordsworth’s attitude towards the natural world was still a lingering presence over Victorian authors. Inaugurated with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798,⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁵Zahid R. Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire. Photography in Nineteenth-Century India* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. 110.

⁴⁶⁶Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 56.

⁴⁶⁷Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire*, p. 112.

⁴⁶⁸William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

which opened with Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and ended with Wordsworth's meditative poem *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth's 'myth of nature' was still influential in the nineteenth century. Wordsworth exalted nature poetry as opposed to the chaotic representations of modern and industrialised life, which had turned men into machines, condemned to a life of uniformity, monotonousness, and torpor. Wordsworth thus promoted the calmness of country life because it allows us to stop and meditate and, above all, to perceive emotions recollected in tranquillity that will, in turn, originate powerful overflows of emotions. The lonely cloud wandering in the Lake District is alone but, at least, it moves according to its own perception of the surrounding environment, not in unison with an indistinct multitude.⁴⁶⁹

The nineteenth century witnessed a whole new way of moving across the continent, a period in which British identity grew and transformed thanks to the contact not only with the effects of colonization, but also with the other European countries. The age of Victoria saw the proliferation of travel guidebooks, various locations across Europe turned into tourist destinations and hotels, restaurants and shops were built. Travelling became commercialized. Austin argued that nineteenth-century travellers suffered from discomfort and self-contempt, because their financial means were more or less modest with respect to their noble predecessors' on the Grand Tour, but the rising middle class intended to cultivate and display literary and cultural tastes in its process of self-assertion.⁴⁷⁰ In the second half of the Victorian Era, the prestigious aesthetic

⁴⁶⁹Wordsworth's primary choice was to depict moments of rural life, for he considered country life as the closest to the primary laws of nature. The contact with nature, from which they draw their sustenance, generates elementary feelings that co-exist in a state of simplicity and contemplation. This philosophy is represented in literature through the use of a less sophisticated language, 'really used by men'. Wordsworth refers to the sublime sense of «something far more deeply interfused.» We should acknowledge that much of Wordsworth's sensibility towards nature derives from his sister's: Dorothy Wordsworth was a keen botanist who moved with her brother to the Lake District. Her observations of nature resulted in her journals: it is possible that her brother William reworked many of her recordings, considering that many of the images and linguistic expedients employed by the poet appear in Dorothy's journals.

⁴⁷⁰Austin, «Aesthetic Embarrassment», p. 629.

codes on which the rhetoric of moral superiority of these tourists relied often embarrassed them.

This usually occurred in one of two ways: either the material circumstances of tourism desublimated the aesthetic code of a tourist's consumption or the viewer's efforts to encounter the new and to defamiliarize the customary lapsed into a dependence on a familiar (and shunned) visual paradigm, that of the picturesque. The precariousness of the nineteenth-century tourist's visual pleasure is blatant in the prosaic accounts of ordinary persons in unfamiliar settings; but it is noticeable as well in the records of practiced writers on native ground.⁴⁷¹

As for Victorian literature, it still was infused with Wordsworth's views. Amongst others, Richard Jefferies, who published most of his works during the last decade of his life until 1887, was particularly influenced by the Romantic poet. Jefferies was a man of the countryside who moved to the city, London, for economic necessities, but, as Drew claimed, he felt indignation towards the inhuman and unnatural consequences of industrialization all lifelong.⁴⁷² Drew wrote that

As an Englishman born to a country heritage, but forced by the need to make a living to go to town and, once there [...] Jefferies mirrored in his own life the situation of millions of other Englishmen who had been forced into urban life by the Industrial Revolution. We have in his writings an invaluable presentation of what the countryside and the loss of the countryside meant to the Victorian town-dweller, that is, to the majority of the population of Victorian England.⁴⁷³

Like Wordsworth, Jefferies devoted much of his observations to the rural, everyday life of country people, which he considered to be a book of extraordinary interest.

⁴⁷¹Austin, «Aesthetic Embarrassment», p. 629.

⁴⁷²Philip Drew, «Richard Jefferies and the English Countryside», *Victorian Studies* 11, no. 2 (December 1967), pp. 181.

⁴⁷³Drew, «Richard Jefferies and the English Countryside», p. 182.

That is why he built a body of work that is mid-way between the picturesque sketching activity and the recording, like a sort of memorial, of country habits, speeches and manners, to avoid their being lost to posterity's memory.⁴⁷⁴ In the collection of essays *Hodge and His Masters* (1880),⁴⁷⁵ Jefferies's lyrical recollection of nature sometimes gives in to actual criticism of social and political questions like the condition of agriculture or farming. Drew continued by arguing that Jefferies was aware that the countryside was the site of industry, where «bitter hard work is turned into wealth», a fact that gives his writing a grip on reality.⁴⁷⁶

This attitude towards industrialization and urban life recalls the approach of another great author of the Victorian Age, namely the pre-Raphaelite William Morris. Alongside his utopia *News from Nowhere* (1891),⁴⁷⁷ Morris's production comprises a series of romances of medieval inspiration where natural landscapes are the main settings as in the dramatic monologue *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858).⁴⁷⁸ Morris strived for a simpler life and a return to a more rural context, but without fully rejecting all elements of urban life. On the contrary, his ideal of pastoral life included

Elements from town, garden and wilderness. In order to blend these diverse elements he cleanses the town from its dirt and violent hurry, rids the forest of its terror, and robs the garden of its social exclusiveness.⁴⁷⁹

Thomas Hardy was akin to Morris in his appreciation of nature, but with a more pessimistic attitude: his thoughts are summarised in his phrase «chastened sublimity»,⁴⁸⁰ expressing his less enthusiastic view of the natural world. Landscape

⁴⁷⁴Drew, «Richard Jefferies and the English Countryside», p. 184.

⁴⁷⁵Richard Jefferies, *Hodge and His Masters* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015).

⁴⁷⁶Drew, «Richard Jefferies and the English Countryside», p. 185.

⁴⁷⁷William Morris, *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wilmer (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

⁴⁷⁸William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (London: Ellis and White, 1875).

⁴⁷⁹Pauline Fletcher, *Gardens and Grim Ravines: The Language of Landscape in Victorian Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 189.

⁴⁸⁰Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, ed. Claire Seymour (Chatham: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), p. 6.

becomes the representation of human suffering because men are a part of nature. This is well illustrated in Hardy's masterpiece *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), where he manages to convey the main character's state of mind through the description of the different environments Tess finds herself in. When she experiences her greatest joy and her happiest moments, she lives in Talbothays Dairy, described as a fertile, verdant land where life renews itself in spring, mirroring a moment in Tess's life when she is treated kindly and her love for Angel is blooming and reciprocated. Tess lives in unison with nature, free and content, that is why Hardy often used animals as metaphors for her state, for instance she is comfortable and «warm like a sunned cat.»⁴⁸¹

Talbothays Dairy stands in stark contrast with Flintcomb-Ash, where she progressively becomes disconnected from the cycle of life renewal, because her past causes the disruption of her identity as she moves forward towards this village, turning her into a hunted animal. The name "Flintcomb-Ash" is interesting to analyse: the flint is a kind of hard stone, whereas the *OED* defines "comb" as a «long and narrow hill or ridge, having steep sides. *Scottish and English regional (northern)*, usually in form *kame, kaim*; frequent in proper names»,⁴⁸² the adding of the noun "ash" reinforces the idea of a barren land where no vegetation, nor life in general, can flourish. In fact, Flintcomb-Ash is described as a sort of wasteland where nature is brutal; a particularly striking image of the landscape at Flintcomb-Ash is the ominous description of the birds that are «gaunt, spectral creatures with tragical eyes – eyes which had witnessed scenes of cataclysmal horror in inaccessible arctic regions»,⁴⁸³ apparently suggesting that the place is unsafe, uncomfortable, and potentially dangerous. It is, indeed, here that Tess experiences some of her most tragic moments. Drew stated that the simple emotions provoked by dwelling in a rural context are, nonetheless, more acute and powerful because of their simplicity and connection to a primordial state of nature. For this reason, he argued that many Victorian authors, like Hardy, perceived the countryside as the perfect theatre of cruel and tragic events. This

⁴⁸¹*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

⁴⁸²David B. Morris, «Gothic Sublimity», *New Literary History* 16, no. 2 (Winter, 1985), p. 306.

⁴⁸³Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, p. 307.

is possibly the link connecting nature and the Gothic. Morris affirmed that the exaggeration of emotions is a key to understanding Gothic sublimity, which releases into fiction images and desires long suppressed, and unleashes the possibility of tragedy and peril because of an «uncontrollable release from restraint.»⁴⁸⁴ This also means that parts of our minds and soul that were, indeed, restrained are liberated, and we are compelled to recognise their existence and face them. In a Burkean perspective, the Gothic is the perfect site of the sublime, since the genre leads to the arousal of strong emotions, namely terror, fear, horror, similar feelings as to those inspired by the sublime natural landscapes. Moreover, characters themselves can inspire such strong emotions: the antagonists, ghosts, monsters, or other human beings, are often indecipherable, alien to the sphere of the observing subject and, for this reason, they encompass all the characteristics of the sublime. The Freudian theory of the *unheimlich* is useful also in this kind of discussion since the subject finds himself face to face with unfamiliar parts of his deepest self.

The Gothic sublime stands in between reason and imagination, in a space where the subject abandons himself to the principle of pleasure brought about by horror:

It is the voice from the crypt (the deathly space of all Gothic narratives) which wishes to write the narrative of the gap, that infinitesimal lapse on the part of Reason when it gives way to chaos and the mind embraces the full terror of the sublime. The subject declares “I am my own abyss”; life and will forego their struggle as Gothicscapes of “despondency and madness” are embraced with no thought of returning to the Law of Reason.⁴⁸⁵

The Gothic sublimity is often counteracted by the picturesque in terms of natural environment: on the one hand, Gothic nature is the setting of anxieties made real, tangible, and it acts as the background of happenings that oblige the stories' protagonists to look into their deepest selves. On the other hand, the beauty of the natural landscapes described in many fictional works counteracts the monstrosity of

⁴⁸⁴David B. Morris, «Gothic Sublimity», p. 306.

⁴⁸⁵Vijay Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime*, in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell), p. 292.

what takes place inside the characters' heart and mind, and the tragic events that they experience. The Romantic poet and essayist Anna Laetitia Barbauld argued that the observer / reader of Gothic tales does not perceive actual pleasure in witnessing the sublime. In her opinion, it is the «the excitement of surprise from new and wonderful objects»⁴⁸⁶ that fuels the mind's imaginative ability. This happens because the supernatural triggers amazement in the observer beholding something that he had never seen before, something unknown that produces surprise. This perspective may suggest why the protagonists of the short tales discussed in the first chapter seldom report sentiments of fear on their part, but they react to the sight of the supernatural with anxiety until they become accustomed to the presence of the Other. Once they acknowledge the existence of supernatural entities, which never attack the living with the purpose of harming them, they interact with the spirits directly, and sometimes work in unison, to achieve the resolution of the plot.

2.2.2 Views of Terror

The aesthetic of the picturesque and the sublime has a relevant presence in the corpus, where nature stands either in contrast with the Gothic elements of the narratives, or it indulges the mood of the tales by depicting landscapes “in decline”. On the one hand, the short narratives here analysed present positive descriptions of the countryside, which is perceived as a peaceful realm where the protagonists take refuge from the chaos of urban areas. In Braddon's ‘The Little Woman in Black’, for instance, the protagonists move away from London after their marriage:

The long suburban road, which in those days soon became rustic, fledged by them like a dream that was dreamt, a happy vision of sunlight and glancing leaves, white houses, cottage gardens – now and then a carriage, now and then a cart – and on to the woods and pastures, orchards and hot-gardens of Kent.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁶Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror*, in *The Gothic Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Martin Myrone and Christopher Frayling (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), p. 132.

⁴⁸⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 237.

In ‘The Ghost’s Name’, a novelette by Braddon, Captain Donnelly dreams of a house he would like to have in the countryside where to lead a pastoral lifestyle in a small fancy, «picturesque» house. In the countryside, some of the characters experience a return to their childhood as the country views bring about happy memories from the past. Similarly, other natural landscapes are depicted as bright, colourful and a source of delight. It is the case of the Italian coasts that act as the background to some tales by Mary Elizabeth Braddon,⁴⁸⁸ where the beauty of the natural world counteracts the horror that takes place behind the scenes in the minds and bodies of the characters, pestered by the supernatural.⁴⁸⁹ In ‘Herself’, already analysed in part in Section 1.2.1, the protagonist, Violetta Hammond, moves for the winter to an Italian villa that her late grandfather had recently bought. The mansion is called the Orange Grove, and is located in the town of Taggia, on the Ligurian coast; Violetta hopes that the fine Southern weather will help her recover from her frail health condition, as her lungs are affected by an indefinite illness:

Why, the Orange Grove is the very best part of my fortune. It seems almost a special Providence [...] There are doctors always teasing me about my weak chest, and there is a lonely house and gardens and orange groves waiting for me in a climate invented on purpose for weak chests. I shall live there every winter of my life.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁸Braddon uses the term “picturesque” to depict two buildings in two of her tales: the first one is the family castle of the De St. Valliers ‘His Oldest Friends’ (*Mistletoe Bough*, 1890), a castle surrounded by a fertile and verdant valley that makes it a picturesque spot; the second building is the parsonage in ‘Dorothy’s Rival’, which is not, however, particularly commendable: «the parsonage was a comfortable red-brick house, very square and very uninteresting from a picturesque point of view. It stood a little way back from the high coach road to London with an orchard on one side, and on the other a common cottage garden, with two long flower-beds and a broad gravel-path, and vegetables growing in the middle distance, and espaliers in the background.» Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 102. Mary Elizabeth Braddon, ‘His Oldest Friends’, in *The Cold Embrace and Other Uncollected Ghost Stories*, ed. Richard Dalby (Ashcroft, CA: Ashtree, 2000), pp. 205-223.

⁴⁸⁹In ‘The Invisible Tenants of Rushmere’, Florence Marryat presented an idyllic landscape characterised by «flower-bespangled fields», «bright with summer flowers», where the children amuse themselves amongst the new-mown hay. Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 208.

⁴⁹⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 306.

Violetta appreciates the fact that the edifice is located in an isolated area, so that she can avoid being disturbed during her process of recovery. The variety of natural species growing uncontrolled around the building conveys a sense of wilderness, which Lota particularly adores.⁴⁹¹ However, the reader does not see the landscape through Violetta's eyes, and thus remains unaffected by her enthusiasm: in fact, Braddon's descriptions of the landscape in this story always tend to suggest that something is not right underneath the sunny surface. Gothic sublimity immediately creeps in as the girl arrives in Taggia. In fact, the wilderness, which in itself gives the idea of confusion and entrapment, is the frame of the «solitary, majestic»⁴⁹² villa. The house stands out as a mountain from the tangle of trees, inspiring awe and a sense of apprehension in those who see it. As discussed in the first chapter, the house is indeed a powerful entity with a life of its own, and in this mansion, Violetta does not find solace, but death. The wilderness outside of it only reflects Lota's impossibility of escape from the mansion, which exerts its charms on her by means of the cursed mirror in the library. The fine weather cannot save Lota because she does not profit from it, always being locked up in the medieval section on the interior, a former hospital, a fact that further stresses the dichotomy between her search for healing and her tragic end. The surroundings of the villa are rich in palms and olive trees, species that recall both the seaside and abundance thanks to the fruits they provide, but also in cypresses. The cypress is a symbol of death, often ornating cemeteries, guarding the eternal rest of the dead, and, therefore, it stands as an omen of Violetta's death. The symbolism of death begins to find its way in the story, and the sublime emerges again in the form of «a deep gorge cutting through the heart of the picture [...] a foreground of tumbled crags and threads of running water.»⁴⁹³ The imposing mountains and the dreadful

⁴⁹¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 308.

⁴⁹²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 308.

⁴⁹³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 291. Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 308. Oliphant's dreadful castle in 'The Secret Chamber' is surrounded by velvet lawns, a peaceful avenue with double rows of trees, like a cathedral, woods that look soft and with a rich foliage, an idyllic scenery in contrast with the bloody memories and the secrets the castle holds. At the beginning of the century, Ann Radcliffe depicted the surroundings of the chateau of Monsieur St. Aubert, on the banks of the Garonne (Gasconne) at the very beginning of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by exploiting the sublime as a recurrent trope: «On the pleasant banks of the Garonne, in the province

gorge and crags⁴⁹⁴ rip the canvas where an apparently picturesque landscape is painted: the distance from these natural elements does not cause alarm in the beginning, but they cause awe and inspire a disquiet that will increase to become terror as Violetta slides progressively towards her death. The same apparently positive description characterises the arrival of Helen, who had been invited to stay with her:

There was a landau with a pair of fine strong horses waiting to carry us up to the villa. The road wound gently upward, past orange and lemon groves, and silvery streamlets, and hanging woods, where velvet dark cypresses rose tower-like amidst the silvery-gray of the olives, and so to about midway between the valley, where Taggia's antique palaces and church towers gleamed pale in the dusk, and the crest of the hill along which straggled the white houses of a village.⁴⁹⁵

of Gascony, stood, in the year 1584, the chateau of Monsieur St. Aubert. From its windows were seen the pastoral landscapes of Guienne and Gascony, stretching along the river, gay with luxuriant woods and vines, and plantations of olives. To the south, the view was bounded by the majestic Pyrenees, whose summits, veiled in clouds, or exhibiting awful forms, seen and lost again, as the partial vapours rolled along, were sometimes barren, and gleamed through the blue tinge of air, and sometimes frowned with forests of gloomy pine, that swept downward to their base. These tremendous precipices were contrasted by the green of the pastures and woods that hung upon their skirts; among whose flocks, and herds and simple cottages, the eye, after having scaled the cliffs above, delighted to repose. To the north, and to the east; the plains of Guienne and Languedoc were lost in the mist of distance; on the west Gascony was bounded by the waters of Biscay.» Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Lisa M. Dresner (New York City, NY: Barnes and Noble Books, 2005).

⁴⁹⁴A similar description occurs in 'Sir Hanbury's Request': one day, Sir Hanbury walks through the Black Forest (in Switzerland and Germany), wandering amongst the craggy hills, green all around, with his sketch-book the make sketches of the natural sceneries he sees, and meets a girl in white robes with a red scarf. He moves like the chamois hunter in Lord Byron's *Manfred*, Act II. The hunter lives amongst the mountains' crags and rarely moves to valley. Manfred is particularly touched by this figure, whose pure soul he praises: «Myself, and thee -- a peasant of the Alps-- / Thy humble virtues, hospitable home, / And spirit patient, pious, proud and free; / Thy self-respect, grafted on innocent thoughts; / Thy days of health, and nights of sleep; thy toils, / By danger dignified, yet guiltless; hopes / Of cheerful old age and a quiet grave, / With cross and garland over its green turf, / And thy grandchildren's love for epitaph; / This do I see -- and then I look within -- / It matters not -- my soul was scorch'd already!» Lord Byron, *Manfred, Act II, Scene I*, in *Selected Poems*, ed. Peter Manning (London: Penguin Books, 2005), ll. 63-73, page number unavailable.

⁴⁹⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 313.

The skyline of Taggia gently comes out of this light, in contrast with the huge, straggled villa. However, the dark cypresses tower above the expanse of beautiful natural elements, obscuring the brilliance of the surroundings with their presage; furthermore, the glowing light that illuminates the trees and the sea, making it all glitter, also casts a shadow on Lota's face, which Helen cannot see. The sickness of the house had already begun to work on Violetta's brittle body, and Helen is of course struck by the pejorative changes her friend has undergone, but everything in this apparently heavenly place seems meant to hide the truth and hinder Lota's salvation. At first, also the villa appears to be a wonderful place:

A fairy palace, with lighted windows, shining against a back-ground of wooded hills. I could not see the colours of the flowers in the thickening gloom of night, but I could smell the scent of the roses and the fragrant-leaved geraniums that filled the vases on the terrace.⁴⁹⁶

And again:

The house was perched upon the shoulders of a romantic hill, with an outlook of surpassing loveliness, and looking round at the brilliant colouring of an Italian drawing-room steeped in soft clear light, and redolent of roses and carnations.⁴⁹⁷

The luxuriant nature suggests that nothing evil can lurk around the Taggia villa, but the landscape does not match the rapid deterioration of Violetta's health, whose signs become increasingly visible. In fact, Helen is particularly sensitive to her state, admitting that Lota is spending a miserable time enjoying nothing in a place so lovely

⁴⁹⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 314. In particular, the room where the cursed mirror is placed is defined «picturesque, how luxurious, the old room looked in the glaring light of the wood, which brightened even the grim tapestry, and glorified the bowls of red and purple anemones and other scented flowers, and the long wall of books, and the velvet curtained windows, and shining brown wall», Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 329.

⁴⁹⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 315.

that «bare existence should have been bliss»;⁴⁹⁸ the image of her «perishing friend, dying by inches, and obstinately determined to die»⁴⁹⁹ haunts Helen.

Braddon employed a similar technique of landscape presentation in ‘Good Lady Ducayne’, also set in Italy in the winter season. The protagonist of this story is Bella Rolleston, a young girl who lives with her mother; they are so poor that, sometimes, they even lack food to eat. Bella’s mother was a noblewoman before marrying a scoundrel who deserted her and left her poor and destitute. Bella decides to enrol as companion to a lady, the only possible career that she sees in her life. She thus becomes the companion of Lady Ducayne, an old woman who looks withered and all bony like a hag. The woman leaves for Italy to spend the winter in a warmer climate than London’s and brings Bella with her. Italy is dreamland to the girl’s dreamy soul; in a letter to her mother, she writes:

The blue sky, the olive woods, the orange and lemon orchards between the cliffs and the sea – sheltering in the hollow of the great hills – and with summer waves dancing up to the narrow ridge of pebbles and weeds which is the Italian idea of a beach [...] the sun is so hot [...] lovely coast, wonderful sea, these summer flowers that bloom in winter. There is a hedge of pink geraniums under my window, mother – a thick, rank hedge, as if the flowers grew wild – and there are Dijon roses climbing over arches and palisades all along the terrace – a rose garden full of bloom in November!⁵⁰⁰

Bella describes the Italian coast at Cap Ferrino, possibly in the Ligurian region, like Helen and Lota depict it in ‘Herself’. She loses herself in the wonderful shining hills, where she spends her days roaming amidst olive woods. But again, the sublime element appears, and behind the dark hills the frame of the snowy mountains becomes visible, surrounded by pine woods.⁵⁰¹ Bella’s joyful wanderings will not last long, as her health, like Violetta’s, progressively declines; she appears drained of her life, paler, weaker, and begins to carry marks of bites as if she were regularly bitten by

⁴⁹⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 318.

⁴⁹⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 321.

⁵⁰⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 43.

⁵⁰¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 44.

mosquitos. The sublime thus penetrates Bella's life in the form of terror, heightened by the unfamiliarity with the places and people around her; she is homesick, but incapable of leaving to return to the safety of her mother's arms. Braddon illustrates Bella's downfall by saying that she sits motionless in the wind, amidst all the beauty and brightness of the land and sea, shivering despite the warmth. Dread comes in the form of wind descending from the mountains and contaminating the beautiful scenery that is no longer a comfort to her. As the story unravels, we learn that Good Lady Ducayne is not good at all, for she instructs her Italian doctor, Parravicini, to perform tests on the young companions that she engages to find the secret of prolonged life, at the expenses of the poor young ladies, who eventually die. Bella will be the only survivor.

During the Romantic period and, subsequently, well into the nineteenth century, the Alps became one of the most renowned locations for tours and increasingly crowded with tourists. Victorian travellers saw the Dolomites, in particular, as a place where a new and progressive artistic sentiment could rise, the 'Dolomite picturesque' as Bainbridge called it, continuing the tradition of eighteenth-century picturesque landscapes.⁵⁰² Alpinists and picturesque artists visited mainly the Italian Dolomites and the Austrian and Swiss Alps, drawing sketches or realising paintings of great beauty like the tryptic by the alpinist Elijah Walton, which he painted in the Italian region of Trentino Alto-Adige: *Monte Marmarolo, seen from the Auronzo Valley*,

⁵⁰²Bainbridge, *Topographic Memory and Victorian Travellers in the Dolomite Mountains*, p. 164. Vacations and tours to the mountains became a habit in the nineteenth century, a fact that spurred the publication of a series of guides for the good practice of 'mountaineering', as it is called in Somerset's *The Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes* (1885). Other manuals of mountain excursions, all prompting safety, competence and training, include Joseph and Elizabeth Pennell's *Over the Alps on a Bicycle* (1898), Elizabeth Tuckett's *Pictures in Tyrol and Elsewhere: From a Family Sketch-Book* (1867) and *How We Spent the Summer, or a Voyage en Zigzag, in Switzerland and Tyrol, with Some Members of the Alpine Club* (1864), and A. F. Mummery's *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus* (1895). A particularly productive alpinist, painter and sketcher was Elijah Walton, who published several manuals such as his *Flowers from the Upper Alps* (1869) and, for artists, *The Peaks in Pen and Pencil for Students of Alpine Scenery* (1872). Alpine clubs and mountaineering circles also began to be instituted. See William Bainsbridge, *Topographic Memory and Victorian Travellers in the Dolomite Mountains*, p. 168.

Monte Tofana, seen from Cortina d'Ampezzo and *Monte Civita, seen from the Lake of Alleghe*.⁵⁰³ The Swiss Alps are the setting of Rhoda Broughton's 'The Man with the Nose' and are the destination of Hector and Eveline's gateway from France in their attempt to escape the ghost of André in Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant'; also Molesworth opts for a mountainous landscape in her short story 'Unexplained'.

In Broughton's story, two lovers have just got married and they must decide where to spend their honeymoon; they eventually choose Belgium, the Rhine area, and then Switzerland.⁵⁰⁴ These places are presented as the typical *locus amoenus* of pastoral life, which seems ideal for a newlywed couple. However, despite the premises, this tale encompasses all the elements of the sublime and the feelings of dread it entails. Freud's theory of the *unheimlich* is appropriate. In fact, Elizabeth recalls an event that had occurred to her years before, while she was vacationing at the Lakes. A strange man characterised by a particularly shaped nose had mesmerised her. Elizabeth is obviously terrified whenever the memory comes to her mind, because she remembers having lost all control over herself and being unaware of what was happening to her. The unfamiliarity of that event brings terror that is mirrored by the sublimity of the natural landscapes that stand as the background of the picturesque Rhine valley. This fertile land echoes the fecundity of marriage, and the joys of simple life in nature recall the happiness of the first moments of married life, over which the sword of Damocles looms. A storm comes while the couple is on a cruise on the river, admiring the «eternal-clad slopes»:⁵⁰⁵ storms are typically sublime features in literature, and

⁵⁰³The excursions to the Alps were encouraged also by means of art exhibitions, like Walton's, and photobooks, which became the new way of sketching the picturesque world in the nineteenth century, such as W.D. Howard and F.H. Lloyd's privately published photo-book *Photographs Among the Dolomite Mountains* (1865).

⁵⁰⁴Honeymoons in Victorian times were expected to be, like other journeys, transformative for the couple, in terms of habits, physical aspect, and health, possibly because oftentimes the destinations were seaside or country places. This presumed changing power of honeymoons is discussed also in Collins's *The Woman in White*, where Marian Halcombe is disappointed by the lack of alterations that she perceives by reading her sister's letters, sent by Laura during her honeymoon with Sir Percival in Europe. See Helena Michie, «Victorian Honeymoons: Sexual Reorientations and the "Sights" of Europe», *Victorian Studies* 43, no. 2 (Winter, 2001), pp. 229-251.

⁵⁰⁵Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 22.

this one in particular tears apart the peaceful moment of leisure and warns the reader that the couple's happiness is not going to last forever. As Broughton inserts elements of the sublime in contexts of tranquillity, she progressively increases the reader's anxiety, like Braddon does in her tales. The storm passes swiftly, and everything apparently returns to its former state of calm:

The squall clears off by and by, and we go streaming, streaming on past the unnumbered little villages by the water's edge with church-spires and pointed roofs; past the countless rocks, with their little pert castles perched on the top of them; past the tall, stiff poplar rows. The church bells are ringing gayly as we go by. A nightingale is singing from a wood. The black eagle of Prussia droops on the stream behind us, swish-swish through the dull green water.⁵⁰⁶

The harmonious, picturesque scenery is marked by the presence of singing nightingales: this bird is generally associated with beauty and melody, but they are nocturnal animals and, for this reason, they are also related to darkness, mysticism and death.⁵⁰⁷ A deathly aura lingers over the couple, as intrusive elements foreshadowing demise are scattered throughout the text. A few pages later, the author writes that Elizabeth is left alone by her husband, who must return to England to deal with some financial questions, a departure that seals Elizabeth's end. While the couple is arguing about this sudden departure, Elizabeth stops as if she were blocking all thoughts out of her mind, and stares at the mountains, awe-struck:

My eyes stray away to the mountains. Pilatus on the right, with his jagged peak and slender snow-chains about his harsh neck; hill after hill rising silent, eternal, like guardian spirits standing hand in hand around their child, the lake. As I look suddenly they have all flushed, as at some noblest thought, and over all their sullen faces streams

⁵⁰⁶Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 22.

⁵⁰⁷It is impossible not to mention John Keats' poem *Ode to a Nightingale* (1819): the speaker finds himself in a dark forest, enchanted by the song of a nightingale. This sound provokes a series of meditations on beauty and nature, but also on time, death, and human suffering. See John Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

an ineffable, rosy joy – a solemn and wonderful effulgence, such as Israel saw reflected from the features of the Eternal in their prophet's transfigured eyes. The unutterable peace and stainless beauty of earth and sky seem to lie softly on my soul.⁵⁰⁸

At a moment when human interactions disappoint her, the girl turns to a nature that causes no dread, but is looked upon as a comforting guardian, and a peaceful, religious feeling pervades Elizabeth's soul. This moment of tranquillity is interrupted by Elizabeth's husband's voice, a brisk return to reality that extinguishes the serenity she had just felt and plunges her into renewed fear. She warns him that his departure might mean the end of everything, not because she would cease to love him, but because she feels in her heart that something terrible is coming. This brief connection with nature exemplifies the belief that there is a deeper link between the natural and the human world, but the sudden turnaround demonstrates that, in spite of this, nature is indifferent to the fate of men. The mountains are guardians of the land, eternal inhabitants of the earth, witnesses to the passing life of men, unresponsive, unobtrusive, disinterested in our fate. Once Elizabeth remains alone, the mysterious mesmeriser who had attracted her years before finds her and lures her into following him. Her husband returns to find her gone, and he will never see her again.

German woods and mountains are the setting of Mary Molesworth's 'Unexplained'. The protagonist is on holidays with her younger children in Germany, hosted by some friends, the von Waldens, in a little town that, being summertime, becomes too hot. Since she is looking for some quiet countryside place where to spend a couple of weeks with her children, a boy and a girl, Herr von Walden proposes Silberbarch, a small town in the middle of the Thuringian Forest, unknown to most. Her hosts appear to be surprised, in particular her friend Ottilia objects to the decision, because the town is outside the tourist track, and there is absolutely no reason why a visitor should want to go there. In spite of their remonstrations, the woman decides to leave, so they engage in a naturalistic walk in the Thuringian Forest, both on foot and aboard various means of transport:

⁵⁰⁸Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 26.

So we were to start the next morning for an excursion in the so called “Forest”, in the company of Herr von Walden, his wife and son, and two young men, friends of the latter. We were to travel by rail over the first part of the ground, uninteresting enough, till we reached a point where we could make our way on foot through the woods for a considerable distance. Then, after spending the night in a village whose beautiful situation had tempted some enterprising speculator to build a good hotel, we proposed the next day to plunge still deeper into the real recesses of the forest, walking and driving by turns, in accordance with our inclination and the resources of the country in respect of *Einspänners*⁵⁰⁹ [...] And at the end of three or four days of this, weather permitting, agreeable nomad life, our friends the Waldens, obliged to return to their home in town from which we started, were to leave my children and me for a fortnight’s country air in this same village of Silberbach [...] I did not then, I do not now, know – and I am pretty sure he could not say – why our guide, Herr von Walden, had chosen Silberbach from among the dozens of other villages which could quite as well – as events proved, indeed, infinitely better, have served our very simple purpose.⁵¹⁰

Despite the uncertainty regarding the final destination of these naturalistic walks in the woods, the activity is appreciated by all the participants regardless of the fatigue it causes, and everyone seems to be in a good mood. The positive sequence of images continues with the description of a beautiful landscape that emerges as a *locus amoenus* in the middle of the Thuringian Forest and matches the cheerful disposition of the characters:

It was the month of August; already the subdued evening lights were replacing the brilliant sunshine and blue sky of the glowing summer day. We were in the forest [...] the road descended abruptly to a considerable depth, and there in the defile far beneath ran a stream, on one bank of which the trees had been for some distance cleared away, leaving a strip of pasture of the most vivid green imaginable. And just below where we stood, a goatherd, in what – thanks possibly to the enchantment of the distance – appeared a picturesque costume, was slowly making his way along, piping as he went, and his flock [...] following him according to their own eccentric fashion.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁹One-horse carriage.

⁵¹⁰Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 93-95.

⁵¹¹Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 102-103.

The description recalls the classic sceneries of ancient literature, exalting the beauty of agrarian life. As it happened in Latin and Greek literature, here the rural scene is painted in an idealised manner as the flock of goats and their goatherd appear almost as mythological figures in a land where the rhythms of human life and nature are synchronised. This idyllic image takes on a sense of peace and solace after a difficult time, a sign of hope. There is also music in the air coming from the shepherd's flute, a transposition of the Greek God Pan, the divinity of woodlands and pastoralism. The pipe that he is playing lets out notes defined as «pathetic [...], simple, barbaric»:⁵¹² in its touching simplicity, these notes move the listeners, who perceive the music and the rural context as something “uncivilised” because extraneous to the constructions of civilisation. This suggests a spontaneous connection with the natural world, a return to Rousseau's state of nature, granted by the multisensorial experience that envelops the listeners and onlookers who, in fact, stop and remain silent, impressed by this dreamlike vision. After a few moments, the party resumes the conversation and the attention falls on the village of Silberbach: every participant keeps warning the protagonist about this place, advising her not to go, all but Herr von Walden. The continuous insinuations regarding Silberbach contribute to increase the anxiety of the protagonist and, simultaneously, of the reader. The uncertainty as to what could happen in the village and the vagueness of the remarks on it further aggravate the feeling of disquiet. Some questions come naturally to mind: why is Silberbach not recommended? Why is Herr von Walden the sole person to promote it? Has he got something in mind? This expedient helps Molesworth both to produce the right amount of anxiety that the Gothic requires, and to keep the reader's attention high, which makes this tale particularly effective. This effect is further elaborated through the addition of sublime elements. In fact, there are mountains in the distance and a storm is approaching, thunders roaring from afar, two elements that are paramount in any discourse on sublimity. The celestial vault over the mountains is coloured by «an unusual amount of blue haze»,⁵¹³ completed by the presence of the ruins of an ancient monastery once inhabited by wicked monks.⁵¹⁴ The reader is led to believe that some

⁵¹²Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, p. 104.

⁵¹³Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, p. 111.

⁵¹⁴Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 124, 125.

magical forces are at work in this isolated place. They must be suspicious malevolent entities, since a party member exclaims that local doctors often send their patients to that part of the forest, thinking the lack of pollution might help them recover, but the inhabitants look unhealthy, pale and thin.⁵¹⁵ So, the Silberbach area is depicted as poor and this causes the locals' state of ill-being, but there seems to be more than this: the people of the village appear to be drained of their vitality, some are even physically deformed, as if victims of some toxic contamination. When the narrator meets the people of Silberbach, she notices that:

It was not only the uncivilised look of the place, nor the coarse food, nor the want of comfort that made me feel that one night of Silberbach would indeed be enough for me. A sort of depression, of fear almost, came over me when I pictured the two children and myself alone in that strange, out-of-the-world place [...] There was a general look of squalor and stolid depression about the people too: the landlord was a black-browed, surlily silent sort of man, his wife and the one maid-servant looked frightened and anxious, and the only voices to be heard were those of half-tipsy peasants drinking and quarrelling at the bar.⁵¹⁶

The location is unwelcoming for a foreigner; however, the reader's perception is certainly influenced, as is the protagonist's, by the supernatural blue haze and by the legends about the depraved monks. The storm, an ominous sign, announces that something dark is coming with its thunder, lightning, howling winds and heavy mists. The climax of this tale is the encounter of Nora, the narrator's daughter, with the ghost of a young English gentleman who had travelled those lands years before. He had bought a china set matching the protagonist's, in the same shop, as a gift for his mother. Therefore, the gentleman had meant to return to England, but he died in unresolved circumstances. Unable to pass on, the man remained in spirit form haunting the earth, specifically those places or people who carry pieces of the china set that he had possessed while alive. The objects are connected to the mother whom the poor

⁵¹⁵Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 112-113.

⁵¹⁶Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 135-136.

deceased could never visit again; thus, they are a symbol of his missed closure with her. This prevents the soul from leaving the earthly space and move on to the afterlife.

Rural life is also crucial in Margaret Oliphant's 'The Open Door', which is set in the park surrounding Brentwood, the villa of a Colonel's family in Scotland. The Colonel is particularly appreciative of the country landscapes nearby:

From the lawn and drawing-room one could see all these varieties of landscape. The colour was sometimes a little chilly, but sometimes, also, as animated and full of vicissitude as a drama. I was never tired of it. Its colour and freshness revived the eyes which had grown weary of arid plains and blazing skies. It was always cheery, and fresh, and full of repose.⁵¹⁷

He continues as follows:

Brentwood stands on that fine and wealthy slope of country [...] The village of Brentwood lay almost under the house, on the other side of the deep little ravine, down which a stream – which ought to have been a lovely, wild, and frolicsome little river – flowed between its rocks and trees [...] Our side of the dell was charmingly *accidenté*, and clothed with fine trees, through which various paths wound down to the river-side and to the village bridge which crossed its stream [...] Village architecture does not flourish in Scotland, the blue slates and the grey stones are sworn enemies to the picturesque [...] We had walks in plenty, the glen being always beautiful in all its phases, whether the woods were green in the spring or ruddy in the autumn.⁵¹⁸

The picturesque landscape of Brentwood recalls that of the Scottish mansion home to the Campbells in 'The Lady's Walk'. The male narrator, a close friend to Miss Campbell, arrives in Scotland to find an unusually thriving land, different from the typically barren Scottish landscape. The passage describing the picturesque scenery at Ellermore is quoted extensively because it represents a perfect exaltation of pastoral life, joined with the beauty of Oliphant's descriptive technique.

⁵¹⁷Oliphant, "The Open Door" and Other Stories, p. 76.

⁵¹⁸Oliphant, "The Open Door" and Other Stories, p. 76.

Ellermore lay in the heart of a beautiful district full of mountains and lochs, within the Highland line, and just on the verge of some of the wildest mountain scenery in Scotland. It was situated in the midst of an amphitheatre of hills, not of very exalted height, but of the most picturesque form, with peaks and couloirs [in the text] like an Alpine range in little, all glowing with the purple blaze of the heather, with gleams upon them that looked like snow, but were in reality water, white threads of mountain torrents. In front of the house was a small loch embosomed in the hills, from one end of which ran a cheerful little stream, much intercepted by boulders, and much the brighter for the interruptions, which meandered through the glen and fell into another loch of greater grandeur and pretensions. Ellermore itself was a comparatively new house, built upon a fine slope of lawn over the lake, and sheltered by fine trees – great beeches which would not have done discredit to Berkshire, though that is not what we expect to see in Scotland: besides the ashes and firs which we are ready to acknowledge as of northern growth. I was not prepared for the luxuriance of the West Highlands – the mantling green of ferns and herbage everywhere, not to say the wealth of flowers, which formed a centre of still more brilliant colour and cultivation amid all the purple of the hills. Everything was soft and rich and warm about the Highland mansion-house. I had expected stern scenery and a grey atmosphere. I found an almost excessive luxuriance of vegetation and colour everywhere.⁵¹⁹

The earth grants abundance of food, from potatoes to various kinds of vegetables, and there are farms and cattle providing the rest, a «primitive wealth»⁵²⁰ echoing a past of innocent, pure relation with the natural world as in Molesworth's 'Unexplained'.

However, as one progressively approaches the so-called Lady's Walk, the path in the mansion's park haunted by the invisible ghost of an ancestor of the family, the landscape radically changes. The picturesque gives way to the sublime landscape, a steep slope that runs down to the river,⁵²¹ which corresponds to the feelings of dread caused by the presence of the ghost. Here the concept of *unheimlich* is particularly apt: in fact, the lady's spirit is terrifying only for those who are unfamiliar with its existence, namely those who do not belong to the family. On the contrary, its members

⁵¹⁹Oliphant, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 55-56.

⁵²⁰Oliphant, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 57.

⁵²¹Oliphant, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 59.

have learnt to coexist with the spectre and do not fear it; rather, if the ghost does not walk by them, it means someone is going to die. The presence of the ghost has been acknowledged and familiarised by the Campbells, who look up to it as a symbol of their family's integrity.

There are several references to the softness and warmth of the weather and to the sky ablaze with colours, with shades of crimson and yellow contrasting with the bright greenness of the land, reflected on the water of the *loch*.⁵²² All the brightness contrasts with the soft step sounds heard along the path, which would have been justified only by the darkness of the night, not the light of day, according to the narrator. However, in the context of this story, the spirit's movements are reassuring, they signal that the family is safe, therefore the fact that they resonate in daylight is perfectly suitable for the feelings they evoke to the Campbells: calmness, peace, certainty. As explained above, the narrator does not share the family's lore, so the sounds produce fright in his heart because they have no meaning to him, they are unfamiliar, thus he struggles to connect the presence of a spirit with light and safety: «the brightness, the life around, the absence of all that one associates with the supernatural, produced a thrill of emotion to which I can give no name.»⁵²³ The man feels dank and cold as he descends a slope amongst shrubberies, as if he had plunged into freezing water after the «warmth and glory»⁵²⁴ experienced before; as a consequence, exploring the Lady's Walk at night is even more dreadful to him, as darkness would heighten the sensations that already triggered him during the day.⁵²⁵ One cloudy evening, the prelude to a "sublime" storm, he wanders in the park and the spectre appears before him, but in the dark he cannot see anything. A single glimpse passes before his eyes when the coachman's wife, living there in the park, opens the door and some flickering light from the fireplace frames the fleeting figure of the ghost.⁵²⁶ One day, the steps are heard no more, a fact that plunges Miss Campbell into great preoccupation for the fate

⁵²²Oliphant, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 68, 81.

⁵²³Oliphant, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 67.

⁵²⁴Oliphant, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 67.

⁵²⁵Oliphant, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 69.

⁵²⁶Oliphant, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 75.

of her family. Her elder brother Colin dies soon afterwards, the deadly prediction coming true. After his death, the landscape around the mansion changes:

The heather had all died away from the hills; the sun-bright loch was steely blue; the white threads of water down every crevice in the mountains were swollen to torrents. Here and there on the higher peaks there was a sprinkling of snow. The fir-trees were the only substantial things in the nearer landscape. The beeches stood about all bare and feathery, with every twig distinct against the blue. The sun was shining almost as brightly as in the summer, and scattered a shimmer of reflections everywhere over the wet grass, and across the rivulets that were running in every little hollow. The house stood out amid all this light, amid the bare tracery of the trees, with its Scotch-French *tourelles*, and the sweep of emerald lawn, more green than ever, at its feet, and all the naked flower-beds; the blue smoke rising peacefully into the air, the door open as always.⁵²⁷

The winter landscape mourns with the family, but colours do not entirely fade because life continues: the footsteps will be heard again one day at sunset, under the rain, a beacon of hope for the broken family who can move on, guarded by its ghost.⁵²⁸

Charlotte Riddell set her 'Nut-Bush Farm' in the countryside, which has an important role in the life of the protagonist, the male narrator. He states that he had

Been bred and born on a farm. My father held something like fifteen hundred acres under the principal landowner in his country, and though it so happened I could not content myself at home, but must needs come up to London to see the lions and seek my fortune, still I had never forgotten the meadows and the cornfields, and the cattle, and the orchards, and the woods and the streams, amongst which my happy boyhood had been spent.⁵²⁹

The narrator, called Jack, has pleasant memories of his childhood spent in nature, a pastoral life led in an idyllic context that he decided to give up for financial reasons; he moved to London amidst lions, metaphorically standing for the extremely

⁵²⁷Oliphant, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 88-89.

⁵²⁸Oliphant, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 100.

⁵²⁹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 61.

competitive urban lifestyle where people take on almost feral, animal behaviours for the sake of profit and better positions. The chaos of this kind of environment contrasts with the pleasing tranquillity of country life, where simply roaming the fields is enough to be happy. Now that his health has deteriorated because of the permanence in the city, Jack is nostalgic about his childhood in the countryside and seeks a house to rent so as to recover in a rather uncontaminated location. It is not easy for him to find a suitable place: for instance, he discards a mansion because of its distance from any socially active site, including towns, markets, stations. Being a man of the city, he finds it hard to fully re-immerses in the agrarian lifestyle until, one day, he finds the proper solution in a pretty picturesque location: a mansion surrounded by laurel, turf as green as emerald and a little fence for defence, a lawn descending towards the house encircled by forest trees and a variety of blossoming plants and flowers. Similarly to Molesworth's party's reaction before the valley around Seeberg in 'Unexplained', the sight leaves him awe-struck, incredulous about the beauty he is beholding: a «paradise, [...] Nothing but health, purity and peace.»⁵³⁰

The narrator thus hopes that life in the countryside may be healthy for his family as well, since both his wife and son do not benefit from city life. However, this *locus amoenus* turns out to have been the stage of a cruel murder years before and is now haunted by the spirit of the victim. People say that there is something wandering in the fields, a supernatural entity in the form of a man. The narrator hears these rumours, which are also confirmed by Miss Gostock, a businesswoman who collects the mansion's rent. The woman, who has a habit of drinking brandy and of being shabby, reveals that her former tenant had escaped with the money he owed her and his lover girl, for whom he had abandoned his wife and children. Nevertheless, gossips say that the spectre is exactly the former tenant, murdered somewhere out in the fields. Even though the landlady warns him not to mind those stories, Jack is anxious about his family, for who would ever want to inhabit a haunted place? The perfect agrarian paradise is not so Edenic after all.

The first person who joins the narrator at Nut-Bush Farm is his sister Lolly, who loves to stroll in the fields. However, one day she sees the alleged ghost and

⁵³⁰Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 64.

immediately rushes to her brother. He takes her to the fields to chat in tranquillity, unheard by possible eavesdroppers, and she confesses that she has seen the ghost:

After breakfast I went to Whittleby, and as I came back I observed a man before me on the road. Following him, I noticed a curious thing, that none of the people he met made way for him or he for them. He walked straight on, without any regard to the persons on the side path, and yet no one seemed to come into collision with him. When I reached the field path I saw him going on still at the same pace. He did not look to right or left, and did not seem to walk – the motion was gliding - [...] He went on, and so did I, till we reached the hollow where the nut-bushes grow, then he disappeared from sight [...] I walked on and crossed the little footbridge and was just turning into Beech Walk when the same man bustled suddenly across my path [...] I saw a man rise [from it] and stand upright as if waiting for me. *It was the same person Jack!* [emphasis in the text] I recognised him instantly, though I had not seen his face clearly before.⁵³¹

The ghost exists and clearly wants something as he shows himself to Lolly, both following her and having her follow him. He seems to be leading the girl to specific places that are supposedly linked to his murder. Like other ghosts by Riddell, namely Miss Tynan and Old Mrs Jones, this phantom interacts with humans in a direct way and seeks their assistance by exploiting their voice and physical possibility to act. All three ghosts are murdered in places that are supposed to be safe, as is the case of home, or sources of relax and solace like the countryside; in all three tales, however, these characters become victims of murder and in the frame of this specific narrative, the countryside moves from being a pastoral Garden of Eden to the theatre of a tragic affair. Jack dismisses his sister's confession as foolishness, though deep inside the awareness of the haunting troubles him. Furthermore, he enjoys the countryside so much so that he sometimes wanders among the fields by night. The scene is presented as magical through a series of references to typical features of fairy stories. Jack, whose sensations are heightened by the peaceful nighttime, is amazed by nature at Nut-Bush Farm. It is a constant novelty to him, a source of pure love and attachment as those perceived by a man who has just married the most good-looking woman.

⁵³¹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 75.

As I stood upon the lawn, looking around with a keen and subtle pleasure, I felt, almost for the first time in my life, the full charm and beauty of night. Every object was as clearly revealed as though the time had been noon instead of an hour past midnight, but there lay a mystic spell on tree and field and stream the garish day could never equal. It was a fairy light and a fairy scene, and it would scarcely have astonished me to see fantastic elves issue from the foxglove's flowers or dart from the shelter of concealing leaves and dance a measure on the emerald sward. For a minute I felt – as I fancy many and many a commonplace man must have done when first wedded to some miracle of grace and beauty - a sense of amazement and unreality. All this loveliness was mine – the moonlit lawn – the stream murmuring through the fir plantation, singing soft melodies as it pursued its glittering way – the trees with a silvery gleam tinting their foliage – the roses giving out their sweetest, tenderest perfumes – the wonderful silence around – the fresh, pure air – the soft night wind – the prosperity with which God has blessed me.⁵³²

Jack feels a mystical connection with nature, he believes to have been blessed by the Lord for the bounty and beauty of those fields. It is a sensation similar to Wordsworth's emotions recollected in tranquillity, the myth of nature where man and the environment enter into deep connection and a powerful flow of emotions is generated, but in the present time. As Jack continues to walk enraptured by the landscape, he reaches a spot that disrupts this moment of experience: it seems to him the perfect spot for a murder, a deep natural excavation out of which tons of earth must have been carted, all covered with nut trees uncared for. Riddell here is giving the reader a hint about the resolution of the former tenant's mysterious departure by spotlighting how this corner of the Nut-Bush area looks different from the rest, and by reporting in indirect speech Jack's thoughts.⁵³³ It is indeed the location where the former tenant, who was an honest person and had never really betrayed his family, was murdered by Miss Gostock because of her lust for wealth, and his body was buried there. His appearances were meant to attract people to that spot so as to be freed from the mortal world and for his memory to be redeemed. So, in 'Nut-Bush Farm', the picturesque pastoral sceneries represent on the one side physical and mental solace

⁵³²Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 79.

⁵³³Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 80-81.

for the weak health of the narrator, as he returns to the countryside to recover, and where he also experiences a return to the happiness and innocence of childhood. On the other hand, the natural world counteracts with its beauty the horror of Miss Gostock's feat and becomes a cemetery for the poor tenant's body. Nature is romantically depicted here through the emotions it evokes in Jack's heart and soul in Wordsworthian terms, but it also echoes the pre-Romantic Graveyard Poetry of Thomas Gray, Thomas Parnell and Robert Blair, where nature, death, melancholy and thoughts of mortality are intertwined.

2.3 Other Natural Settings from Britain to the Edges of the World

2.3.1 The Marshes

Since the origins of English literature in Anglo-Saxon times,⁵³⁴ swamplands were considered the natural environment of evil, inhabited by human outlaws or monstrous beings that were often equated because feared by and estranged from the sociable world. Nevertheless, this kind of setting is not particularly recurring in British fiction: in his 1730 poem *Evening in Autumn*, Thomson associated the marshes to the decadent season of Autumn and used the term «stagnate» referred to this landscape, evoking the idea of immobility and absence of life or activity.⁵³⁵ Charles Dickens chose the marshes as one of the most important and symbolic settings of his *Great Expectations*: the misty marshes of Kent are near Pip's home and his parents and siblings' graves, forever marking his humble origins as a distinctive trait of the boy. They symbolise uncertainty and danger throughout the whole novel. The marshes are also inherently linked to criminality in the novel: firstly, young Pip feeds Magwitch while he hides in the swamp; later on, Pip is kidnapped by Orlick and almost murdered there. The misty marshland always carries an ominous aura, a sense of befalling doom that Pip has to

⁵³⁴In the anonymous Old English poem *Beowulf*, the homonymous protagonist faces three monsters, the first one being Grendel, an anthropomorphic creature often described as an outlaw and exile that dwells in marshy lands. See R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, John D Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf. Fourth Edition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

⁵³⁵See James Thomson, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Aaron Jacob Spatz (New York City, NY: Charles and Wonder, 2012), page number unavailable.

pass through even after he obtains his fortune at the end of the story, foreshadowing possible negative consequences for him.⁵³⁶

Florence Marryat's 'Lost in the Marshes' is a short tale set in an English county close to a village named Corston, located between the sea and the open country where a few scattered farmers live. The sea coast is always crowded with people who want to sunbathe, or bathe in the «sparkling waves from some sequestered nook.»⁵³⁷ However, between the village and the ocean there are some dangerous marshes:

There lay the salt marshes, a bleak, desolate tract of land which no skill or perseverance could reclaim from apparent uselessness. Except to the samphire and cockle-gatherers,⁵³⁸ the salt marshes of Corston were an arid wilderness which could yield no fruit. Many a farmer had looked longingly across the wide waste which terminated only with the shingled beach, and wondered if it were possible to utilise it. But as it had been from the beginning, so it remained until that day; its stunted vegetation affording shelter for sea-fowl and smugglers' booty only, and its brackish waters that flowed and ebbed with the tides, tainting the best springs on the level ground of Corston. It was the existence of these marshes that rendered the coastguard necessary to the village, which would otherwise have become a perfect nest for smugglers.⁵³⁹

This first description of the wetlands around the village illustrates the inaccessibility, or at least accessibility at one's own risk, of the marshes. They are

⁵³⁶Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Wetlands are more frequently mentioned in American literature: for instance, Emily Dickinson's poem *Sweet Is the Swamp with Its Secrets* (1890, published posthumously) gives an idea of the pitfalls one might encounter in the marshes: «Sweet is the swamp with its secrets, / Until we meet a snake; / 'Tis then we sigh for houses, / And our departure take.» See Emily Dickinson, *Complete Works*, ed. Thomas Wentworth Higginson (Hastings: Delphi Classics, 2012), page number unavailable.

⁵³⁷Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 283.

⁵³⁸Respectively a type of marine plant and a species of mollusc. Coastal salt marshes in the UK are protected environments because of the floral and faunal biodiversity they host, but scientists are alarmed by the rising sea levels, which might cause the disappearance of this habitat and the living species that thrive in it. See the webpage *Saltmarshes* at www.conservancy.co.uk and UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat Descriptions 2016 www.jncc.gov.uk.

⁵³⁹Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 284.

presented as a barren land where no edible vegetation could ever grow, a bare land wet by unhealthy waters. As a matter of fact, farmers were never able to cultivate those swamps and the surrounding area: life cannot thrive, while death is a pending menace to all those who approach the quagmires:

Many a keg of spirits and roll of tobacco were landed on the coast of Corston, and many a man in the place was marked by them as guilty, though never discovered. For they who had lived by the salt marshes all their lives were cunning as to their properties, and knew just where they might bury their illegal possessions with impunity when the tide was low, and find them safe when it had flowed and ebbled again. Everyone was not so fortunate. Lives had been lost in the marshes before now – ay, and of Corston men too, and several dark tales were told by the gossips of the village of the quagmires and quicksands that existed in various parts of them, which looked, although they never were, both firm and dry, but had the power to draw a man and horse with the temerity to step upon them into their unfathomable depths.⁵⁴⁰

The Corston marshes are described as a hellish place where many people have died, swallowed up by the quicksands and disappearing into the «unfathomable depths», an exaggeration meant to convey the idea of the great danger this place represents. It seems that those who end up sinking are dragged to the bottom of the earth, to an immeasurable pit like Hell itself. The adjective “unfathomable” serves the purpose of instilling a sense of terror that recalls the sensation provoked by the sublime: dread originates from the uncanny, given by the non-familiarity with the location, and from the realisation of the vastness of the natural environment the onlooker, and the reader too, face.

The geological structure of the soil is not the only threat posed by the marshes: in fact, the descriptions of the environment quoted above explain that a possibly worse threat comes from human beings. Being an inhospitable place where no one could live a regular life, the swamps become the perfect hiding spot for criminals, the outlaws of society who, like monsters, are feared by men and act in isolation to perpetrate their evil actions. The marshes have become a site of spirits and tobacco smuggling, so,

⁵⁴⁰Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 284.

consequently, vigilance is required. Furthermore, a spirit called the Marsh Ghost is said to haunt the quagmires: the phantom used to be an old man who had been abandoned by his children and mistreated by the people who were hosting him; starvation and blows made him mad, so that he began wandering alone in the marshes, having lost all sense of danger. One day, he was brought back to the village dead, possibly murdered, considering that his money disappeared soon after. The ghost of the poor man began to wander the swamps six months after his death, every full moon, asking for his riches back. The marshy landscape contrasts with the abundance of the fields nearby, cultivated by local farmers:

It was the end of September and the close of a glorious summer. The harvest had been abundant, and the Norfolk soil, which knows so well how to yield her fruits in due season, was like an exhausted mother which had just been delivered of her abundance. The last sheaves of golden corn were standing in the fields ready to be carried to the threshing-barn, the trees in the orchards were weighed down with their wealth of pears and apples, and in every lane clusters of bare-headed children with their hands full of nuts and their faces stained with blackberry juice, proved how nature had showered her bounties on rich and poor alike.⁵⁴¹

This pastoral description offers an idyllic scene where nature is compared to a mother who has just given birth, an image of full life blooming, of joy and sustenance provided by mother earth to all people, independently of their condition. The image of the children innocently playing and eating fruits that stain their faces further reinforces the frame of an Edenic land where nature is sufficiently generous to grant its resources to all living creatures. These passages thus present a series of contrasting images: birth and death, hell-like and heavenly natural environment, criminality and innocence, sterility and abundance.

It is in this pastoral scenery that the protagonist of the tale is introduced: Lizzie Locke is a young girl of the labouring classes, whose beauty has never been contaminated by the toil of work because of her blindness. Lizzie is represented like

⁵⁴¹Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 285.

the Dantesque angel woman, characterised by delicate features, blue eyes with long lashes and a sweet, calm temperament. However, a veil of melancholy covers her as her blind eyes are compared to darkened windows, unable to look out upon the world⁵⁴²: like the material windows described in Chapter 1, Lizzie's eyes are closed to the outside and she is thus prevented from letting her personality soar, condemned to burn inside of her because of her handicap.

Despite her disability, Lizzie can orient herself in the surroundings, even around the marshes. One day, while she is returning from the fields walking near the swamps, she hears a horse riding in her direction, so she steps aside to let the animal pass. It abruptly stops and draws up upon its haunches. Animals and humans alike apparently perceive the nefarious aura of the marshes. The horse's rider is the other female character in the story, Rosa Murray. Rosa is the opposite of Lizzie, very beautiful but «spoilt [...] impetuous, saucy, and self-willed»;⁵⁴³ if Lizzie is the angel-lady of courtly love, Rosa must represent the demonic side of the coin, for she is dark-haired, with grey eyes and the complexion of a crimson rose, to use the author's words, known as the Damask Rose of Corston. Her family is middle-class, considered to be in step with the nobility by the people in the village, who are ignorant of London society. The Murrays wallow in their reputation because they can pretend to be more than they are, fuelling their middle-class ego as if they were nobles. They can afford horses and have a well-furnished house and Mr Murray refuses aspiring suitors for his daughter hoping that a wealthy gentleman from London will come and take her to the city. They intend to convey the impression of greater wealth than they actually possess, an attitude reminding of Mr Tippens's family in Riddell's 'Old Mrs Jones', eliciting and exacting the rustic villagers' respect. Rosa is the worthy heir of her father, as her vainglory has turned her into a «heartless *coquette*, the most odious character.»⁵⁴⁴ She stands in stark

⁵⁴²Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 286.

⁵⁴³Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 286.

⁵⁴⁴Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 287. Rosa's attitude hides the pressure of her family, her father and brother's, on her. She is constantly reminded of her status as a lady, she is warned not to act like a mere servant, her love interest is hampered because socially lower than her. Her male relatives prove to be suffocating misogynists who impose their will upon the woman they control, mirroring the condition of most women in the nineteenth century.

contrast to Lizzie, who tries to avoid imposing her condition on her aunt, with whom she lives, and Larry Barnes, her fiancé. On the day of their encounter, Rosa invites Lizzie and her fiancé Larry to her house for a party and asks the boy to tell her the story of the Marsh Ghost. Coincidentally, it is a full moon night. Rosa flaunts her wickedness by challenging Larry to go to the swamps and see if he can find the spectre and survive, the price being her gold chain. Rosa leans on Larry's pride, and he completely falls for it, either because he longs for Rosa's admiration or, more simply, her gold. Lizzie is obviously desperate and certain that her loved one is doomed to die. Larry marches on to the marshes, the «wide, desolate waste of the salt marshes»,⁵⁴⁵ and his courage immediately fails; however, as the boy turns back to return to Corston, he finds a figure standing before him. Initially, Larry believes it is the ghost, but he immediately realises it is a human figure, a man he knows to be Mr Darley, Rosa's lover. Darley had intended to marry Rosa against her family's will, him being "only" a gamekeeper, but it turned out that he was already married to another woman, and Barnes himself had been the one who revealed it to Rosa's father. In a flash, Darley realises that Larry is responsible for the end of his love story. The two men engage in a fight whose inevitable result is Larry's death, as Darley has the advantage of having been trained to box. Darley too will meet his tragic end the same night though: his body will be found the next morning, shot through the heart.

Rosa and Lizzie are two very different women who, eventually, are touched by the same fatality, the death of their loved ones. However, Barnes's body is not recovered until Lizzie decides to search for it herself in the swamps, losing all sense of peril as it had happened to the old, mistreated man. The pain and uncertainty deriving from the lack of a corpse to bury drive the poor girl to madness, so she undertakes her personal quest until she actually finds Larry's body. Lizzie's pure soul and loving temperament lead her to risk her own life for the sake of her lost love, and when her quest is accomplished, she dies by his side. The corpses of Lizzie and Larry are found both intact, as the chemical properties of the swamps' terrain preserved Larry's body from decomposition. The villagers finally grasp the truth about Barnes's death at the hands of Darley, and justice is done for this poor soul, victim of a woman's fancies,

⁵⁴⁵Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 310.

and his fiancée, who sacrificed her life at the altar of love, a final image of the lovers' bodies entwined that acquires a mystical sense. Lizzie used to be respectful of the natural environment that she inhabited and knew not to cross the frontier between the barren swamp and the plentiful fields; this is metaphorically the fine line between evil and good and, consequently, death and life. Rosa's foolishness, derived from her self-absorption and tantrums make her cross that line, so that she becomes the demonic temptress inducing a naive man to submit to her, at the cost of his own life. Just for fun, she condemns a man to Hell, metaphorically represented by the depths of the wetlands, but finds herself in the hold of death in turn, punished for her inconsiderate action by a sort of retaliation law. Lizzie's pure soul and Larry's innocent gullibility do not save their lives in the monster-land that is the quagmire, but in death, they are elevated to the divine and are granted their peaceful eternal rest. The marshes' insalubrious terrain, usually trodden by society's scum, returns Larry's unscathed body to the surface. Seemingly, Lizzie's body does not sink into the depths of the ground and, like her lover, is granted eternal rest in peace, rewarded by mother nature for her righteousness.

2.3.2 Beyond the Borders of the Civilised World: the Arctic

In the nineteenth century, explorations of unknown and wild areas of the world were paramount for Britain, who competed with the other colonial powers for the economic control of territories and commercial routes, both via land and water. As stated by Costantini,⁵⁴⁶ national pride was the major motif behind the exploratory frenzy that Britain experienced during the Victorian Age, thus carrying on the imperialistic tradition of conquest.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁶Mariaconcetta Costantini, «The Lure of the “Frozen Deep”: Nineteenth-Century Variations of a Gothic Trope», *Rivista di Studi Vittoriani* XI, no. 22 (July 2006), pp. 7-43.

⁵⁴⁷Costantini, «The Lure of the “Frozen Deep”», p. 7. The consequence of this “policy” was the caricature of the Inuit tribes, both physically and in terms of their “uncivilised” lifestyle. Furthermore, travel accounts in the Arctic tended to foster a chauvinist rhetoric of masculinity and virile strength linked with the conquest and submission of other tribes and countries.

Explorations across the world led to reports and accounts presented as scientifically accurate, but oftentimes spiced up with invented and imaginary details produced by the mind of the author who composed them. Arctic navigators sought the way to explore and conquer the so-called Northern Passage. A major expedition was commanded in 1845 by Sir John Franklin: they departed aboard two ships, *Erebus* and *Terror*, to investigate the last unnavigated part of the Northern Passage across the Canadian Arctic, but it ended tragically. Both vessels became icebound and were abandoned in 1848, when, however, various members of the crew and the captain had already died. The expedition was from then on led by Francis Crozier, Franklin's second-in-command, and James Fitzjames, captain of the *Erebus*, who set out for the mainland but disappeared. All traces of the remaining crew were lost, and no member of it was ever found. Several rescue and search missions were launched in order to find the mariners alive or, at least, their remains.⁵⁴⁸ Mid-Victorians partially lost interest in Arctic expeditions, but the discovery of the North Pole became a renewed goal towards the end of the century, as testified to by several magazine articles. A brief 1875 passage from the Scottish *Dundee Courier* announced the arrival of a German captain who intended to recruit local men to join his upcoming expedition; it recites:

Commander Markham, who is to be second in command of the British Arctic expedition, is expected in London in a few days' time, when he will, it is stated, proceed to Dundee for the purpose of picking out six whaling men to act as ice quartermasters on board the ships of the exploring party. Preparations are being made for the German Arctic expedition. Two small steamships of 300 tons burthen, and crews of thirty men each, are to be got ready. One is to explore Greenland whilst the other is to advance to the North Pole. It is estimated that the expedition will last two years, and cost 300.000 thalers. The expedition will probably start about the same time as that of the English Government – namely in June.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁸An 1885 article in the *Exmouth Journal* announces the recovery of a series of relics «of strange interest» connected with the Franklin expedition or the subsequent search parties. See «Arctic Relics», *Freeman's Exmouth Journal*, no. 108 (December 1885), p. 2.

⁵⁴⁹«The Arctic Expedition», *Dundee Courier*, no. 6692 (January 1875), p. 4.

A certain pride emerges from the article because of the active participation of Scottish men required by the German captain; moreover, the journalist announced that a parallel English expedition would be taking place almost simultaneously, further evidence of the western yearning for the North Pole, which was still a mystery at the time. In early 1873, the *Naval and Military Gazette* published an article that expressed disappointment and a certain concern due to the delay of an Arctic expedition, decided upon by the British Government, which might cause the loss «of that pre-eminence in the field of Arctic exploration which – despite the length of time which has elapsed since we went out an expedition – we still hold.»⁵⁵⁰ Clearly national pride was triggered by the press as the public was fomented by reports of Arctic explorations; several exhibitions were also organised to allow British people to witness first-hand the results of the expeditions, like the Portsmouth 1876 Arctic Exhibition, which also displayed the actual ships and attracted crowds of participants daily. The *Luton Times* also mentioned the curious presence aboard the ship *Pandora*, harboured in the local harbour, of a rose tree that had been planted on the ship when it left England: the plant apparently died when the crew reached the Arctic regions, only to revive when the ship returned to a warmer climate.⁵⁵¹ The rose tree episode is only one example of curious and mysterious myths and legends associated with the Arctic pole. Costantini wrote that an epistemological reason also lay behind the urge to explore the North Pole:

Shrouded in mystery since antiquity, the poles had inspired a number of theories and legends, which still lacked scientific validation. Was there any truth in the age-long myths of utopian lands stretching at extreme latitudes, such as the myths of Hyperborea or polar Arcadia? Were the icy wastes of the Ant / Arctic covering ground? Or were they floating on water? What effects did polar magnetism have on human beings? And was this magnetic power related to the forces that influenced animal life? At a time of growing trust in scientific knowledge, the enigmas of the polar *whiteness* demanded a largely shared solution.⁵⁵²

⁵⁵⁰«Arctic Exploration», *The Naval and Military Gazette* XL, no. 2143 (February 1873), p. 1.

⁵⁵¹«The Arctic Expedition», *Luton Times* XXI, no. 1106 (November 1876), p. 7.

⁵⁵²Costantini, «The Lure of the “Frozen Deep”», p. 9.

It is only natural that the mythical allure of the poles (even though the southern pole still gained less attention than the northern) became a literary trope for many authors starting from the eighteenth century. The frozen wastes, from the poles to the European and American glaciers, fascinated Romantic poets and novelists, notably Mary Wollstonecraft and her daughter, Mary Shelley,⁵⁵³ and the American author Edgar Allan Poe.⁵⁵⁴

In the nineteenth century, the icy northern regions continued to inspire authors and appeared frequently as frames for various narrative pieces and across different genres. Victorians interpreted the “frozen deep” as interconnected with ideas of defiance and violation, or as a symbol of the social, political, economic, and cultural anxiety of the time, a stimulus to cross geographical borders that are, metaphorically, moral and cultural ones.⁵⁵⁵ The concept of “otherness” was particularly crucial to these narratives, as Victorians were concerned with the encounter with other cultures and the implications that this might have on their stability, worries that became stronger and stronger with the growth of the Empire. Gothic and sensation fiction well highlighted the Victorian anxiety caused by the presence of the “other” and the crossing of liminal spaces; that is why authors of these genres were particularly interested in exploiting icy landscapes as settings for their stories. As Costantini explained, the distance of such places from the known and civilised lands allowed

⁵⁵³Mary Shelley has her monster meet Frankenstein on top of a mountain glacier; when Victor reaches the summit of the mountain, he is filled with a sense of joy that replaces his desperation, and he feels like he could ascend to a new, higher, level of existence: «It was nearly noon when I arrived at the top of the ascent. [...] I remained in a recess of the rock, gazing on this wonderful and stupendous scene. The sea, or rather the vast river of ice, wound among its dependent mountains, whose aerial summits hung over its recesses. Their icy and glittering peaks shone in the sunlight over the clouds. My heart, which was before sorrowful, now swelled with something like joy; I exclaimed - “Wandering spirits, if indeed ye wander, and do not rest in your narrow beds, allow me this faint happiness, or take me, as your companion, away from the joys of life.”» See Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*.

⁵⁵⁴See Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁵⁵Costantini, «The Lure of the “Frozen Deep”», pp. 10-11.

authors to explore them through their imagination while maintaining truthfulness,⁵⁵⁶ because their descriptions tended to be based on accounts by real explorers. In doing so, writers could offer realistic tales on which a symbolic apparatus was built. Amongst the Victorian authors who modelled their narratives on this trope are Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell. Wilkie Collins produced a theatrical piece in 1856, entitled *The Frozen Deep*, written with the assistance of Charles Dickens; the extent of Dickens's contribution to Collins's play is still a matter of debate. In 1866, Collins anonymously revised the script for a new production to be staged at the Royal Olympic Theatre; he subsequently turned the script into a *novella*. The play's plot revolves around the Franklin expedition's disaster, where the ships got stranded in the ice; as the Captain explains, it proved necessary to launch a search party to see if some survivors could be taken home:

Without recalling all the hardships we have suffered for the last two years - the destruction, first of one of our ships, then of the other; the death of some of our bravest and best companions; the vain battles we have been fighting with the ice and snow, and boundless desolation of these inhospitable regions - without dwelling on these things, it is my duty to remind you that this, the last place in which we have taken refuge, is far beyond the track of any previous expedition, and that consequently our chance of being discovered by any rescuing parties that may be sent to look after us is, to say the least of it, a chance of the most uncertain kind.⁵⁵⁷

The Captain's speech highlights the dreadful condition of loneliness and isolation experienced by the mariners, which is worsened by the fact that the crew have entered

⁵⁵⁶Costantini, «The Lure of the "Frozen Deep"», pp. 12. Costantini also mentioned the influence of Darwin's theories on such authors, because his and other naturalists' assumptions suggested a regression to a primitive state. Life in the Arctic and Antarctic regions certainly tested human resistance since extreme conditions were to be faced with basic instruments for survival outside the civilised world. It meant to retreat to a state of existence in a liminal space between humanity and non-humanity, between civilisation and "otherness". In Collins's *The Frozen Deep* (1856), there are references to widespread beliefs that the English could survive anywhere thanks to their superiority of spirit and technological advancement, while "savages" were thought to be soulless and utterly ignorant by default.

⁵⁵⁷Wilkie Collins, *The Frozen Deep* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1874), p. 89.

an area unexplored until then, a fact that makes rescue missions on the part of other mariners impossible. They are dislocated in a waste where survival is challenged by the harshness of the place, lacking any resource that may grant the sailors food or fire to heat up (they will have to burn wooden beds to make some firewood); their fuel and food provisions slowly decrease, they can rely only on bones they squash with a mortar to cook a sort of soup with just water.⁵⁵⁸ The quest for the Northwest Passage has led the crew a step forward with respect to previous explorers, though condemning them to a dreary fate. In the lines of the drama, the North Pole is called the «eternal ice and snow»,⁵⁵⁹ suggesting the vast immensity of those lands where time is perpetually frozen; the cold is personified, it is the «merciless cold, striking its victims.»⁵⁶⁰ In this play, the North Pole also acts as the symbolic representation of the recesses of the human mind, which is to be considered in relation to Collins's deep interest in the paranormal and in psychic "activities" such as hypnotism and mesmerism.⁵⁶¹ The magnetic force of the pole was interpreted by mesmerists as the driving force of all interactions between living creatures. The female protagonist, Clara, possesses the gift of the Second Sight, and has tell-tale dreams. Her fiancé, Frank, leaves with the crew for the Arctic, but he is followed by Richard, the man whom Clara had rejected to marry Frank. The two mariners are unaware of their mutual connection, but when Richard learns of it, his desire for vengeance seethes. One night, Clara enters a state of trance, «insensible to touch, insensible to sound, motionless as stone, cold as stone»,⁵⁶² and has a vision of Richard holding Frank's head while the man is

⁵⁵⁸A short tale that well accounts for the difficulties in the management of resources is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Captain of the PoleStar*, published in *Temple Bar* in 1883. The story also mentions some spectral sightings of a nebulous figure on the part of the crew, leading them to believe the ship itself is haunted. This must have fuelled the mysterious aura of the Arctic pole in the eye of the Victorian public. See Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Captain of the PoleStar and Other Stories* (Auckland, NZ: The Floating Press, 2010).

⁵⁵⁹Collins, *The Frozen Deep*, p. 67.

⁵⁶⁰Collins, *The Frozen Deep*, p. 129.

⁵⁶¹Mesmerism was one of the means exploited to have information about how and where to find the lost members of the Franklin expedition, see Shane McCorristine, *Spectral Arctic. A History of Dreams and Ghosts in Polar Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵⁶²Collins, *The Frozen Deep*, p. 144.

unconscious; she screams to her fiancé «Wake, Frank - wake! You are drifting to your death!»,⁵⁶³ but he cannot hear her. Florence Marryat's Mrs Graham in 'Sent to His Death!'⁵⁶⁴ recalls this episode devised by the duo Collins – Dickens where a distraught woman calls out to her loved one while dreaming, in a state of trance, ending up desperate because the man is on the verge of death.

According to Costantini, there is a further philosophical meaning that Collins attached to the frozen ice of the pole, that is to say the lack of stable theological convictions in life, represented by the floating icebergs above the deep waters.⁵⁶⁵ This is well represented by Clara's vision, where Frank is seen floating on the black, deep and mysterious waters of the ocean on an iceberg in a disquieting, eerie and Gothic atmosphere described through terms such as "livid", "spectral", "ghost-like". The iceberg on which Frank lies slowly drifts away, as does Clara's hope to see him alive back in England and her faith in saving Providence. When, eventually, Frank returns safe home, Clara's unbelief is reprimanded by her friend, Mrs Crowford, who exclaims: «in what you saw last night! You, an educated woman, a clever woman, believing in a vision of your own fancy - a mere dream! I wonder you are not ashamed to acknowledge it!»⁵⁶⁶ And again: «Now, Clara [...] which of us is right? I who believed in the mercy of God? or you who believed in a dream?»⁵⁶⁷

Elizabeth Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) presents a dreary image of the Arctic in the second chapter. A whaler is about to harbour back from Greenland, and the author describes the terrible feeling of uneasiness of the crowd awaiting the mariner's disembarkation: the terror felt by people waiting on land is tangible, their fear of having lost their loved ones is oppressing.

⁵⁶³Clara is "accused" of suffering from «"Catalepsy," as some call it--"hysteria," as others say--this alone is certain, the same interval always passes», Collins, *The Frozen Deep*, p. 144.

⁵⁶⁴See Section 1.3.

⁵⁶⁵Costantini, «The Lure of the "Frozen Deep"», p. 39. Collins remained enthralled by the pole for all his life, as testified to also by references to the Arctic in later productions like *Poor Miss Finch* (1871) and the 'Devil's Spectacles' (1879). See Wilkie Collins, *Poor Miss Finch. A Novel* (London: Richard Bentley, 1872) and the 'Devil's Spectacles', in *The Bath Herald* (1879), page numbers unavailable.

⁵⁶⁶Collins, *The Frozen Deep*, p. 158.

⁵⁶⁷Collins, *The Frozen Deep*, p. 213.

How impatient her crew of beating hearts were for that moment, how those on land sickened at the suspense, may be imagined, when you remember that for six long summer months those sailors had been as if dead from all news of those they loved; shut up in terrible, dreary Arctic seas from the hungry sight of sweethearts and friends, wives and mothers. No one knew what might have happened. The crowd on shore grew silent and solemn before the dread of the possible news of death that might toll in upon their hearts with this uprushing tide. The whalers went out into the Greenland seas full of strong, hopeful men; but the whalers never returned as they sailed forth. On land there are deaths among two or three hundred men to be mourned over in every half-year's space of time. Whose bones had been left to blacken on the gray and terrible icebergs? Who lay still until the sea should give up its dead? Who were those who should come back to Monkshaven never, no, never more?⁵⁶⁸

Gaskell recalled the desolation and isolation that the crews must suffer during the Arctic expeditions, and the pain of the families at home who can only hope to see their loved ones again. What is particularly dreadful is the consciousness that those who do not return are left on the cold icebergs unburied, melting like the ice under the sun. The impossibility to give a proper burial to the dead sailors is disturbing, because it equals to condemning them to an afterlife of torment: they cannot rest in God's peace, be forgiven before expiring, they simply disappear into the depths of the frozen seas, which are comparable to the depths of Hell. The corpses left unburied are symbols of dehumanisation as well, because they simply become burdens to the living companions who must abandon them for their own survival, also suggesting the necessity of adapting to extreme environments by means of extreme, feral behaviours.

In the corpus, there is only one story partially set in the Arctic regions, namely Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 'My Wife's Promise'.⁵⁶⁹ The protagonist, Richard Dunrayne, had

⁵⁶⁸Elizabeth Gaskell, *Sylvia's Lover*, ed. Francis O' Gorman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 21.

⁵⁶⁹Braddon briefly mentioned the loneliness experienced during an Arctic expedition in 'Eveline's Visitant': «I felt like a traveller who had traversed the frozen seas of an arctic region, remote from human love or human companionship, to find himself all of a sudden in the bosom of a verdant valley, in the sweet atmosphere of home.» Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 28.

once taken part in an Arctic expedition which turned out a disaster, as many lives were lost despite the leader's scientific expertise. Richard's first impression of the polar regions of the north is ambiguous: upon his return, the memory of the companions whom he had loved and lost convinces him never to return to the North Pole, to the «horrors of that perilous region.»⁵⁷⁰ However, while he was in the Arctic, Richard perceived a certain influence, a mysterious connection between him and the «rarefied polar air»⁵⁷¹ and «deep cold blue of the northern sea.»⁵⁷² Contrary to Collins's black waters and Gaskell's grey icebergs, Braddon's blue sea contrasts with the death of the mariners engulfed by the ocean or left on the icy expanses, an image of tranquillity rather than of menace. Richard feels lost, but it is an ambiguous sentiment, because he seems to be torn between the arcane fascination of the polar zone and the dangers it poses to those who reach it. This first image of the Arctic offered by Braddon's character is opposed to the canonical interpretation of the Arctic as “sublime”, which had its culmination after the wreckage of the Franklin's expedition. It was characterised by threatening landscapes, terrible creatures, and deathly danger as depicted in well-known works such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838),⁵⁷³ including works of adventure fiction idolizing the Arctic explorer.⁵⁷⁴ Arctic sublimity is generally associated with danger, whiteness versus darkness, vastness, solitude and magnificence, which derive from Burke's aesthetics: danger and pain are terrible if they come too close to us, but if they are observed from a distance, they could even be “delightful”. The mysteriousness of

⁵⁷⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 7.

⁵⁷¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 7.

⁵⁷²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 7.

⁵⁷³We should also consider a wide array of popular artistic productions including spectral panoramas and *tableaux vivants*, massive paintings of barren landscapes and wrecked ships. An example is Caspar David Friedrich's *The Sea of Ice (Da Eismeer)*, painted between 1823 and 1824. For a more accurate idea of how artists changed their view of the Arctic, and alpine, regions across the centuries see Barbara C. Matilsky, *Vanishing Ice: Alpine and Polar Landscapes in Art, 1775-2012* (Bellingham: Whatcom Museum of History & Art, 2013).

⁵⁷⁴Benjamin Morgan, «After the Arctic Sublime», *New Literary History* 47, no. 1 (Winter 2016), pp. 2-3.

such unexplored, unknown regions evokes the idea of the *unheimlich* described in the previous chapter, meaning that the unfamiliarity with such places causes a feeling of dread that, however, often shifts to fascination. Several accounts of the time reported strange facts that nourished the fantasy of both travellers themselves, whose experience of the Arctic was filtered by the accounts of previous adventurers, and the public in Britain. Certain atmospheric events like the phantom suns or natural phenomena like the blooming algae staining the ice with red residuals, mistaken for blood, caused dread, and provided material for fantastic tales.⁵⁷⁵ According to McCorristine, these tales, which often included hauntings, pose questions on who had cultural authority over the Arctic. He argues that

They also help us to make sense of current cultural and political concerns in the Canadian Arctic about the disappearance and reappearance of the Franklin expedition. Therefore, my first key argument is that British Arctic explorers – such as those on the Franklin expedition – recognised and reflected on the spectral aspects of being in the Arctic. This included having strange dreams, reveries, hallucinations and other supernatural experiences. Highlighting their spectral stories complicates the pervasive idea that explorers were always, or always thought of themselves as, rational actors in a wild region. In doing so we are forced to think about Arctic exploration historically as a practice that involved supernatural experiences: this is an important revision given the power of Victorian exploration in current conceptions of the Arctic (in politics, geography and tourism for example).⁵⁷⁶

The remoteness of the Arctic allowed multiple modes of representation and inventiveness on the part of authors, and readers could imagine any kind of supernatural and mysterious event taking place in those wild lands. McCorristine highlighted that this was especially true for women, whose relegated position in society would not allow them to embark on such expeditions at the time.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁵In the seventeenth century, it was even believed that the Arctic was the realm of Satan, see McCorristine, *Spectral Arctic*, p. 24.

⁵⁷⁶McCorristine, *Spectral Arctic*, p. 5.

⁵⁷⁷McCorristine, *Spectral Arctic*, p. 5.

In Braddon's story, Richard returns from his first expedition enthralled by those marvellous wastelands but determined never to go back. However, the mysterious magic of the polar north proves rooted within him, as he finds himself longing for the Arctic despite his conviction. Braddon described his yearning by contrasting an image of warmth, conveyed both by the family gathered around the hearth at Christmas time and by the flames in the fireplace,⁵⁷⁸ with the cold of the Arctic waters. Richard affirms that «the genius of the polar ocean beckoned me away, and all the blessings of my life, all the natural affections of my heart were too weak to hold me.»⁵⁷⁹ In Burkean terms, the distance from the source of initial suffering and dread turns those sublime areas into an obsession in Richard's mind, who intends now to organise a new expedition and return to the Arctic, convinced that his previous experience and the data collected so far will grant the crew survival: «in my dreams, again and again, with maddening repetition I trod the old paths, and saw, ghastly white against the purple of that northern sky, the walls of ice that had blocked our passage.»⁵⁸⁰ Here Richard recalls the polar sublimity in all its might, as he refers to the walls of ice that prevent the explorers from passing: it is nature's power over humans, who live in a constant challenge with natural forces, conscious that they are weak before majestic Nature. One might recall Kant's transcendentalism, according to which the contact with the sublime gives men the strength to measure their force and face the apparent omnipotence of Nature.⁵⁸¹ This courage is exactly what moves Richard before the "ghastly" white of the boundless expanse of snow and ice: the term, which is etymologically cognate of "ghost", has the now obsolete meaning of «causing terror,

⁵⁷⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 8.

⁵⁷⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 8.

⁵⁸⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 9.

⁵⁸¹See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, ed. Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Kant theorised the sublime as a moral and aesthetic category based on his own philosophical convictions. According to him, since the power of the mind is supreme and above any other force, terror is the possibility for the mind to further evolve by winning over fear and transcend its limits. He argued that any natural object goes beyond human comprehension, but the sublime stands in the ability of the mind to appreciate this vastness; thus, sublimity resides in the mind of the observing Subject rather than in the Object of observation.

terrible.»⁵⁸² The terrible sight provokes the sensation of pleasure typical of the sublime, which has charmed Richard to the point that he cannot stand to be away.

The protagonist is not a really sociable individual, he has friends mainly amongst his fellow adventurers, so the idea of leaving England is not painful to him. When he communicates his decision to his family, he does not realise the pain it causes them, for he feels “possessed” by the call of the North Pole. The new expedition has little success, but all the crew members survive after two years spent on shortages:

We wintered at Repulse Bay, with a short stock of fuel, and a shorter supply of provisions; but we managed with a minimum of the former luxury, and supplied all deficiency of the latter by the aid of our guns. Never was a merrier banquet eaten than our Christmas dinner of reindeer steaks and currant dumplings, though the thermometer had sunk 79° below freezing-point, and our jerseys and trousers sparkled with hoar-frost.⁵⁸³

The homely image of Christmas, of warmth and family reunion does not compare, in Richard’s obsessed mind, with the Christmas spent amongst his companions, in a freezing cold weather in the middle of an unknown world, with little provisions left. A life of fatigue in the Arctic fulfils Richard’s life more than the commodities of his house. The expeditions allow Richard to prove himself an accomplished human being, free from the restraints of British society, where his reputation as a good sailor and junior officer are trivial. This journey at the end of the world nourishes Richard’s manly vanity and frames him within the imperialistic discourse of male power that, in the nineteenth century, is strictly related to conquest and exploration beyond the national borders.

Richard refers to the «all-exacting demon of the frozen seas» that calls him back, as dreams of the icy lands haunt his sleep.⁵⁸⁴ Despite the siren’s song that Richard continuously hears, he momentarily renounces his explorations to attend his dying father. He does not know that it will be his safety, for the ship disappears with the mariners, defeated by the “demon” of the North. At this point Richard, who cannot

⁵⁸²*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

⁵⁸³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 9.

⁵⁸⁴Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp 9-10.

resist the call of the North, decides to engage on an expedition to locate his comrades, or what remains of them: he makes some discoveries that are also acknowledged by the Royal Society, but he finds no trace of the lost men. Upon his return, he feels empowered, a symbol of virility bolstered by his “imperialistic” endeavours:

I came back to England at forty-four years of age, a hardy wanderer, with a long brown beard that seemed lightly powdered with the northern snow, and with the strength of a sea-lion. For the best years of my life I had lived in snow-hives and stone-cabins, or slept at night amidst the wilderness of ice, in a boat which my stalwart shoulders had helped to carry during the day.⁵⁸⁵

Richard meets the woman whom he will marry, Isabel Lawson, at this point in life, when he is at the highest of his prowess. Nonetheless, despite her being «a fairer enchantress than the spirit of the frozen deep»,⁵⁸⁶ she still cannot compete against «the glamour of the frozen north.»⁵⁸⁷ Braddon employs several metaphors related to magic to emphasise the lure of the North Richard keeps feeling. The love for Isabel convinces Richard to try and live in England, and thus follow its conventions: they get married, have a child, and settle in the countryside, in a blooming region filled with woods and hills. Things worsen when the couple’s son, a child of barely two years, dies, and the grief and despair make Richard feel lost again in an environment that he does not perceive as his own:

Being in town, an idle man, with no London tastes and no friends, it is scarcely strange that I should attend the meeting of the Royal Society - the Fate of Franklin was yet unknown, and the debates upon this subject were at fever-heat. A new expedition was just being fitted out by the Government, and there could be no better opportunity for a volunteer band, which follow in the tracks of the Government vessel. In the rooms of the Society I encountered an old comrade who had served with me in my first voyage on board the *Westernwise*, and he exerted his utmost powers of persuasion to induce me to join himself and others in a northward cruise, to search for Franklin and for our lost companions of the Ptarmigon. I was known to be an old hand, well provided with the

⁵⁸⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 11.

⁵⁸⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 11.

⁵⁸⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 12.

sinews of war, adventurous and patient, hardened by many a polar winter; and my friend and their party wanted me as their leader.⁵⁸⁸

Richard is flattered by the request, which causes his first wave of thrill after his son's death. He appears like an outsider in the city, where his specific competence is of no use. He is more isolated in the crowded streets of London than in the North Pole, where he can count on the companionship of his fellow mariners, with whom he is totally in communion. He is gratified by the sailors' acknowledgement of his abilities and temperament that are the result of years of war and expeditions: Richard is a man of the Empire, used to living outside the borders of the homeland and not accustomed to its social rigidity; he draws his lifeblood from the imperialistic discourse of conquest and discovery. Despite having promised Isabel he would never return to the North, Richard feels the strong call of the Arctic once more, again described as an obscure entity that takes over him and possesses him like a demon, «the demon of the North resumed his hold upon me.»⁵⁸⁹ There is a magical power, a mysterious strength that connects this land to Richard's very soul, it mesmerises him and attracts him like a magnet, «every impulse of [his] mind – every longing of [his] heart urged [him] to join the new enterprise.»⁵⁹⁰ Eventually, Isabel realises that she cannot prevent his departure for long. She calls the Arctic a «wild, awful world [...] eternal ice and snow»,⁵⁹¹ but the woman is determined to let him go because she has faith: contrary to Collins's Clara, Isabel fills the Arctic with theological meaning because, as she states, those lands were made by God and, consequently, they must be safe. She reassures him by stating that she will be with him in his dreams. Braddon relied on

⁵⁸⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 14. This brief passage reminds me of the description McCorristine made of the Norwegian adventurer Fridtjof Nansen (who had a PhD in neuroanatomy like his contemporary Freud), who explored the Arctic in 1893 and subsequently published the account *Farthest North* (1897): «in popular myth Nansen is the archetypal Scandinavian polar explorer - a manly, no-nonsense hero with little time for the sentimentality or plodding amateurism of his British contemporaries», see McCorristine, *Spectral Arctic*, p. 1. See also Fridtjof Nansen, *Farthest North. The Incredible Three-Year Voyage to the Frozen Latitudes of the North*, ed. Roland Huntford (New York City, NY: Random House, 1999).

⁵⁸⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 15.

⁵⁹⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 15.

⁵⁹¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 16.

the concept of animal magnetism, or mesmerism, to explain the deep connection between Isabel and Richard, an invisible natural force linking humans, animals and even vegetables;⁵⁹² like Clara, Isabel thinks that she will be able to see, through visions, the dangers that her husband might encounter.

In my dreams I shall follow you – yes, I know that I shall dream of you every night, and that my dreams will be true. There must be some magnetic chain between two beings so closely united as we are, and I am sure that sleep will show you to me as you are – safe or in danger, triumphant or despondent [...] if I should be taken from you, dearest, you will know it directly. Yes, dear, at the death-hour my spirit will fly to you for the last fond parting look upon earth, as surely as I hope it will await you in heaven.⁵⁹³

It is a promise. The magnetism between them will allow Isabel's spirit to find her husband and say goodbye, should she die before his return. The story follows a sort of circular movement, in that the reader finds Richard, who has now left northward for the new expedition, missing his wife and languishing for the warmth of the family hearth that he once found dull, while he craved adventure. He must now be happy with a mock hearth of weak fire that hopefully will not be extinguished in the icy fortune hut of the crew. Richard is now sustained only by duty, whereas he finds no more joy, no more sense of belonging and companionship in the Arctic regions. If he admired them in awe, he now feels the weight of the hardship the crew must endure. Richard has radically changed his perception of the Nordic lands; once a source of pleasure, they have become a source of dread: «no words can paint the desolation of this wild region – no mind can imagine that horror of perpetual snow, illimitable as eternal.»⁵⁹⁴ This icy wasteland now represents the loss of hope and faith to him, worsened by the fatigue that leaves its marks on the tired faces of the explorers.

In the sempiternal whiteness of the polar land and sky, Richard eventually sees the figure of his wife, dressed in white as an angel, approaching, and he knows she has

⁵⁹²For further information see for instance Maria Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015) and Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne, eds., *Victorian Literary Mesmerism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

⁵⁹³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 18.

⁵⁹⁴Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 19.

fulfilled her promise. Richard will learn that her death had happened on Christmas Day, a day that used to mean little or nothing to him, who participated in the family gathering out of duty, drifting to the North with his mind. Now, Christmas will always recall the time that he has lost with his wife, a sort of divine punishment both for his lack of faith and for his arrogance in believing that there were more important things than family and home. Solitude will forever haunt him for real, now that his family is disrupted, having lost his son and wife, in part because of him.

In one last act of generosity, his ghost wife guides Richard, under the pale moon shining on the glimmering ice, to a series of mounds made by «civilized»⁵⁹⁵ hands, which he excavates to find that they are the resting places of his lost companions (and some provisions later discovered by the other explorers). The only sign of “civilised” presence takes the primeval form of entombment, which recall the ancient burial mounds in Suffolk. However, considering that no survivors from the former exploration have been found, it is possible that those mounds had been built by the Esquimaux, a manifestation of respect for these strangers who had come to their lands, an approach that the imperial settlers often did not show to the colonised people. The loss of so many lives represents a partial failure in the imperialistic policy of Britain, which demanded a great effort on the part of its citizens. Regardless of whoever built those burial mounds, the fact dissipates the fear of the impossibility of proper burial: Richard and his fellows can rest assured that their dead friends have their own tombs, a sign that they have not been forgotten and rest in God’s grace.

The Esquimaux are seen in the story as a mere source of provisions, as the crew buy some dogs from them and hope to leave the disabled members at an Esquimaux station. The remarks on the “civilised” hands who made the mounds, without ever suggesting it might have been the local tribes, confirm Richard’s tendency to consider the indigenous people as «“gothic” wilderness on the borders of civilisation.»⁵⁹⁶

This consideration echoes Parker’s statement regarding the inhabitants of the wilderness in various horror and Gothic narratives: she called this theme the ‘primitive beneath the civilised’. In discussing woodland societies, she argued that, since the wilderness forces us to investigate our origins, it scares because it defies the concept

⁵⁹⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 20.

⁵⁹⁶McCorristine, *Spectral Arctic*, p. 43; the phrase is here referred to the ghostliness of the Arctic.

of evolution. The icy wilderness of the Arctic poses the same problem as any forest or wild area, because being at its border leads men to question how far have we gone from primitivism.⁵⁹⁷

Moreover, despite Kant's theory that nature can be challenged by man, we can see here how the extreme climate of the North had the best over the British explorers who, in spite of their experience and scientifically advanced knowledge, were not in the position to defy the forces of nature. Richard returns to England; he has survived but is defeated. The mission was successful, but it came at a great cost.

2.4 A Possible Ecocritical Discourse

Ecology had a history even before it had a name: this noun is first recorded in the form "oecology" in an article that appeared in the science, literature and art journal *Academy* in 1875;⁵⁹⁸ since the eighteenth century the ecological perspective had become a way of looking at the earth and at the life of the beings that inhabit the planet, so that it also became known as the "economy of nature".⁵⁹⁹ In recent years there has been an acceleration in scholarly activity in ecocriticism and ecofeminism, studying multiple modes of nature-oriented fiction that Murphy summed up as enlightenment realism, alchemical and situated realism, postmodernism, science

⁵⁹⁷With reference to the primitive and the "uncivilised", Capancioni discussed cannibalism and Dickens's "rewriting" of the Franklin Expedition to turn the British into the victims of the Inuits. See Claudia Capancioni, *Cannibalism, Charles Dickens, and Franklin's Last Arctic Expedition: "a fate as melancholy and dreadful as it is possible to imagine"*, in *Transgressive Appetites: Deviant Food Practices in Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Silvia Antosa, Mariaconchetta Costantini, and Emanuela Ettorre (Sesto San Giovanni: Mimesis, 2021), pp. 87-101. For more reports and articles about Arctic expeditions see Charles Dickens, «The Lost Arctic Voyages», *Household Words* 10, no. 245 (1954a), pp. 361-365; Charles Dickens, «The Lost Arctic Voyages», *Household Words* 10, no. 246 (1954b), pp. 385-393; Charles Dickens, «The Lost Arctic Voyages», *Household Words* 10, no. 248 (1954c), pp. 433-437; John Rae, «Dr Rae's Report to the Admiralty», *Times* 23 (October 1854), p. 7; John Rae, «Sir John Franklin and His Crew», *Household Words* (February 1855), pp. 12-20.

⁵⁹⁸*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

⁵⁹⁹Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy. A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. xiv.

fiction and fantasy.⁶⁰⁰ Ecocriticism is defined as «an interdisciplinary field of study which explores how the natural world is portrayed in literature, esp. in relation to modern environmental or ecological concerns.»⁶⁰¹ It was coined in 1977 by W. H. Plumstead in an article in *Hartford Studies In Literature*, where ecocriticism was presented as «posit[ing] ecosystems as models to evaluate and gain insights into literary works.»⁶⁰² However, a definite idea of what “ecocriticism” actually means is still a matter of discussion amongst critics:

[Ecocriticism] challenges interpretation to its own grounding in the bedrock of natural fact, in the biospheric and indeed planetary conditions without which human life, much less human letters, could not exist. Ecocriticism thus claims as its hermeneutic horizon nothing short of the literal horizon itself, the finite environment that a reader or writer occupies thanks not just to culturally coded determinants but also to natural determinants that antedate these, and will outlast them.⁶⁰³

The methods of ecocritical analysis in literature are undefined and differ according to the type of analysis that the scholar intends to carry out. Some studies take into consideration the rising “ecological” spirit of Victorians and the environmental changes that contribute to dictate the shifting nature of ecocriticism and its techniques of analysis. As Clark wrote,

Environmental thinking also changes the priorities as to what issues are more significant than others: a small fungus necessary to the life of a tree may be more lastingly decisive than the sensational diaries of a leading politician [...] The enormity and complexity of environmental issues and their depth of implication in the commonest habits of thought or daily action may also perhaps underlie the

⁶⁰⁰Patrick D. Murphy, *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature Oriented Literature* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp. 28-41.

⁶⁰¹*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

⁶⁰²*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

⁶⁰³Herbert F. Tucker, «From the Editors», *New Literary History* 3 (1999), p. 505.

intellectual instability of some ecocritical texts, torn as they often are between revisionist insights and lapses, as if on numbed recoil, into outmoded kinds of romanticism or new age rhetoric.⁶⁰⁴

Of course, issues such as climate change were not prominent in the century of interest, since the most brutal effects of earth's exploitation really became visible only later, but respect for the earth and concern about certain practices were frequent in Victorian fiction, both by male and female authors. Clark quoted a comment by Richard Kerridge on 'ecological' Hardy who, in *The Woodlanders* (1887),⁶⁰⁵ described through natural images of decay the penetration of market economy into Wessex; he also considered Kerridge's celebration of Hardy's ability to see the same things in different ways, to which the scholar attributed a loose 'ecological' sense of interconnection and plurality.⁶⁰⁶

In the nineteenth century, women were in fact enthralled with gazing at the wonders of nature [...] Denied formal higher education, they also constituted large portions of the audience at public lectures on science and read whatever was available to them on the subject. From late eighteenth century on, they could easily find the works of other women who had written the story of science by emphasizing its wonders [...] Within the system of scientific practices defined by their culture, such women writers functioned not as ground breakers but as educators and popularizers.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁴Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 5.

⁶⁰⁵Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, ed. Phillip Mallet (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2004).

⁶⁰⁶Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, pp. 99-100. The following quotation by Meeker is interesting because it fits the theme of this chapter: «If the creation of literature is an important characteristic of the human species, it should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behaviour and the natural environment, and to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of humanity, and what insights it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around.» Joseph W. Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1997), p. 4.

⁶⁰⁷Jean Fernandez, *Geography and the Literary Imagination in Victorian Fictions of Empire. The Poetics of Imperial Space* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2020), p. 36.

Considering that Victorian women were still mostly denied any political or scientific education and career, which remained a male prerogative, an “ecologic discourse” that questioned their contemporary man-made world could only be made in subtler ways, and Gothic fiction offered the perfect stage for all kinds of women’s literary activism. Female authors’ interest in the relationship between nature and human activity has led to the concept of “ecofeminism”, «a socio-political theory and movement which associates ecological [...] concerns with feminist ones.»⁶⁰⁸ According to Patricia Murphy, ecofeminism established itself at the end of the nineteenth century thanks to six female poets who rationalised the exploitation of Nature anticipating issues that became relevant in the following centuries: Augusta Webster (1837-1894), Mathilde Blind (1841-1896), Michael Field,⁶⁰⁹ Alice Meynell (1847-1922), Constance Naden (1858-1889), and Louisa S. Bevington (1845-1895). She argued that ecofeminism covers a wide range of approaches and perspectives but one single premise, namely nature and women are equated in their condition of oppressed body in a male-dominated civilization, sharing a status of inferiority with respect to both humanity and masculinity.⁶¹⁰

The condition of women was thus more or less indirectly associated with the subordination of nature to a system of oppression governed by male authorities, a fact that authoresses explored by means of the Gothic genre. In the introduction to a 2014 special issue of *Gothic Studies*, Del Principe defined a new field of critical enquiry as “ecoGothic”, a theoretical lens and a new literary and cultural mode.⁶¹¹ Del Principe considered nature as a subject suitable to Gothic literature, and from here he moved to discuss “anthropocentrism”, arguing that the «monstrous anthropocentric gaze» can

⁶⁰⁸*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

⁶⁰⁹Pseudonym used by the verse drama authors Katherine Harris Bradley (1846-1914) and her niece and ward Edith Emma Cooper (1862-1913), who worked conjointly on about forty works.

⁶¹⁰See Patricia Murphy, *Reconceiving Nature. Ecofeminism in Late Victorian Women’s Poetry* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2019). See also Dewey W. Hall and Jillmarie Murphy, *Gendered Ecologies: New Materialist Interpretations of Women Writers in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Press, 2020).

⁶¹¹See David Del Principe, «Introduction: EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century», *Gothic Studies* 16, no. 1 (May 2014), p. 1.

be challenged by questioning the extent of human dominion over nature.⁶¹² The term “anthropocentrism” is defined by the *OED* as «primary or exclusive focus on humanity; the view or belief that humanity is the central or most important element of existence, esp. as opposed to God or the natural world.»⁶¹³ An anthropocentric view of nature, from rocks to vegetation to animals, thus sees it as entirely in relation to human needs, submitted to the cultural, financial and political values of men. In his introduction to *EcoGothic*, Smith wrote that Gothic representations of evil can be used for radical reaction in different ways; specifically, the Gothic nature participates in a language that expresses estrangement rather than belonging.⁶¹⁴

Parker affirmed that ecocriticism is a Gothic theme *per se*, and as the ecoGothic becomes a means to analyse the relationship between what is human and what is not, it also opens a path into the exploration of the dark side of this relationship, which she referred to as “ecophobic” associations. She further stated that the ecoGothic posits the idea of trans-corporeality, according to which everything is connected, and humans and non-humans alike are part of the same material system, and they cannot be separated.⁶¹⁵

Trans-corporeality is of significant relevance to the EcoGothic. The Gothic is a mode famously obsessed with the transgression of boundaries—and trans-corporeality, which foregrounds the idea that there is a constant transition and flow across and between all sorts of ‘bodies’, very much fits in with this. Moreover, if, as Estok⁶¹⁶ contends, ecophobia is pervasive throughout the Western world, then the essential ideas of trans-corporeality may be seen not as positively ecocentric, but as truly horrifying.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹²Elizabeth Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic. The Deep Dark Woods in the Popular Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020), p. 19.

⁶¹³*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

⁶¹⁴Andrew Smith, *Introduction. Defining the Ecogothic*, in *Ecogothic*, ed. Andrew Smith and William Hughes, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 2.

⁶¹⁵Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, pp. 31-32.

⁶¹⁶Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, pp. 31-32.

⁶¹⁷Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p. 33.

So, the ecoGothic is a mode through which we can attempt to comprehend complicated representations of the non-human world.⁶¹⁸

We are bound to ask again the old question, but in changed circumstances: where did we begin to go wrong? With pesticides and post-war ‘factory farming’? With the advent of the automobile? With consumerism, capitalism and the extinction of the ‘organic community’? With the industrial revolution and mass production?⁶¹⁹

These are the questions that Jonathan Bate posed in order to understand which man-made event has triggered the environmental questions we are now facing. Since «telling stories is the characteristically human way of humanizing the big questions»,⁶²⁰ literature seems a good place to start investigating the matter. In particular, certain ideas expressed between the lines by the authors in the corpus suggest an ecocritical, rather than anthropocentric, response to the changes that technological and economic progress were “inflicting” upon the British (and European) environment in the nineteenth century. Their focus on nature’s perfection and healthy properties even when danger, dread and death are behind the corner, together with the exaltation of pastoral life, seem to suggest a shift from a man-centred view of the world that was fostered, in Victorian times, by the development of industrial capitalism and expanding imperialism.⁶²¹ Such issues were certainly of interest to nineteenth-century authors who saw their world changing before them and, as a consequence, mutations in the relationship between the natural world and humans. Nature was increasingly being exploited for the sake of profit and mass production, a process that has sadly worsened until the point of no return we are almost

⁶¹⁸Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p. 36.

⁶¹⁹Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 24-25.

⁶²⁰Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 25.

⁶²¹For more information about Victorian ecocriticism see Vicky Albritton and Frederik Albritton Jons-son, *Green Victorians: The Simple Life in John Ruskin’s Lake District* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Dewey W. Hall, ed., *Victorian Ecocriticism: The Politics of Place and Early Environmental Justice* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017); Laurence W. Mazzeno and Ronald D. Morrison, *Victorian Writers and the Environment: Ecocritical Perspectives* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2017).

facing today. This kind of changes also led many scholars to investigate the place of humanity in the history of the natural world. The mythologising of nature that occurs in passages from, for example, Molesworth's 'Unexplained', Oliphant's 'Earthbound' or Riddell's 'Nut-Bush Farm' has a precise role, that is, spotlighting the ills of modern times through the myth of natural life, exposing the harmful conditions of our modern 'civilised' lifestyle:

Idealization of the supposed organic communities of the past, like idolization of the aboriginal peoples who have supposedly escaped the ills of modernity, may often serve as mask for the oppressions of the present. But the myth of a better life that has gone is no less important for being myth rather than history. Myths are necessary imaginings, exemplary stories which help our species to make sense of its place in the world.⁶²²

Nature appears, in Bate's terms, as a form of recreation because beholding the view of mountains, lakes or walking in a field makes us feel relaxed and represents a separation from the anxiety and alienation caused by every day, urban life. Furthermore, the critic argued that the sight of a picturesque landscape offered more to Romantics and post-Romantics than simple relaxation: it was in itself an act of exploitation, because the ability to enjoy such scenes was a test for the writers and intellectuals' own sensibility.⁶²³

The encounter with nature is a form of recreation: it is also an act of re-creation [...] The point of view is that of the human observer, not the land itself. The classic picturesque view is seen from a 'station', a raised promontory in which the spectator stands above the earth, looking down over it in an attitude of Enlightenment mastery [...] Oscar Wilde remarked that there was no fog in London before the Impressionists started painting. His point was that our perception of nature is pre-determined by aesthetic categories. The admirer of the picturesque landscape standing with her back to the landscape is the ancestor of the idealist aesthete.⁶²⁴

⁶²²Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 25.

⁶²³Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 132.

⁶²⁴Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, pp. 132-133.

This kind of attitude towards natural observation can be detected in the aforementioned stories ‘Unexplained’ by Molesworth and ‘Nut-Bush Farm’ by Riddell, where both narrators observe the landscapes before them from a higher position. In general, Romantic and Victorian fiction is infused with the aesthetical principles of the sublime and the picturesque and characterised by the aesthetical principles generated by Latin and Greek classics: the object of observation is not nature itself, but a landscape that meets the requirements of a specific aesthetic discourse.⁶²⁵ However, it is impossible to deny that certain ideas exist in the corpus and that they possibly allude to a more “engaged” reading of the natural landscape, not restricted to a set of aesthetic categories. The estrangement from an anthropocentric view of nature that these stories often bring about promotes a pure reconnection to the natural world. It can be considered also as an attempt to direct the focus on the first signs of decay that human activity causes, an early form of attention towards the consequences of exploitation of the environment based on human necessities. This is achieved through a series of brief comments positioned here and there across various stories. These authoresses seemed to understand that «“nature” is an abstraction, true, but it is also an imposing material presence in whose highly contested fate we are all deeply implicated.»⁶²⁶ As the preceding sections showed, Braddon, Riddell, Oliphant, Broughton, Molesworth and Marryat all stage some of their stories in the countryside or oppose the beauty and peace of an Arcadian life to the chaos and pollution people are subjected to in the city. Various characters seek the soothing air of the countryside or of coastal and mountainous areas abroad to recover from fatigue or poor health conditions. The natural environment is thus a “landscape for escape”, where the suffix “-scape” associates the two terms and fosters the concept of finding refuge in nature. The suffix was a full word in itself until the end of the nineteenth century, defined as «an act of escaping»⁶²⁷ and, rarely, as a synonym for “landscape”.⁶²⁸ As for landscape, the term is defined as «a picture representing natural inland scenery, as distinguished

⁶²⁵Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, pp. 119-152.

⁶²⁶Glen A. Love, *Practical Ecocriticism. Literature, Biology and the Environment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), p. 26.

⁶²⁷*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

⁶²⁸*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

from a sea picture, a portrait, etc.»,⁶²⁹ as «the background of scenery in a portrait or figure-painting»,⁶³⁰ or as «a view or prospect of natural inland scenery, such as can be taken in at a glance from one point of view; a piece of country scenery.»⁶³¹ The word “landscape” thus contains in itself two further meanings, that of escapism, «the tendency to seek, or the practice of seeking, distraction from what normally has to be endured»,⁶³² and that of the “picturesque”, a concept explored by these authoresses. According to Murphy,

The view of the nonurban as escape is precisely a *scape*, a viewpoint of where the world stands in relation to human beings – or rather, where human beings stand when they consider their relationship to the rest of the world. The idea of the land establishes place, whether woods or lake or mountain range, as something separate from human culture. And yet we are in the world, in nature, all the time, because we are ourselves natural [...] like myriad other creatures with varying numbers of cells.⁶³³

In some of the stories analysed so far, the will emerges to place human life in the greater context of nature as a whole, with more or less veiled judgements over the often-inconsiderate actions of man that modify the environment and, consequently, its ecosystems. There are several comments expressing concern about the pollution that contaminates rivers and fills the air with smog. In ‘The Open Door’, Oliphant discussed the condition of the stream that runs by Brentwood’s manor:

The village of Brentwood lay almost under the house, on the other side of the deep little ravine, down which a stream – which ought to have been a lovely, wild, and frolicsome little river – flowed between its rocks and trees. The river, like so many in that district, had, however, in its earlier life been sacrificed to trade, and was grim with paper-making. But this did not affect our pleasure in it so much as I have known it to affect other streams. Perhaps our water was more rapid – perhaps less clogged with dirt and refuse.⁶³⁴

⁶²⁹Oxford English Dictionary, www.oed.com.

⁶³⁰Oxford English Dictionary, www.oed.com.

⁶³¹Oxford English Dictionary, www.oed.com.

⁶³²Oxford English Dictionary, www.oed.com.

⁶³³Murphy, *Farther Afield*, p. 13.

⁶³⁴Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 77.

Through the words of her narrator, the Colonel, Oliphant indirectly denounces an already tragic environmental problem: at the end of the nineteenth century, such polluting practices were already custom in Scotland, the setting of the story, as much as in the rest of Europe. The river is polluted by the waste deriving from papermaking, which, until about mid-nineteenth century, was carried out through watermills, a practice first recorded in 1282 in the Spanish Kingdom of Aragon. Around 1840, the Canadian inventor Charles Fenerty discovered that wood was suitable for papermaking and invented a machine extracting fibres from wood as paper used to be done with rags. A similar discovery was made by the German machinist and inventor Friedrich Gottlob Keller, so that in both Northern America and Europe paper began to be made from wooden fibres. The large presence of wood sources allowed, of course, to initiate paper production on a large-scale, which favoured the printing and publication of texts of various kinds.

Even though Victorians lacked the scientific data that we have at our disposal today, they could see at what cost paper was mass produced. Waste from pulp and papermills were discharged in waters, and they contained a mixture of solids, nutrients and organic matter that were extremely dangerous for the natural ecosystem if present in large quantities, especially nitrogen and phosphorus. In fact, they cause what is known as eutrophication of water, whose most common effect is an overgrowth of algae on the surface of the water which, of course, affects the local floral and faunal biodiversity because water becomes miry. We can thus imagine the river described by Oliphant as not completely swampy yet, but on the way to becoming toxic.

Another form of pollution is represented by the deafening sounds that come from urban, industrialised areas like Glasgow, the setting of Oliphant's 'The Lady's Walk', where the roars heard from the damp, crowded streets disrupt the tranquillity in which the narrator lingers before reaching the city, where he can also hear the clanging machinery at work in the factories.⁶³⁵ Brentwood's mansion and its park are located in the countryside, between Pentland Hills and Firth, close to Edinburgh. The beauty of this landscape is contrasted with the city of Edinburgh's skyline: the city's Castle

⁶³⁵Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, pp. 105, 107

and Calton Hill's monuments have «spires and towers piercing through the smoke.»⁶³⁶ Tim Hatton, Professor of Economics at Essex University, wrote about pollution in industrialised areas in the nineteenth century. Economists and scientists have devised new methods to measure the levels of air-pollution by combining coal consumption by industry with the industrial composition of the workforce to estimate annual coal use in each district. The result is that the most polluted areas were the Midlands, Northern England and Southern Wales, but the contamination had spread throughout the whole country with awful results.

As early as the 1850s, higher coal intensity was associated with higher death rates from respiratory diseases, especially among the old and the very young. An increase of just 1% in coal intensity raised the deaths of infants by one in every 100 births [...] Those located downwind from a coal intensive district suffered from their neighbour's pollution. And communities in valleys surrounded by hills suffered more deaths as their own smoke emissions became trapped and concentrated. Coal combustion also affected the health of those that survived. It led to repeated respiratory illness, slower growth during childhood and shorter adult stature. Although much of the variation in individual height is genetic, we can nevertheless compare the adult heights of those who grew up in more or less polluted districts. The effect of atmospheric pollution can be measured by looking at men who were born in the 1890s whose heights were recorded when they enlisted in the British army during World War I. Their average height was five feet six inches (168cm), but 10% were shorter than five feet three (160cm).⁶³⁷

A scientific report written by scholars who used this new method was published in 2015 by Walker Hanlon from Massachusetts's National Bureau of Economic Research, stating that

Starting in the 1870s, overall mortality began to fall substantially, a pattern that continued through 1900. The reduction in overall mortality was driven by the fall in mortality due to infectious diseases, particularly tuberculosis, typhus, scarlet fever, and diarrhea & dysentery. In contrast, mortality due to respiratory diseases, the category most closely associated with industrial pollution, was rising over most of the study period. This

⁶³⁶Oliphant, *“The Open Door” and Other Stories*, p. 76.

⁶³⁷“Air-Pollution in Victorian Era Britain – Its Effects Now Revealed”, see at www.theconversation.com.

increase was particularly pronounced in the period before 1880, a period that also saw the greatest increases in coal use intensity [...] By the 1891-1900 decade, respiratory mortality was accounting for as many deaths as all of the major infectious diseases combined.⁶³⁸

Air pollution was physically visible because it took the “shape” of smoke, but it must be said that this cover, which was obviously prominent especially in London, the driving machine of British economy, was not the result of mere factory production and coal use. Also, private houses released noxious emissions from hearths, the result of the immense rates of population growth, in turn a consequence of migrations from the countryside to the city. Rudyard Kipling (who grew up abroad) and Alice Meynell compared the London smoke to darkness, but no connections were made between smoke and domesticity: the sacrality of home, a sanctuary to be protected at all costs, did not allow the inference that something so rooted within the identity of Victorians could be the partial cause of a major environmental problem affecting the nation’s welfare.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the connection between climate changes due to smoke and air pollution and ideology was reinforced by an event: the London fogs. Ruskin wrote that «the Empire of England, on which formerly the sun never set, has become one on which he never rises.»⁶³⁹ The perpetual halo of darkness caused by the smoke began to be seen as an apocalyptic sign of the end of the Empire, increasing the anxiety over the decline of English greatness that almost seemed the end of all civilization. A series of “fog seasons”, during which people really had to endure a condition of semi-obscurity, repeated themselves several times from the mid-eighteenth century, increased notably in the nineteenth century and culminated in the calamity of 1952:

The incidence of fog increased during the 1830s, but blanket episodes became less frequent. In the 1840s, however, conditions again deteriorated and in February 1843 the

⁶³⁸“Air-Pollution in Victorian Era Britain”, p. 9.

⁶³⁹Ruskin, *The Works*, p. 62.

weather was so bad that 'it was almost impossible to see from one side of the street to the other'⁶⁴⁰ [...] By the late 1850s, also, journalistic benchmarking had confirmed that midday close-downs had become more frequent, costly and dangerous [...] Despite due warning, meteorologists, epidemiologists and urban reformers were genuinely shocked by the severity of the great crises of December 1873, January 1882, Winter and Spring 1886-7, December 1891, December 1892 and November 1901.⁶⁴¹ If conditions were bad between 1871 and 1875, they were even worse between 1886 and 1890, with nearly twice as many severe episodes recorded in the later 1880s than the early 1870s.⁶⁴²

The image of the layer of smoke hovering over the London area recalls a story by Oliphant, a quite long novelette called 'The Beleaguered City'. The story is delocalized and set in France, in the town of Semur in Haute Bourgogne, in the month of June. The weather is wonderful, the crops are bearing fruits and the sun shines. One day, a mysterious fog comes to Semur, for which there appears to be no rational explanation; the inhabitants hear strange sounds around them, things are seen moving without being touched by anyone, like boats sailing on their own, various phrases appear on the church and other buildings' walls like *Sommation*, "summoning", and *Vraie Signification de la Vie*, "the true meaning of life". At a certain point in the long story, which consists of various testimonies, the men are even chased from town while the women are "chosen" to communicate with the fog and welcomed back behind its walls. The fog turns out to be a party of ghosts, the spirits of the locals' loved ones, who have returned to earth to teach their dear ones the true meaning of life and what is really worth appreciating in the world. The men, who cannot distinguish any form or understand the sounds that they hear, were guilty of loving money and fame above all else, their creed being *le bon Dieu c'est l'argent!* The fog increases day by day:

⁶⁴⁰Quotation from an article on *The Times* by the *Select Committee on Smoke Nuisance* (1843).

⁶⁴¹See W. P. D. Logan, «Mortality in the London Fog Incident, 1952», *The Lancet*, I (1953), p. 338; Frederick J. Brodie, «On the Prevalence of Fog in London During the 20 Years 1871 to 1890», *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society*, XVIII (January 1892), p. 403; R. H. Scott, «Fifteen Years' Fogs in the British Islands», *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society*, XIX (October 1893), p. 232; reported as is quoted in the text's note.

⁶⁴²Bill Luckin, «'The Heart and Home of Horror': The Great London Fogs of the Late Nineteenth Century», *Social History* 28, no. 1 (January 2003), p. 34.

There ought to have been a moon almost at the full; but no moon was visible, no stars – nothing but a grey veil of clouds, growing darker and darker as the moments went on; such I have heard are the days and the nights in England, where the sea-fogs so often blot out the sky.⁶⁴³

Even though the story is displaced, Oliphant's reference to the situation in England is crystal clear. The fog is dispelled after three days of darkness and Semur returns to be brightened by the sun. The town-folk experience a religious revival and all are joyful and "purified". The religious metaphor runs throughout the whole story, with the pervasive idea that the inhabitants are punished by God until they acknowledge his superiority above all else; then they are forgiven and "resurrected" to grace to the rhythm of their beloved church bells resounding. However, it is not impossible to think that the metaphor truly intended by Oliphant concerns the climatic crisis that the country was going through in the late century. The narrative is a myth of good, pious conduct in the face of avarice, and the two things are connected. It seems to be a critique to the excessive greed for increasing production that mass consumption requires. Mass consumption and mass production have certainly triggered a path of money circulation that excites entrepreneurship at the cost of care for human safety, from an environmental perspective as much as from that of safety on the workplace, health, and quality of life. The fog dispels only when Semur people learn to respect the valuable things and God's greatness, meaning that the fog over the city of London will disappear only when the governors contain the damage provoked by this pressing economic system.

In the tale, women are the main architects of the whole village's redemption, since they are considered worthy by the spirits and capable of hearing their cry. They become the spokespersons of the world of the dead that grants access to a different level of knowledge, and they are aware of the consequences of not acting on time. Unlike Maud in 'Earthbound', Semur's women can have their voices heard and are the vehicle of the change of course that saves the citizens' souls. As speculative as it

⁶⁴³Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, p. 188.

may be to say this, Oliphant proposed women as the true channels of change, the beacon of hope in a society directed by men who did not see the outcome of their policies, which comprised the exploitation of earth and of the weakest elements of society in the working system, including women and children.

Mary Molesworth briefly addressed human exploitation of the Earth in 'Unexplained', where the narrator walks with her friends in the middle of the Thuringian Forest and reaches a pastoral valley that, to her, appears like the Garden of Eden.⁶⁴⁴ Suddenly, the vision is disrupted by the realisation that the forest stops abruptly, and she bitterly comments:

One travels for hours together as if in an enchanted land of changeless monotony; trees, trees everywhere and nothing but trees – one could fancy late in the afternoon that one was back at the early morning's starting-point – when suddenly the forest stops, sharply and completely, where the hand of man has decreed that it should, not by gradual degrees as when things have been left to the gentler management of nature and time.⁶⁴⁵

Molesworth idealises nature as a paradise where men do not interfere with its course, and she expresses nostalgia for a world when human-nature interactions took place following nature's rhythm. To the glorification of nature is opposed that of London in Braddon's 'Dorothy's Rival': however, the city is considered as an El Dorado only by those who have never seen it, which implies that its inhabitants would rather not live there: «all the roads were London roads in those days; and people lived and died on the London road without ever seeing the metropolis, which figured, glorious and radiant, in their daydreams.»⁶⁴⁶

Similarly, in 'Prince Ramji Rowdedow', Slimeford-on-the-Slushy is an ugly town which is growing especially thanks to factories built in the typical red-bricks architecture, shutting out the countryside. It is an industrial town whose inhabitants

⁶⁴⁴Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 102-104.

⁶⁴⁵Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, p. 105.

⁶⁴⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 102.

are always on strike and have absolutely no other interests, completely alienated by work. The narrator, an actor at the local theatre, states:

I cannot say that the Slushy is a beautiful river, or that the muddy banks thereof are pleasant walking, or that any mortal, not an inhabitant of Slimeford ever expressed admiration for its dirty waters, on which dismal black barges lie at anchor here and there, and into which various dye-works and other factories discharge their viscid and rainbow-hued liquids.⁶⁴⁷

The dirt is intrinsic to the tautological town's name, since "slushy" means "muddy, miry" and "slime" is a thick, muddy substance; "ford" is "to look", thus "to look at slime", but it also means "shallow part of a river" that can be crossed. Braddon delocalises her story in a non-existent town that seems to have, however, a certain likeness to Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's birth-town. Being a little industrial city, Slimeford, like Stratford, lives upon trade and has boats crossing its filthy river to move goods from one part of the country to the other. Stratford-upon-Avon is on the route from London to Wales and vice versa. The strategic importance of the Avon led to an extensive sailing of the river, which became navigable thanks to some projects undertaken in the seventeenth century. The river must have been thus polluted by the waste and emission released by the trade vessels crossing it. Smoke is always present whenever a Victorian industrial town is described, and Slimeford has its own share of smoke-clouds.⁶⁴⁸ Similarly to Slimeford-on-the-Slushy, in 'Sir Hanbury's Request' the town of Loomborough is described as «a quite country town ringed in with green fields and humble rustic villages, a clear blue river winding through it, and the sweet summer air unpolluted by smoke.»⁶⁴⁹ Loomborough too was later turned into an industrial town, a fictional place that can easily be replaced with the name of many other British towns of the time. It has become an economic and judicial centre, but some of its districts are particularly smoky and dirty because most crowded.

⁶⁴⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 102.

⁶⁴⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 137.

⁶⁴⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 149.

Overpopulation has thus decreased the safety and well-being of the citizens.⁶⁵⁰ The narrator, young Hanbury, dreams of going back in time, when Loomborough was a picturesque country town

With painted gables and projecting upper stories, queer old mullioned windows, irregular pavements, open gutters through which the town sewage flowed merrily, like a rivulet. Loomborough was a small market town, with a cathedral that seemed ever so much too big for it, and a margin of fields and wooded hills were white with snow, and the black twigs of the trees bore icicles.⁶⁵¹

Given these premises, it is not surprising that people fled from the urban area to find shelter in the countryside, a less contaminated environment to recover their health, damaged by air, water and earth pollution, and by the constant, reverberating sounds of traffic, machines and voices, namely acoustic pollution.

Molesworth's Anne, the protagonist of 'Witnessed by Two', is persuaded by her staff to leave town for the country because her health and nerves need restoration. In Rhoda Broughton's 'The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth', Mrs De Wynt sends her son to the sea to recover his health, far from London. She goes with him, but being a city woman who does not love life outside London, she finds the seaside rather dull, boring, and scarcely suggestive:

My life here is not an eminently suggestive one. It is spent digging with a wooden spade, and eating prawns. Those are my employments at least; my relaxation is going to the Pier to see the Calais boat come in [...] There is a wind here *always*, in comparison of which the wind that behaved so violently to the corner's of Job's house was a mere zephyr. There are heights to climb which require more daring perseverance than ever Wolfe displayed [...] There are glaring white houses, glaring white roads, glaring white cliffs.⁶⁵²

⁶⁵⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 151.

⁶⁵¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 158.

⁶⁵²Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 5.

Yet the woman acknowledges that London is soiled, her «dear, beautiful, filthy London.»⁶⁵³ In Oliphant's 'Earthbound', Lord Robert Beresford argues with his brother about the advantages of living in the countryside, whereas his sibling «congratulated himself that he was not like his brother Robert, the head of the family, and compelled to pass his winters in the middle of those damp acres of park»,⁶⁵⁴ an exception for no other preference for the city is expressed in the corpus. In fact, the protagonist of 'Poor Pretty Bobby', Mrs Hamilton, lives happily as a young girl in her father's rented mansion in the countryside, near Plymouth:

My father rented a house near Plymouth at that time, an in-and-out *nooky* kind of old house – no doubt it has fallen to pieces long years ago – a house all set round with unnumbered flowers, and about which the rooks clamoured all together from the windy elm tops.⁶⁵⁵

The protagonist's mother imagines that the soldier Bobby, the girl's loved one and her father's protégé, would want a room overlooking the garden filled with flowers and birds when he comes at their place, tired from the chaos of battle. The two lovers walk out in the garden the day they promise themselves to marry before his departure:

We walked out under the heavy leaved horse chestnut trees, and the old and rough barked elms. The sun was shining all this time [...] There were soft showers enough to keep the grass green and the flowers undrooped, but I have no association of overcast skies and untimely deluges with those long and azure days. We sat under a haycock, on the shady side, and indolently watched the haymakers – the shirt-sleeved men, and burnt and bare armed women, tossing and raking while we breathed the blessed country air, full of adorable scents, and crowded with little happy, and pretty winged insects.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵³Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 6.

⁶⁵⁴Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, p. 39.

⁶⁵⁵Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 53.

⁶⁵⁶Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 56.

The fatigue of labour is not perceived in this pastoral image of country life, because the context seems to render the labourers' work in the fields more bearable. Victorians actually tended to avoid descriptions of the working life in the countryside while favouring the positive traits of life in that environment. The upper classes experienced the countryside as a place where to detox from the burdens of life in the city without considering the asperities met by labourers in the fields, the long working hours in various atmospheric conditions, the meagreness of their resources and the often-poor hygienic conditions. These aspects were mostly hidden in favour of a positive narration of life in the countryside, which reflected the cultural and literary tastes of the bourgeoisie and the upper classes.

Also, Charlotte Riddell set some of her tales in the countryside, as previously illustrated. The protagonist and narrator of 'The Open Door', Theopheus, claims to love the Meadowshire's countryside and to be one of the *few* people, possibly intended ironically since it is in italics in the text, who love the country and hate the city, and wishes he could never go back to London despite the shudders caused by his female antagonist, who sometimes hides in the vegetation to escape the house.⁶⁵⁷ In 'Nut-Bush Farm', the countryside will turn out to be the stage of a cruel murder, but it is the environment where the narrator has grown and he still feels nostalgic about this place. When he returns to the fields, his childhood memories come back to his mind and soothe his soul. Finally, Edgar Stainton, the protagonist of 'Walnut-Tree House', acknowledges the intensification of what we would call acoustic pollution as a consequence of the increased urbanisation of the London area, which is rendered with the onomatopoeic term «rumble» of London traffic, and with the phrase «noise of passing cab and whistling street boys.»⁶⁵⁸

Chapter 2 moves from the domestic space of the Victorian houses to the external space of gardens and parks, towards the wide-open spaces of the British countryside and the European tourist routes, namely the mountainous regions of Switzerland and Germany, the countryside of France and the heterogeneous Italian landscapes. The

⁶⁵⁷Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 40.

⁶⁵⁸Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 16.

ultimate destination is the Arctic, the great mysterious North that Victorians were so eager to conquer.

The first part concerns the picturesqueness of the British gardens and private parks that are the setting of various tales in the corpus. This represents a literary manifestation of the frenzy for landscape gardening that took over both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries and was infused with the picturesque aesthetic. These locations, outside the house yet so closely linked to the domestic environment, offer solace to the characters in the stories, as is the case of André de Brissac in Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant' and Maud and Edmund in Braddon's 'The Ghost's Name'. However, parks and gardens suggest another possible interpretation directly connected with the nation and its imperialistic endeavours, detectable in Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant' and 'Sir Luke's Return': these stories seem to suggest the fear of being contaminated by the Other, of being taken over by the colonised, which would endanger the greatness of the Empire, and therefore the need to protect Britain's past.

The aesthetic principles of the picturesque and the sublime have been investigated: sublimity generates emotions, horror, awe, surprise, that suit the Gothic genre and sensation fiction, which, through the monstrous and the supernatural, force the reader to face fears and to familiarise them in order to overcome the dread. Here the Freudian concept of the *unheimlich* returns in use. For this reason, beautiful agrarian and other natural sceneries are often counteracted, and vice versa, in the tales by the presence of ominous criminal or supernatural "entities" at work in stories like Braddon's 'Herself' and 'Good Lady Ducayne', Broughton's 'The Man with the Nose', and Molesworth's 'Unexplained'.

Section 2.3 concerns two specific types of landscapes, completely different from one another: the marshes in Florence Marryat's 'Lost in the Marshes' and the Arctic in Braddon's 'My Wife's Promise'. The marshes are one of the typical habitats of criminals and monsters because, since the origins of British literature, they are deemed as inhospitable places unsuitable for civilised life. On the other hand, the Arctic represents British strife for the supremacy of the world as an imperial power.

The last part of the chapter deals with a possible ecocritical discourse traceable in short narratives mainly by Oliphant, 'The Open Door', Braddon, 'Prince Ramji Rowdedow', or Riddell's 'Walnut-Tree House'. The possible ecocritical

interpretations of passages from these tales reflect the Victorians' growing interest in the environment, or at least a greater sensibility as to the consequences that human actions have on the environment and, therefore, on people's lives.

This thesis will now move on to the third and last step of the journey: this time, space becomes metaphorical, no longer geographical, for we enter the realm of the body and the mind.

Chapter 3

Gothic Bodies and Haunted Minds

The third and last Chapter deals with a different kind of space, not properly geographical: the space of the body and of the mind.

In Victorian literature, the human body is often represented as distorted; monstrous characters symbolising deviances of various kinds, from the social to the political, populate Gothic and sensation fiction. The growing interest in the scientific developments of medicine met with the pseudo-scientific theories of phrenology and physiognomy that originated in the eighteenth century and inspired Cesare Lombroso's theories. If the body bears the marks of criminality, then it becomes the perfect site for the Gothic, allowing authors to explore the dark side of men and women. The distortions of the human body took up various forms in nineteenth-century fiction, from vampires to werewolves, to degeneracies devised by mad scientists as a result of brutal experimentations.

Section 3.1.1 analyses the vampire body, which in the corpus belongs to women who are mock-vampiric figures, draining the lives of those around them, in some cases literally. The discussion on the vampire body leads to a number of interpretations concerning social envy, discourses on women's role in society, therefore related to fertility and sterility, or to economic interpretations involving fear of the so called "reversed colonization".

Section 3.1.2 investigates the impaired body; Victorian concerns for bodily fragility intersected with questions of hereditariness. The Section highlights the role of impaired characters in the construction of narrative plots and of their identities, reflecting the role attributed to disabled bodies in Victorian society.

Sections 3.1.3 and 3.1.4 concern xenophobic questions of otherness, concentrating in particular on the Irish and on people of "darker complexions", specifically the Indians, all sharing traits that mark them as criminals from the Victorian perspective, influenced by the theories of phrenology and physiognomy.

The last space explored in this work is the mind, with its mysterious mechanisms, which follow a logic of their own that is, still nowadays, far from having been fully

deciphered. Section 3.2.1 analyses the dreams that punctuate many short stories throughout the corpus, generally pivotal in the development of the plot, where various kinds of oneiric experiences are presented.

Section 3.2.2 concerns mental disorders: mental instability is never directly addressed as the main issue in the short narratives of interest, yet there are frequent references and hints at madness that show how these questions pervaded the Victorian imagination.

3.1 Reading Fictional Gothic Bodies

3.1.1 The Vampire Body

Mighall referred to the human body as the «locus of Gothic horror in the last decades of the century»,⁶⁵⁹ and identified a «distinctly ‘somatic’ aspect of late-Victorian Gothic.»⁶⁶⁰ Mighall’s statements derive from the frequent representations of the human body in Victorian fiction, often distorted to enhance monstrosity. In fact, as also suggested by Mighall’s use of the term “somatic”, Victorians believed that physical features could reveal one’s inner wickedness and criminal tendency, following the pseudo-scientific theories of physiognomy and phrenology that originated in the eighteenth century. The German physician Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828) was the first one to speculate that certain areas of the brain are responsible for human activity, so that he began to identify the localization of mental functions in the brain. Gall also hypothesized that the shape of the skull mirrored personality traits, a theory that he further developed team-working with Johann Gaspar Spurzheim (1776-1832), the inventor of the term “phrenology” (from the Greek *phren*, “mind”, and *logos*, “discourse”). In Britain,⁶⁶¹ this new discipline took root almost immediately and spread thanks to the work of the Scottish lawyer George Combe (1788-1858),

⁶⁵⁹Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, p. 130.

⁶⁶⁰Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*, p. 130. See also Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁶⁶¹See Sharron Pearl, *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

who became the spokesman of the phrenological movement in Britain and founder of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society in the 1820s. Combe explained that Gall had encountered several difficulties during his period of study because of the predominance of metaphysical interpretations of human activity, which determined that general powers such as perception, conception, memory, imagination, and judgement were the only categories defining the products of human agency. Combe further illustrated Gall's proceedings: the master observed the correspondence existing between certain talents and dispositions and the shape of the head; he subsequently dissected the skull to ascertain its structure. Combe owed to both Gall and his disciple, Spurzheim, the development of the phrenological theory that systematised «the truths, brought to light by their joint observations, into a beautiful and interesting system of mental philosophy, and to develop its moral applications.»⁶⁶² The popularity of phrenology exploded in early Victorian Britain thanks to the work of many proponents, like Hewett C. Watson (1804-1881), physician and botanist convinced that

In ten years from this time the public laugh or the public pity will be freely bestowed upon the anti-phrenologists. - In another ten years, anti-phrenology will exist in the last decrepitude of age. - And in ten years more, it will be a subject for the historians of things that have ceased to be.⁶⁶³

Phrenological societies were founded throughout the country in the first decades of the Victorian Age, each counting hundreds of members,⁶⁶⁴ and phrenological theories circulated in various ways even amongst the commercial middle class, thanks to open lessons, by means of publications on the *Phrenological Journal and Miscellany* (1823-1847), pamphlets and books: Watson had published more than fifty-seven

⁶⁶²George Combe, *Elements of Phrenology. From the Fifth Edinburgh and Enlarged Edition with Illustrations* (New York City, NY: William H. Colyer; Boston, MA: Lewis and Sampson, 1845), pp. 31-32.

⁶⁶³Stephan Karschay, *Doyle and the Criminal Body*, see at www.cambridge.org, p. 96.

⁶⁶⁴See Terry M. Parssinen, «Popular Science and Society: The Phrenology Movement in Early Victorian Britain», *Journal of Social History* 8, No. 1 (Autumn, 1974), page numbers unavailable.

books and pamphlets by 1836; a paramount work in phrenology was Combe's *Constitution of Men* (1828), which is estimated to have sold a thousand copies in 1834; when a "popular", cheaper edition was released it sold 90.000 copies by 1851.⁶⁶⁵

Moving from phrenology and physiognomy, the Italian psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) developed the theory of inborn criminality scientifically approached in his multi-volume study *Criminal Man* (1876-1897), a text that revolutionized criminal anthropology and the interpretation of the criminal behaviour. Lombroso understood crime as the result of an individual organic constitution, which, in this perspective, would explain recidivism. The founding principle of Lombroso's theory was that criminality would be immediately detectable when looking at individuals because their body bore the marks of inherent, innate criminality: the dimensions of the skull, the shape of the nose, skin colour, and hair colour are just some examples of the physical features taken into consideration to determine a criminal profile; to specific traits corresponded a sphere of crimes. Lombroso's theories became paramount sources for several Victorian authors, especially Charles Dickens, who relied on physiognomy for the physical descriptions of criminal characters in many of his novels, namely in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870),⁶⁶⁶ but also female authors such as George Eliot and Emily Brontë were fascinated by this field.⁶⁶⁷

The scientific methods of phrenological analysis began to be applied to the field of criminology, questioning the inherent qualities of human beings, the degree of determinism in their criminal endeavours, and the possible effects of exercising the intellectual and moral faculties to correct behaviour. In this perspective, phrenology was useful to those who advocated reforms of the penal and legal system; phrenologists claimed to be able to diagnose individual flaws and set in motion a process of improvement:

⁶⁶⁵See Parssinen, «Popular Science and Society», page number unavailable.

⁶⁶⁶Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood and Other Stories*, ed. G. K. Chesterton (London: Read, 2020).

⁶⁶⁷See Eike Kronshage, *Vision and Character. Physiognomics and the English Realist Novel* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2018).

In the eyes of the phrenologists, the penal institutions and lunatic asylums of early Victorian Britain were even more in need of reform than the schools. According to phrenology, both criminals and the insane suffer from diseases for which they are not basically responsible. Criminals are only following their natural animal propensities toward destructiveness, secretiveness, and combativeness. Particularly if such naturally deficient children are deprived of a proper moral training and brought up amidst poverty and ignorance and practical wickedness, crime on their part appears almost inevitable. The primary purpose of prisons then, must not be to punish criminals for transgressions over which they have little control, but to remove them from society and to re-educate them to society's natural laws and their own deficiencies, so that they can eventually be re-integrated into society.⁶⁶⁸

Even though the influence of the phrenological movement waned in the 1840s, it still persisted throughout the whole century, becoming a source for *fin-de-siècle* Gothic and the rising detective fiction, whose main exponent was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle with his Sherlock Holmes narratives. The most prominent literary detectives were physiognomists themselves like Holmes, but also Edgar Allan Poe's August Dupin, the detective in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841, *Graham's Magazine*), *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* (serialised between 1842 and 1843 in *The Lady's Companion*), and *The Purloined Letter* (1845, *The Chamber's Journal*).⁶⁶⁹

The figure of the literary detective partakes in both of these endeavours: Sherlock Holmes investigates criminal acts by drawing on theories of criminality that help him to apprehend (in both senses of the word) criminals and their crimes. Just like nineteenth-century criminological discourse, Arthur Conan Doyle's Holmes stories search for the unique characteristics of crime and construct criminality in distinctive ways which interrogate and, at times, destabilise scientific assumptions about the nature of the criminal offender: are the seeds of crime to be found in social conditions, or is criminality predetermined by evolutionary biology? What is the relative significance of nature and nurture in the

⁶⁶⁸See Parssinen, «Popular Science and Society», page numbers unavailable.

⁶⁶⁹See Christopher Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2011).

development of crime? And is criminality only visible in the results it wreaks or can it be detected on the face of the criminal offender? Different criminologists answered these questions in different ways, and the dominance of Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) as the founding father of criminal anthropology in the popular imagination should not gloss over the fact that his deterministic theories were met with considerable criticism from continental as well as British commentators.⁶⁷⁰

Victorian Gothic fiction is populated by monstrous characters whose physicality shows signs of deviancy. As Marshall stated, the fact that evil can be seen in the face of a deranged character was important to this genre,⁶⁷¹ which exploited the theories of phrenology and physiognomy more than any other literary genre at the time. The manifestation of evil in this kind of fiction often took the form of witches, vampires, werewolves and ghosts, human beings who have undergone, willingly or not, a physical transformation, generally as a consequence of a spiritual degradation. This modification marked them as evil and manifested through signs of corruption on their own bodies. This was one of the assumptions from which phrenological and physiognomic theories developed; the point was whether a human being became evil after having committed a crime or the criminal temperament was innate.⁶⁷² The female body was particularly mistreated in Gothic and sensation fiction by Victorian authors, who often turned women into vectors of evil. Mulvey-Roberts wrote that, starting from the eighteenth-century Gothic fiction, the female gothic body had developed a

⁶⁷⁰Karschay, *Doyle and the Criminal Body*, p. 96.

⁶⁷¹Bridget Marshall, «The Face of Evil: Phrenology, Physiognomy, and the Gothic Villain», *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)* 6, no. 2, (Fall 2000), p. 161.

⁶⁷²Marshall, «The Face of Evil», p. 163. In discussing the figures of Stoker's *Dracula* and Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, however, Marshall noticed that «although ugly faces are always indicative of evil, it seems that there is still potentially danger hidden behind a beautiful face. Underlying this danger is a discomfort with the reliability of phrenology.» Marshall, «The Face of Evil», p. 169. This statement suggests that even when beauty hides evil under the veil of apparent perfection, one should be careful in judging positively the character, something that happens because phrenological “laws” might mislead the less careful observer.

«Madonna / whore duality, incarceration, fragmentation, hybridity and sexuality, while femininity itself has been demonised in Gothic literature by way of the *femme fatale*, man-made monster, vampire and Medusa.»⁶⁷³ Mulvey-Roberts brought the example of Braddon's Lady Audley and Edward Bulwer-Lytton's Lucretia Dalibard from the novel *Lucretia* (1846): both protagonists are murderous women who end up being locked in an asylum.⁶⁷⁴ In particular, Lucretia's moral corruption is matched by her physical appearance, since she is defined as a «mockery of a human being - more appalling and more fallen than Dante ever fabled in his spectres», with red devouring eyes.⁶⁷⁵ Lucretia's eyes are those of a bloodthirsty creature, a vampire or a wild animal, a kind of female monstrous figure that recurs in various horror, Gothic and sci-fi works of the Victorian Age: we find an example in H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896),⁶⁷⁶ where a puma woman kills Moreau, the scientist who had created her by means of his deranged experimental vivisections. Innocent women are transformed by Dracula in Bram Stoker's 1898 novel. The Count's victims, namely his wives at the castle and Lucy Westenra in London, become vampires after unholy sexual intercourses with the undead; they become epitomes of the *femme fatale* with their sensual red lips and *charme*, once gentle souls turned into infernal seducers.

Another female vampire figure is the less renowned but equally important character from Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire*. This novel encompasses both the typical vampire figure and the sci-fi element of Well's novel, in that the protagonist is Harriet Brandt, «the puma's cub»⁶⁷⁷ born from the union of a mad scientist and barbarous vivisectionist, and an Obeah sorceress. The parents are both killed in Jamaica by the locals because of the atrocities performed both on humans and animals. Harriet is not an actual vampire, as she drinks no blood, but she seems to drain the life

⁶⁷³Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Poisoned Prose*, in *The Palgrave Book of Steam Age Gothic*, ed. Clive Bloom (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), p. 108.

⁶⁷⁴In 1858, Bulwer-Lytton had his own wife hospitalised in an asylum after a wrong diagnosis of dementia, as a punishment for having divulged her husband's infidelities and marital violence.

⁶⁷⁵Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Lucretia; Or, the Children of the Night* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1874), p. 427.

⁶⁷⁶H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, ed. Darryl Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁶⁷⁷Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, p. 199.

out of those whom she encounters: her mother was said to gain pleasure from the suffering of the creatures subjected to the scientist's experiments, while her grandmother was a slave once bitten by a vampire bat. Harriet carries in her blood the marks of her dreadful parentage, she is cursed with black blood, in quite racist terms, and vampire blood, a fatal mix for whomever she meets and touches. Marryat created another similar vampire figure in one of her short narratives, namely 'Sent to His Death!'. The protagonist, Dolly, visits her friend Bessie at her mansion, Poplar Farm; Bessie, an unsentimental and distant parent, has recently become the mother of a baby boy, so she has hired a nurse to replace her in the caring of the child. The nurse is young Mrs Graham, a woman who immediately strikes Dolly's attention for her physical appearance:

I could not help observing what a remarkable-looking girl she was. She had the very palest and clearest of complexions – so colourless that it looked like the finest white wax, and her skin was of the texture of satin. Her large, clear, grey eyes, which shone with a limpid light, like agates with water running over them, had a startled look, which might almost have been mistaken for fear, and her delicately cut mouth drooped in the most pathetic manner. To add to the mournfulness of her appearance, her hair was almost completely hidden beneath her cap, and her dress was the deepest widows mourning.⁶⁷⁸

Dolly describes a woman whose aspect makes her unique: on the one hand, the extreme paleness of her complexion suggests lack of health, as if no blood were running in her veins, on the other hand, the perfect smoothness of her skin makes the nurse appear unreal, too flawless to be human. Furthermore, Mrs Graham's limpid eyes emanate a bright light that contrasts with the deathly appearance of her skin, which contributes to the unnatural, mysterious aspect of the lady. At the same time, she has a strange look in her eyes that Dolly identifies with fear. With this description by her narrator, Marryat instils suspicion in the reader about the nurse's nature, personality, and intentions, further reinforced by the fact that Bessie's child seems to be sick, less cheerful and healthy than the last time Dolly had seen him. In fact, the reader is led to think that Mrs Graham is a vampire-like figure who nurses the child while feeding upon him, slowly draining him of his life. The fear Dolly reads in the

⁶⁷⁸Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 252.

woman's eyes might derive from the nurse's realisation that she can no longer act undisturbed: Bessie and her husband care very little for their children, so Mrs Graham could perform "her duties" without taking any risk, but Dolly represents an obstacle to her activity, because she is more attentive than her friend. In fact, Bessie does not even notice the change for the worse that her son has undergone. The mystery around Mrs Graham deepens when Dolly learns that Poplar Farm is haunted by an entity that people believe to be a ghost, who has been both seen and heard, weeping and wailing, by various members of the household. Bessie has seen the spirit as well, as she tells her friend. She also sets the atmosphere for her tale by describing her house at the moment of the sighting as the perfect Gothic, haunted mansion:

The first time I saw it, Dolly, I thought I should have died of fright [...] Everybody was in bed but myself, and I thought, as I carried my single candle up the dark staircase, how silent and ghastly everything appeared. As I turned into the corridor,⁶⁷⁹ I heard a gasping sound like a stifled sob. At first, I could hardly believe my ears; but when it was repeated my heart seemed to stand still. I was hesitating whether to go back or forward, and trembling in every limb, when *it* – this dreadful *thing* – crossed me. It sprung up, I don't know from where, in the darkness, and just looked at me once and rushed away. It nearly sunk to the ground, as you may well imagine I had only just time to get inside my own door [...] I know *it* was dressed all in white, with snow-white hair hanging over its face, and fearful staring eyes [...] We hear it every night [emphasis in the original].⁶⁸⁰

The same look of fear in the creature's eyes is detected by Bessie, so the reader connects the figure of the nurse with that of the night stalker. As for Mrs Graham, she dutifully attends the child but never plays with him, she never smiles to him, she acts according to her professional role but is emotionally detached from the baby, a fact that fuels the doubts concerning her identity.

As the story progresses, we learn that Mrs Graham's own baby boy had also died, which explains her widow clothing and hairstyle. Dolly is not sure whether the ghost

⁶⁷⁹See Section 1.3.

⁶⁸⁰Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 255-256.

is real or not and, even though she is not afraid of the supernatural, she confesses to be unwilling to interfere with the ghost if it turned out to be real.⁶⁸¹ Nonetheless, she is determined to find out the truth about this entity. One night, Dolly hears sounds of gasping breaths and sobbing and decides to investigate their origin: she finds before herself a figure, a white, tall shadow who answers with sobs to Dolly's question «who are you?»⁶⁸² and moves quickly along the corridor. Moreover, the baby is heard crying from his room. Bessie is more worried about herself than about her child, «never mind *baby*»⁶⁸³, whose name she probably does not even remember, but Dolly gathers her strength and courage and ventures to the nursery. This concatenation of events precedes the climax of the tale, the revelation of the truth about Mrs Graham's nature, that is not what the reader expected. When Dolly enters the room, she finds Mrs Graham sitting up in bed and screaming about water coming in and an open door, reminiscences of the shipwreck that occurred to the ship aboard which she was travelling with her husband and child. Mrs Graham subsequently explains that she has recurrent bad dreams about that traumatic event, and she unconsciously sleepwalks at night, so she comes to be mistaken for a ghost; furthermore, her grief prevents her from properly taking care of the baby, who lacks all motherly affection necessary for his thriving.

So, Mrs Graham is no vampire at all, just a poor young woman who has lost everything and is incapable of confronting her trauma and move on. However, Dolly does not immediately realise that the presumed spectre and Mrs Graham are the same *thing*, but a new encounter with the ghost at night will allow her to identify the poor nurse as the haunting presence in the house. Mrs Graham's hallucinations and bad dreams cause her to sleepwalk around Poplar Farm, crying in search of her husband, Edward.

Another story that presents a vampire-like character, described more thoroughly with respect to Marryat's Mrs Graham, is Braddon's 'Good Lady Ducayne'.⁶⁸⁴ The

⁶⁸¹Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 258.

⁶⁸²Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 258.

⁶⁸³Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 259.

⁶⁸⁴Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Bram Stoker knew each other very well, and they often met at her residence in Richmond. It is likely that, during their discussions, the figure of the vampire emerged and

title, which is ironic given the outcome of the narrative, was inspired by the name of the main antagonist, a figure halfway between the vampire and the witch. We know from Section 2.2 that Lady Ducayne is an old woman who hires young girls as her companions, and that all these girls die, all but Bella Rolleston, the protagonist. In fact, she is the only one to survive the reiterated blood transfusions that the girls are submitted to by the lady's Italian doctor, Parravicini, who then uses their blood to prolong Lady Ducayne's life by transfusing it into her veins. The first time Bella meets the old woman is when she is hired by her, and her gaze is riveted by the sight of that decrepit lady:

Never had she seen anyone as old as the old lady sitting by the Parson's fire: a little old figure, wrapped from chin to feet in an ermine mantle; a withered, old face under a plumed bonnet – a face so wasted by age that it seemed only a pair of eyes and a peaked chin. The nose was peaked, too, but between the sharply pointed chin and the great, shining eyes, the small, aquiline nose was hardly visible [...] Claw-like fingers, flashing with jewels, lifted a double eyeglass to Lady Ducayne's shining black eyes, and through the glasses Bella saw those unnaturally bright eyes magnified to a gigantic size, and glaring at her awfully.⁶⁸⁵

Lady Ducayne is presented like a harpy from Bella's point of view, and a few features of her body immediately catch the reader's attention: her hands and her eyes, framed by the skeleton-like head of a person who seems long past the limits of physical existence. She appears withered, skinny like a dried plant that has not been watered or exposed to the sunlight for a long time, and her face is so wrinkled that her features are hardly recognisable. The hyperbolic description of Lady Ducayne's appearance makes the reader imagine an old hag from a Grimms's fairy-tale, preying

that they exchanged views on it: 'Good Lady Ducayne' was published one year before *Dracula* appeared in 1897. See Saverio Tomaiuolo, *Reading Between the (Blood)lines of Victorian Vampires: Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 'Good Lady Ducayne'*, in *From Wollstonecraft to Stoker: Essays on Gothic and Victorian Sensation Fiction*, ed. Marilyn Brock (London: McFarland, 2009), pp. 102-19.

⁶⁸⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 41.

upon young victims and seeking their deaths for the sake of immortality and power over life and death. The woman is all bony, with a peaked, aquiline nose and pointy chin, irregular physical features. Treaties on phrenology and physiognomy were no longer in full fashion towards the end of the century, but they still had their influence on the Victorian imagination: pointy features, in particular the aquiline nose, are described in phrenological works as typically criminal. Lombroso associated the «nose of the eagle type» and «aquiline like the beak of a bird of prey» to aggressive personalities, inclined to overcome, and to murderers.⁶⁸⁶

Sizer quoted the example of a certain lady called Polly Bodine, whose nose was similarly sized:

The face lacks the loving mouth; the lips look pinched, critical, fault-finding, unloving, and unlovable; the nose is long, sharp, inquisitive, inclined to interfere and disagree, and with that broad head and high crown she is not likely to make herself loving and agreeable.⁶⁸⁷

The reader thus reads about an assassin with all the characteristics of a vampire, which makes Lady Ducayne a not-at-all-good person to entertain oneself with. The lady is a perfectionist in the research of her possible attendees, making sure of their good health. In fact, she poses several questions to Bella regarding her welfare, as if she were to choose the best piece of meat out of the butcher's shop: «have you good health? Are you strong and active, able to eat well, sleep well, walk well, able to enjoy

⁶⁸⁶Gina Lombroso-Ferrero, *Criminal Man According to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso. With an Introduction by Cesare Lombroso* (DigiCat Ebooks: 2022), page numbers unavailable. In Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant' the narrator Hector, murderer of his cousin André, is «dark of visage and stern of manner», for this reason women never appreciated his looks. On the contrary, in 'My Unlucky Friend', by the same author, the protagonist, Marlow, who has been for a long time to India for business, is characterised by a «dark, thoughtful face, deep-set grey eyes, and strongly marked black eyebrows there was a stamp of intellectual power which no physiognomist could fail to recognize.» In this case, the man possesses the traits of an intellectually developed person, who however fails to read his lover's true feelings and deceiving intentions. Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 119.

⁶⁸⁷Nelson Sizer, *Heads and Faces and How to Study Them, a Manual of Phrenology and Physiognomy for the People* (New York City, NY: Fowler and Wells Co., 1898), p. 168.

all that is good in life?»⁶⁸⁸ Lady Ducayne is making sure that Bella fits her requirements because she needs her blood to be of good quality for her transfusions, and she needs her to survive as long as possible. With the help of Parravicini, Lady Ducayne begins to “vampirise” Bella: for days, the pseudo-physician stuns her with chloroform to prevent her from waking up while she sleeps, and then takes her blood. Bella notices signs of stings and Parravicini himself gives his fake opinion on them, blaming mosquitos for the ailment afflicting the girl. He even jokes about the insects by calling them “vampires”,⁶⁸⁹ an irony that induces the reader to think he might be self-deprecating. On the contrary, Bella’s lover, a young medical practitioner named Stafford, whom she meets in Italy, contradicts Parravicini’s diagnosis by firmly stating that the marks are no mosquito bites at all, and suspects that the man is actually bleeding Bella, who is growing weaker and weaker.⁶⁹⁰ It does not take long to Stafford to realise what is really happening, suspicions arising also because of the impressive physical aspect of Lady Ducayne, whom he sees all skinny and trembling yet still in good health, and with eyes like diamonds, so unnaturally bright that they appear even brighter in contrast with that decaying, wrinkled body; Parravicini looking at the woman with pride in his eyes is another clue that Stafford cannot ignore.⁶⁹¹ Bella’s symptoms include dreadful sensations that she recurrently perceives at night and that she identifies with hallucinations accompanied by a sense of suffocation:

A whirring of wheels that went round in her brain, a great noise like a whirlwind, but rhythmical like the ticking of a gigantic clock: and then in the midst of this uproar of winds and waves she seemed to sink into a gulf of unconsciousness, out of sleep into far deeper sleep – total extinction. And then, after that blank interval, there had come a sound of voices, and then again the whirr of wheels, louder and louder – and again the blank – and then she knew no more till morning, when she awoke, feeling languid and oppressed.⁶⁹²

⁶⁸⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 41.

⁶⁸⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 50.

⁶⁹⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 57.

⁶⁹¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 59.

⁶⁹²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 50.

The feelings are given by Parravicini's hand pressing on her mouth and nose with a chloroform-infused piece of fabric, and by the slow process of blood-draining that causes these kinds of visions in the mind of a weary person who is being drugged.

When eventually unmasked, Lady Ducayne admits that she was born the day Louis XVI was guillotined, which means January 21st, 1793, so she is more than a hundred years old. When threatened to have the story of her wickedness revealed if she took other girls for the experiments, assisted by Parravicini, Lady Ducayne releases Bella from her duties with a conspicuous cheque; moreover, rather hypocritically, she dismisses Parravicini's theories and admits that she does no longer believe in them, for they have been risky for her as much as for the girls. However, Lady Ducayne does not renounce her aspiration of prolonged life, affirming that she will find another doctor to keep her alive. The woman even asks Stafford if he has made some discovery in this regard, asking about hypnotism, electricity, or the transfusion of blood, but he replies that no medical procedure meant to unnaturally prolong human life is acceptable; also, he adds that the inappropriate administration of chloroform is a «practice so nefarious, so murderous, [which] must, if exposed, result in a sentence only less severe than the punishment of murder.»⁶⁹³

The figure of Lady Ducayne opposed to the young women whose companionship she seeks for their blood suggests the contrast between old age and youth and, therefore, sterility and productivity.⁶⁹⁴ The old woman's concerns about the good health of the girls she intends to feed upon is emblematic of this. She is desperate not only because she is at the end of her life and fears death, but because she is now incapable of carrying out the duties that her social context requires. Energy can come to her only through the blood of young and healthy victims, but their sacrifice also underlines a social envy towards those women who might be considered, if not for

⁶⁹³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 60.

⁶⁹⁴Saverio Tomaiuolo, *In Lady Audley's Shadow. Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Victorian Literary Genres* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2010), p. 63. Tomaiuolo discussed the presumed inferiority of women also from a physical perspective because of menstruation. He also quotes a passage from Edward Hammond Clarke's *Sex in Education* (1873), according to which women are functionally different from men for the same biological reason. See Edward Hammond Clarke, *Sex in Education; Or, A Fair Chance for Girls* (Boston, MA: James R. Osgood & Company, 1874).

their abilities of any sort, at least useful. Lady Ducayne as an old lady has no relevant social value in a context where women were already confined to specific sectors of the social sphere; their importance deriving from their ability to produce children and be at the service of their husband and family. Non-domesticated women tended to be represented negatively in literature, and Old Mrs Jones, Miss Tynan and Lady Ducayne, make no difference. Since they do not comply with the requirements of Victorian society, they become the antagonists.

Of the examples discussed here, however, the most villainous woman is undoubtedly Lady Ducayne. Her actions imply cruel scientific experimentation on unconscious and unaware patients. This has strong ethical implications in an age where pseudo-sciences were being developed: as previously noted, Lady Ducayne asks Stafford about hypnotism, electricity and blood transfusions. Hypnosis was ridiculed in the medical field when it began to be practiced in the nineteenth century, but it progressively became a respected discipline taught and performed in hospitals and universities by doctors who had risked ostracism to explore this field. Hypnotism, or animal magnetism, originated in the eighteenth century and was inspired by the studies of Mesmer (1734-1815), according to whom there is a kind of energy that passes through all living beings and connects them all. It is thus understandable why Lady Ducayne believed that hypnotism could help her live longer, for she thought that she could benefit from another creature's energetic field.

Similarly, electricity pervaded the Victorian Era thanks to the inventions that brought it to domestic and industrial use: Benjamin Franklin experimented with the Leyden Jar, a glass jar storing electric charge, and Alessandro Volta invented the Voltaic Pile. These experiments led to the production of several electric devices, more or less functional and functioning, which gave further impulse to consumerism and the relative mass production. Of course, electricity became also a pseudo-medical treatment starting with Luigi Galvani's experiments on dead frogs. The result of his tests, which saw the dead animals "react" when electrostatic discharges penetrated their bodies, led to theorise that the nervous system delivers electricity to the muscles.⁶⁹⁵ When electricity began to be used also in the medical field, a series of

⁶⁹⁵Experiments of this sort are amongst the sources of inspiration of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

electro-therapeutic inventions started to circulate, machines meant to restore vitality like Gabriel Davis's Graduated Medical Galvanic Machine (1874), the Matthews Brothers' Pocket Magneto Electric Machine (1870) and Dr John Ambrose Fleming's Medical Battery (1883).⁶⁹⁶ Many electrical devices were also produced and commercialised to be kept at home, including gymnastic apparatus and items meant to cure ailments like menstrual pain.

As for blood transfusions, they began in the first half of the seventeenth century as part of William Harvey's experimentations, thanks to which he discovered the circulatory system. Over the following centuries, blood transfusions continued to be practiced, first from animal to human and in the nineteenth century from human donors, in the conviction that they were a remedy to various illnesses, like haemorrhages and humoral imbalance. However, the risks were elevated, as it was likely to mix the wrong blood types or to transfuse the contaminated blood of ill people, with frequent tragic consequences. Yet, the symbolism of blood as a source of life and vitality still pervaded the imagery of the Victorian Era, so that the balance between risks and benefits always tended to be in favour of the procedure.⁶⁹⁷

Braddon was thus inspired by the medical discourse of the time; she made Lady Ducayne wonder about the effective advantages they could bring. Selfishly, in her eagerness to obtain results, she does not ponder the possible consequences: the death of the girls who are drained of their blood and, being uninformed about it, lack the chance to refuse and restore their health. The unethical medical conduct of Parravicini, who is undoubtedly without scruples, prevents him from supplying the girls with new blood: in this case he does consider the risks, for mixing the 'pure' blood of the young ladies with a possibly polluted fluid might have jeopardised his experiments. The other physician, Stafford, is greatly interested in the ethical implications of Parravicini's experimentation and forbids him to continue, threatening to divulge the abominable moral conduct of the culprits. Stafford's attitude mirrors another side of the debates that rose in the nineteenth century, namely the ethical discussions about

⁶⁹⁶See at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

⁶⁹⁷It was not until 1901 that blood types were discovered by Karl Landsteiner, who identified the ABO blood types; he was given the Nobel Prize in 1930 for his discovery.

the rights of humans, and animals too, with more and more people condemning unethical experimentation like vivisection.⁶⁹⁸ The metaphor of the bird of prey that characterises Lady Ducayne's descriptions, a comparison reinforced by the claw-like hands of the old hag, reminds of the «harpy fingers»⁶⁹⁹ of the agency woman Bella had asked for a job before being employed by Lady Ducayne and who did not want to relinquish her coins; other similarly described hands recur in Margaret Oliphant's 'The Library Window' and in Charlotte Riddell's 'Old Mrs Jones'.

In Oliphant's story, one of the guests of the protagonist's aunt, who frequently invites her friends over to her drawing-room for tea parties, is old Lady Carnbee. Oliphant's description of her echoes the figure of the fairy-tale witch, an image also enhanced by the magical aura that the authoress confers to her tale. At a certain point in the story, the old woman interrupts the girl's reveries before the library window and states: «I've wakened you to life and broke the spell»,⁷⁰⁰ as if to wake her up from a curse, laughing sinisterly. The narrator is so scared by the woman that she cries convinced that the old hag is a witch; to this, Aunt Mary replies that she might have been one once but gives no specific answer, which increases her niece's state of anxiety.⁷⁰¹ The "library window" girl describes Lady Carnbee as follows:

Lady Carnbee's lace was the chief thing about her – heavy black Spanish lace with large flowers. Everything she wore was trimmed with it. A large veil of it hung over her bonnet. But her hand coming out of this heavy lace was a curious thing to see. She had very long fingers, very taper, which had been much admired in her youth; and her hand was very white, or rather more than white, pale, bleached, and bloodless, with large blue veins standing up upon the back; and she wore some fine rings, among others a big diamond in an ugly old claw setting [...] The hand which seemed to come almost to a point, with

⁶⁹⁸See Lisieux M. Huelman, «Medical Ethics in Victorian Fiction», *Literature Compass* 10 (2013), pp 814–821.

⁶⁹⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 38. The elusive phantom in Braddon's 'The Ghost's Name' has red-hot claws that seem to burn the skin of the victim that they touch. Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 373.

⁷⁰⁰Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, p. 203.

⁷⁰¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 48. Lady Ducayne too is called a witch by the Parson, whom Bella overhears saying that the girls who work for her eventually die.

this strange ornament underneath, clutched at my half-terrified imagination. It too seemed to mean far more than was said. I felt as if it might clutch me with sharp claws, and the lurking, dazzling creature bite – with a sting that would go to the heart.⁷⁰²

Lady Carnbee is presented like Lady Ducayne, half witch, half vampire: she is as pale as if she had been drained of her life blood, a feature that she also has in common with Mrs Graham, and she gives the impression of being ready to attack and bite her any moment. It is the claw-like hand, however, that absorbs the girl's attention, with its ring framed in a claw-like structure in turn, a harpy ready to snatch her victim and kill. The reader has the impression that the ring might be connected with the old woman's survival, as if it were a source of power or of protection. The ensemble of the figure enraptures the imagination of the protagonist, as she continues:

She was like a figure in a picture, with her pale face the colour of ashes, and the big pattern of the Spanish lace hanging half over it; and her hand held up, with the big diamond blazing at me from the inside of her uplifted palm. It was held up in surprise, but it looked as if it were raised in malediction; and the diamond threw out darts of light and glared and twinkled at me.⁷⁰³

On another occasion, Lady Carnbee touches the girl who feels a cold touch, like something not living, and she perceives a sting on the neck caused by the diamond mounted on the ring.⁷⁰⁴ Like Lady Ducayne, Lady Carnbee appears to be afflicted by the same kind of envy towards the younger lady, still in the prime of life; in fact, she seems to gain pleasure from mortifying her fancies about the library window (which will result in her obsession towards the ghost of the scholar), as if to suppress her vital impulses.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰²Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, pp. 197-198.

⁷⁰³Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, p. 203.

⁷⁰⁴Oliphant, *"The Open Door" and Other Stories*, p. 213.

⁷⁰⁵The same feeling is identifiable in Braddon's 'The Little Woman in Black', where the stalker of Sarah, the former lover of her husband, is persecuted by the deceived woman apparently out of jealousy, but all the woman wants is to be an active part of society and play a role, despite no longer being young and already married. In a letter to Sarah, the Woman in Black confesses that her greatest sadness comes

Riddell's 'Old Mrs Jones' is the only vampire / witch-like character to be dead. She is described as having «eyes like black beads, and the face the colour of mahogany»,⁷⁰⁶ so she has black eyes like Lady Ducayne but her skin is dark, suggesting that she might not have been British. Cousin Luce, who has repeated encounters with this demanding ghost, is particularly captivated by her hands ready to clutch at her like claws.⁷⁰⁷ The Tippens children see Mrs Jones too, with eyes as black as a doll's and with a skin as dark as that of a man in a turban whom they had seen time before; this further reference to her skin colour, as also her name, Zillah,⁷⁰⁸ Hebrew for "shade", alludes to Mrs Jones's foreign provenance and announces her fate as a ghost lingering in the shadows.⁷⁰⁹ In physiognomy, dark features like hair, skin colour and eyes are generally attributed to criminals, with enormous racial implications.⁷¹⁰ Furthermore, the greedy Miss Tynan of Riddell's 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk' is equally characterised by a hooked nose and fingers like talons,⁷¹¹ claw-like,⁷¹² with which she holds grip of her gold.

from the deprivation of social participation. Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 238.

⁷⁰⁶Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 137.

⁷⁰⁷Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 141.

⁷⁰⁸This name first appears in the Old Testament, where Zillah was the second wife of Lamech, and together with his first wife Adah, they gave birth to the seventh generation of naturally born humans after Cain, ancestors of the Israelites. Her and her co-wife's children are said to have created the civilised arts and to have begun human civilisation, which is thus not God's gift but the result of human intellect.

⁷⁰⁹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 142-143.

⁷¹⁰See Lombroso-Ferrero, *Criminal Man*, Sizer, *Heads and Faces and How to Study Them*, Arthur McDonald, *Man and Abnormal Man, including a Study of Children, in Connection with Bills to Establish Laboratories Under Federal and State Governments for the Study of the Criminal, Pauper and Defective Classes, with Bibliographies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905), George Combe, *System of Phrenology, Vol. II* (Edinburgh: Maclachan, Stewart and Co., 1843) and *Elements of Phrenology. From the Fifth Edinburgh and Enlarged Edition with Illustrations* (New York City, NY: William H. Colyer; Boston, MA: Lewis and Sampson, 1845), and Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, *Outlines of Phrenology* (Boston, MA: Marsh, Capen and Lyon, and Concord, N. H., 1834).

⁷¹¹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 105.

⁷¹²Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 108.

Old Mrs Jones and Miss Tynan, like the agent who demands Bella's coins in 'Good Lady Ducayne', all suggest a different kind of reading, of an economic nature. These three women, two ghosts and one living person, are associated with one another by their thirst for wealth and the mission to preserve it intact. Tomaiuolo also included Lady Ducayne in this type of perspective, stating that

In Braddon's short story, Ducayne's vampirism is justified not only by her desire to prolong her life and health, but also to continue – through the physical regeneration guaranteed by blood transfusions – to enjoy the pleasures of wealth and money. In other words, Lady Ducayne 'capitalises' the young girl's youth and health in order to fight against the consequences of her 'climacteric' stagnation.⁷¹³

If Lady Ducayne intends to continue living for the sake of wealth, Old Mrs Jones and Miss Tynan both died because of their money, and what their riches represented in the misogynist social context around them. They certainly were greedy, and the claw-like hands of their spirit form are the punishment or the symbol of the sins of avarice that they had committed in life, sharp fingers ready to grasp a coin or a jewel. Bann discussed the metaphor of spectral hands as symbols of «the working of an economic unconscious» according to which the general good is achieved through the agency of individuals driven by greed and selfish purposes.⁷¹⁴

Spectrality and wealth are often combined in Victorian popular fiction, which is particularly true as regards Charlotte Riddell, whose short stories have often been interpreted from an economic perspective. Bann analysed in particular 'Old Mrs Jones', arguing that her claw-like hands identify her as an «active malicious figure»,⁷¹⁵ whose spurs try to hold on to gold in the «the troublingly unreliable world of nineteenth-century finance.»⁷¹⁶ Bissell considered the instability of the Victorian financial market and Riddell's own biography to discuss «the perilous nature of

⁷¹³Tomaiuolo, *In Lady Audley's Shadow*, p. 64.

⁷¹⁴Jennifer Bann, «Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency: The Changing Figure of the Nineteenth-Century Specter», *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 4 (Summer 2009), p. 672.

⁷¹⁵Bann, «Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency», p. 674.

⁷¹⁶Bissell, «Spectral Economics and the Horror of Risk in Charlotte Riddell's Ghost Stories», p. 73.

nineteenth-century economics, particularly for women.»⁷¹⁷ Tomaiuolo went further in this discussion by extending the economic point of view to the Empire. He observed that both ‘Good Lady Ducayne’ and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* express fears of counter-colonization at a critical moment for the management of the vast British colonial territories. Braddon’s tale acquires a racial connotation if we consider Lady Ducayne’s dark features, which were typically associated to the Jews. Riddell’s Old Mrs Jones has these dark features in common with Braddon’s character, with the addition of her Hebrew name. Furthermore, as Lady Ducayne keeps wandering in search of maidens for her transfusions, she is as unarresting as the mythical figure of the Wandering Jew;⁷¹⁸ seemingly, Old Mrs Jones roams in a state in between life and death that collocates her in no specific place. Following this line of thinking, the figure of the Jew becomes associated with the monstrous vampire and the supernatural ghost, figures that further connote the Jews negatively. This conveyed an anti-Semitic view and worsened the anxiety of an invasion coming from the far eastern territories of Europe and the Empire at the end of the century, an undesired contamination.⁷¹⁹

3.1.2 The Disabled Body

As Hingston wrote,

Just as sensation fiction supposedly produced physical sensations in the reader, so bodily instability was the genre’s structure and thematic loadstone. Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1859-60), the novel that spurred the trend of sensation fiction, manifests its bodily focus in the extreme [...] Most memorably, when narrator Walter Hartright feels every drop of blood in [his] body... brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on [his] shoulder, the first person narration and focalization encourage readers to share the thrill of that touch. Certainly, Margaret Oliphant felt this way, so her

⁷¹⁷Bissel, «Spectral Economics and the Horror of Risk in Charlotte Riddell’s Ghost Stories», p. 74.

⁷¹⁸Tomaiuolo, *In Lady Audley’s Shadow*, p. 69.

⁷¹⁹See Ailise Bulfin, *Gothic Invasions. Imperialism, War and Fin-de-Siècle Popular Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018).

review states that few readers will be able to resist the mysterious thrill of this sudden touch.⁷²⁰

Gothic fiction is closely related to representations of the body's fragility and lack of integrity, in connection with the psychological, the physiological and the social. Pseudo-sciences like mesmerism contributed on one side to the improvement of disciplines meant to ameliorate human life but, at the same time, they increased the anxiety related to bodily identity.⁷²¹ Bodily fragility becomes strictly related to identity uncertainty: instable bodies like ghosts, which lack a solid form, remind of impaired bodies in that, by showing physical weakness, they raise concerns regarding interiority and identity. Therefore, Gothic stories proved to be the perfect site to explore questions of the self and the mind.

Victorian fiction had a particular focus on disability, as testified to by the works of various authors, like Dickens and Collins. Dickens used pain to construct both his novels' narrative structures and the characters involved in them; his heroines in particular «come into being through illness, scarring, and deformity.»⁷²² As for Collins, «representations of abnormality in *The Moonstone* become the location of a

⁷²⁰Kylee-Anne Hingston, *Articulating Bodies. The Narrative Form of Disability and Illness in Victorian Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), p. 78.

⁷²¹Hingston, *Articulating Bodies*, p. 80.

⁷²²Helena Michie, «"Who Is This in Pain?": Scarring, Disfigurement, and Female Identity in "Bleak House" and "Our Mutual Friend"», *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 22, no. 2 (Winter, 1989), p. 199. If we think of a disabled character drawn by Dickens, the first one to occur to our mind is Tiny Tim from *A Christmas Carol* (1843): the reader's response changes according to our own identification or not with the character and his physical limitations as Stoddard Holmes stated, so a complex may be roused «of surprise, sadness, curiosity, longing, irritation, uncertainty, shame, boredom, identification, excitement, worry, fascination, love, collegiality, or any number of other feelings beyond the simple tonics of pity, laughter, terror, or anger. Tim's own feelings, as drawn by Dickens, are also conveniently limited. The conviviality of his feeble hurrah, his famous "God bless us, every one," are much more memorable than his quiet distaste for the toast Bob offers to Scrooge, the "founder of the feast.» Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010), p. 2.

disabled perspective on the workings of Victorian cultural practice»;⁷²³ Collins exploited abnormality throughout his production, starting with *The Moonstone*, in opposition to “normally abled” bodies to potentially criticise «those modern practices (and resulting cultural forms) which in their origin intend to define, designate, medicalize, control, and exclude the body that is physically and cognitively different.»⁷²⁴ When the disabled body is feminine, questions regarding the social impairment of women, metaphorically represented through physical limitations, are inevitable. Stoddard Holmes argued that Victorian popular fiction tended to «eliminate the desiring, emotionally excessive disabled woman, or rehabilitate her into a properly feeling woman.»⁷²⁵

Developments in the pseudo-scientific discourse about the body and disability were mediated by physiognomy and phrenology, which of course involved the question of the relationship between body and mind. Mary Elizabeth Braddon considered this relationship as “nature”, and Hingston asserted that she associated malfunctioning bodies with deviant behaviours, but hardly ever applying the same method to her heroines.⁷²⁶ Talairach-Vielmas discussed Braddon’s portrait of the feminine body in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, arguing that, similarly to what happens in Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852),⁷²⁷ the plot revolves around a woman who embodies the perfect lady and whose physical traits do not betray signs of criminality, thus defying physiognomic rules. However, the heroine’s character develops throughout the text and is shown to reshape itself as society changes because of the cultural revolution that London, the setting, is undergoing, from technological improvements to mass culture and mass production, a modern rhythm of life that exhausts the mind and has consequences on a psychological level, leading to nervous excitement.⁷²⁸

⁷²³Mossman, «Representations of the Abnormal Body in "The Moonstone"», p. 483.

⁷²⁴Mossman, «Representations of the Abnormal Body in "The Moonstone"», p. 483.

⁷²⁵Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 7.

⁷²⁶Hingston, *Articulating Bodies*, p. 85.

⁷²⁷Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Nicola Bradbury (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

⁷²⁸Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2016), p. 90.

Braddon's production is populated by physically or sensory impaired characters since the beginning. In *The Trail of the Serpent* (1860),⁷²⁹ Joseph Peters is a mute man whose disability is not presented as a cause of isolation, on the contrary, the man is professionally engaged and autonomous. Her later works include romantic relationships between disabled characters and normative ones, as in *The Lady's Mile* (1888) and *One Thing Needful* (1885).⁷³⁰ Similarly, Braddon's short fiction encompasses a variety of female characters, amongst which disabled bodies are included.

The story 'Herself' has already been discussed and its protagonist, Violetta Hammond, presented. Lota, as her friends call her, is a disabled figure in that she is ill, she suffers from a form of pulmonary ailment which affects her quality of life. As she moves to Italy, certain that the change in climate and environment will help her, she slowly dies at the hands of a mysterious force from the past. Her grandfather, the owner of the Ligurian villa where Violetta perishes, had undergone the same unfortunate path, becoming broken, wasted and with shattered nerves.⁷³¹

It could be possible to read in Lota's vicissitudes a similar burn-out as that observed by Talairach-Vielmas in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Lota is physically debilitated by the draining environment of London, in poor health maybe because of the city's pollution, or maybe because of a congenital issue, so that she seeks a place where to decompress and, hopefully heal. She specifically highlights the "lonely" character of the house in Taggia, meaning that she wants peace out of the chaos of urban areas, though her relocation will prove disastrous.

Moreover, even though the Italian doctor consulted by Helen tells her that various people have faded and died in the house, there is a constant reminding of Lota's grandfather throughout the tale. Both the lawyer and the Italian physician are unable to properly explain why the man, old and yet still robust, died in a small lapse of time

⁷²⁹Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Trail of the Serpent* (London: Ward, Lock and Tyler, 1866).

⁷³⁰See Heidi Logan, *Sensational Deviance: Disability in Nineteenth-Century Sensation Fiction* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2019). See also Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Lady's Mile* (London: Ward, Lock and Tyler, 1866) and *One Thing Needful* (Liepzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1866).

⁷³¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 306.

since his arrival. Helen finds the grandfather's diary where he reported his experiences in the back of the villa, the former monkish infirmary, which seems to exert a negative influence on the people who visit it. The man admits that the solitary life that he was leading at Orange Grove was responsible for his state, and that he has therefore begun to see ghosts. The passage suggests that estrangement from society causes a state of mental imbalance. Mr Hammond sees his own image in the dreaded mirror that returns the face of a man slowly dying, to the point of appearing as an invalid on a wheelchair with hollow cheeks, haggard eyes and the loose under-lip drooping weakly.⁷³² The old man alternated moments of lucidity, «outdoor exercise and change of scene - to restore the balance of my brain»,⁷³³ to moments of obnubilation. He is conscious of the state that he has fallen into, but he blames hypochondria for his delusions, for he believes that he is having visions:

The thing was strange – for I had been troubled by no apprehensions of illness or premature old age. I had never even thought of myself as an old man. In the pride bred of long immunity from illness I had considered myself exempt from the ailments that are wont to attend declining years. I had pictured myself living to the extremity of human life, and dropping peacefully into the centenarian's grave.⁷³⁴

The excesses of emotions of Lota's grandfather betray a certain fear of death that has possibly corroded his mind. In the solitude of Orange Grove, with nobody with whom to engage in debates, he feels weakened, the lack of intellectual stimuli makes his brain wither. The result is a form of male mental instability that comprises hypochondria, obsession, nervous breakdown. The premature death of Lota's grandfather seems inexplicable from a medical perspective and defies his conviction of being an invincible human being, untouchable by disease. At the same time, his granddaughter meets the same fate, and one could wonder whether it is Mr Hammond's own blood to be responsible for the girl's poor health, caused by heredity.

⁷³²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 334.

⁷³³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 334.

⁷³⁴Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 334.

It is a month since I wrote this book – a month which has realised all that the Venetian glass showed me when I began to read its secret. I am a helpless old man, carried about in an invalid chair. Gone my pleasant prospect of long tranquil years; gone my selfish scheme of enjoyment, the fruition of a life of money-getting.⁷³⁵

The grandfather's life was marked by wealth, with the egoistic perspective of enjoying his riches alone (Lota had not been invited to join her grandfather in Italy), struggling to follow the economic rules of gaining. The strong commitment to gain and the encounters with other fellow middle-class "intellectuals" were the man's oxygen, of which he was deprived in Italy, having now fallen into a pit of silence and solitude. The movement from one extreme to the other threw the man's stability off balance.

The spectre of hereditariness looms over the characters, both facing the same process of physical and psychological decay. Violetta is not committed to any economic strife for wealth simply because, as a woman, she is forbidden to have a role or any ambition in society, but she is self-conscious and self-assertive, traits enhanced by the wealth that her grandfather left her. Not even her lawyer, a middle-class man, is worthy of being listened to when he contradicts her desire to move to Italy, and she mocks the doctor who continuously remarks on her weak chest.

The passage from an idea of superiority that both grandfather and grandchild seem to possess to the realisation that they need the support of others to live a dignified life, to be listened to, to be taken care of breaks them both. Violetta and her grandfather both suffer a violent nervous breakdown that progressively makes them wither intellectually, as shown by the diary of the old man, a regression matched by the somatisation of the internal struggle:

I see her now a haggard, anxious-looking woman, the signs of worry written too plainly on the wan pinched face, the lovely eyes larger but paler than of old, and the markings of nervous depression visible in the droop of the lips that had once been like Cupid's bow.⁷³⁶

⁷³⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 336.

⁷³⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 313.

Another representation of physical disability appears in Braddon's 'Dorothy's Rival' (1867), a narrative fully structured on the opposition between the beautiful, abled body and the deformed, disabled body of two different girls. The story revolves around Dorothy Bolton, the beautiful daughter of a country parson, the epitome of the perfect child and woman. Her physical transformation after puberty has become visible and has made her particularly attractive, but Dorothy is so pious and modest that she does not realise the power she has. The sexual potential of their daughter scares the parson and his wife, who have educated Dorothy at the sound of

'Handsome is who handsome does', said Dorothy's mother; and the girl felt as if her good looks were in some manner dependent on the neatness of her stitching and the lighting of her last batch of bread.⁷³⁷

Dorothy grows up to be the perfect angel in the house, believing that her beauty is what makes her worthy of being chosen as a wife; paradoxically, despite pretending not to see the physical changes of the girls, the Boltons enhance her sexuality and her presumed reproductive ability as if she was to be sold to the best suitor. Dorothy's beauty becomes the coin for an exchange, and she the "victim" of morally debased parents who hide behind the mask of religion. In fact, the whole tale plays on the contrast between purity of soul and lack of morality, and it is often the devotees who are on the side of ill judgement. She alternated readings such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) to numbers of *The Rambler*, Johnson's magazine issued from 1750 to 1752, which also allows the reader to temporally situate the story, dealing with various themes such as literature, politics, and religion, to *Religious Courtship*; this suggests that Dorothy is torn between her own free spirit that she is discovering while growing and her family's precepts.

Dorothy's father is assisted by Matthew Wall, a young clergyman presented as «very worthy and [an] efficient member of the Church.»⁷³⁸ One night he is invited by Bolton at his house for dinner; there he meets Dorothy, whose piety strikes him and he asks for her hand. Of course, her parents are not happy with this proposal because Matthew

⁷³⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 103.

⁷³⁸Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 103.

is not wealthy, and they had established that their daughter was worth more money than he could grant, but eventually the Vicar decides to accept. When asked about Matthew, Dorothy reddens in embarrassment and must be questioned several times before answering that she loves the curate, while letting out liberating tears. The wedding does not take place for three years, and in the meantime, Matthew has become a more powerful personality in the town of Hammersley, to the point that he has created a fracture between “Wallites” and “anti-Wallites”; amongst the latter is a family of grocers and cheesemongers, the Jorboys, whose daughters are deemed to be beauties. The Jorboys love to appear superior to the rest of Hammersley, displaying frocks the father brings back from London when trading there: envy and rancour are a strong motor of action, and the Jorboys resent that Matthew has ignored their daughters in favour of not-fashionable Dorothy. The community of false pious worshippers engages in gossip, prompted by the Jorboys, and rumours start to circulate that Matthew Wall has a lover hidden somewhere. Mrs Bolton herself believes those voices: the rumours have more power on her than faith in her future son-in-law. The mother undergoes a true physical transformation when one night Matthew is late home; she turns demon-like with red cheeks and the tone of her voice acquires an unfamiliar sound; she accuses Matthew of being a hypocrite and sinner, clearly blinded and incapable of realising her own hypocrisy.⁷³⁹

On his part, Matthew does not deny that he has been meeting someone at the cottage of a woman known as Jane Gurd, but is comprehensibly upset by the accusations, which cause a change in his countenance too: «I did not think Hammersley folks were so wicked as to impute evil to a man who, when most unworthy, is at least urgent in his duty.»⁷⁴⁰ His dutiful work as parson, however, was not enough to earn the trust of these people. Mrs Bolton declares to be ashamed of having allowed him so near her daughter, but Dorothy has for once a twitch of rebellion against her mother, and she physically moves away from her to signal her distance from her parent’s position. Her eyes stare flamingly at the woman, a sign that she has a fire burning inside that had not been unleashed yet: Dorothy is not just pious, but she is wise, as Matthew recognises,

⁷³⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 110.

⁷⁴⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 111.

and intends to let it out.⁷⁴¹ Matthew's firmness in admitting that there is another woman, but that he is not guilty of infidelity, eventually shakes Mrs Bolton, who is moved by his argument about «charity that thinketh no evil»⁷⁴² and, consequently, starts to doubt herself as a good Christian. The family is led to the cottage to meet Matthew's presumed lover only to find Betty, a girl to whom Matthew had given shelter and care after a life of mistreatments.

Such a girl! If this was Matthew Wall's fancy, it was a passing strange caprice. The girl was the ugliest specimen of womankind on which Mrs Bolton had ever looked. There was indeed something more than common ugliness in the dull vacant face, the heavy lower jaw, the low narrow forehead, scant sandy hair, and thick, set lumpish figure.⁷⁴³

The deformed girl, presented from Mrs Bolton's point of view, whose perspective guides the scene, is described as a monster, a «clumsy peasant girl» more immobile than stone.⁷⁴⁴ The reason why the girl did not move when the group entered her room is that she is both blind and deaf, and she cannot speak but the few words Matthew had taught her. Mrs Bolton seems incapable of recognising the humanity in the girl, first she calls her a monster and then "creature" when Mrs Gurd informs her of Betty's physical and cognitive limitations. The woman cannot see Betty as a person because the girl cannot be productive in the social sphere, namely she cannot marry and have children and perform any familiar duties, unlike her own daughter who is not marked by disability. Braddon relies on emotional excess here to mark Betty as socially unfit, erotically unattractive but a catalyst for pathos: she is like a trapped animal that needs caring because unable to survive on its own, but she cannot be associated with human beings.

Nevertheless, if Mrs Bolton used to feel ashamed because Matthew was presumably damaging her family's good name, she now redirects that shame towards herself, because she finally realises that her son-in-law's words about her distorted Christianity

⁷⁴¹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 112.

⁷⁴²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 115.

⁷⁴³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 116.

⁷⁴⁴Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 116.

were true. She thus asks for Matthew's forgiveness, now that she has seen that he is truly charitable and pure in his heart.

Not only Matthew has a good heart, but he raises an essential question as regards the development of specific abilities of disabled people, especially those with severe cognitive and physical deficits. In fact, he explains how Betty is now able to speak a few words taught to her with kindness and patience by him, how she can use signs to communicate her needs, how she has learnt to make baskets and rush mats. Matthew proved that disabled people can learn and improve if their strong points are correctly identified and trained to make these individuals as autonomous as possible. Thus, poor Betty gives her own contribution to society, as the acts that she performs bring benefits to the people who use the items that she makes. Once this is revealed to Mrs Bolton, she starts to look at Betty under a different light: she notices that, when Matthew approaches her, she recognises him and her face changes and she becomes «a creature with a soul»,⁷⁴⁵ but still not entirely human. She recurrently remarks upon Betty's sightless face, upon her dumbness and mindlessness; she refers to her as a «lump of ill-used humanity»,⁷⁴⁶ as if she had tried to be born a human but something went wrong in the process. Even when Betty speaks the word "parson", according to Matthew's input, she is startled by the disagreeable sounds that come out of her mouth rather than being impressed by Betty's effort. Before exiting the room, Mrs Bolton gives a seven-shilling offering for the poor soul as she would do in church, following up her faulty piety: we would say that she does not entirely practice what she preaches.

An example of perfectly autonomous disabled character appears in Marryat's 'Lost in the Marshes', whose protagonist is the blind peasant girl Lizzie Lock. Despite her blindness, she can walk alone and carry items while walking, she can even recognise the tract of land where the marshes begin and stop before endangering herself. Lizzie belongs to the working class, but she is a refined girl despite her social status, having the traits of the angel woman, soft brown hair, fair skin and delicate features, blue eyes with long lashes, not tarnished by work due to her blindness.⁷⁴⁷ Her eyes are her great

⁷⁴⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 117.

⁷⁴⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 117.

⁷⁴⁷Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 285.

limit not only because she cannot see, but because she is described as a burning soul whose view of the world is blocked by her “windows” being irremediably shut.

The metaphor of the eyes as windows fits in the panorama of Victorian pseudo-scientific discourses. In his *Letters on Natural Magic* (1868), the Scottish philosopher David Brewster remembered his correspondence with Sir Walter Scott about, among various themes, optical illusions; according to him, the account of

The different sources of illusion to which the eye is subject is not only useful as indicating the probable cause of any individual deception, but it has a special importance in preparing the mind for understanding those more vivid and permanent spectral illusions to which some individuals have been either occasionally or habitually subject.⁷⁴⁸

In Letter II, Brewster wrote that

Of all the organs by which we acquire a knowledge of external nature, the eye is the most remarkable and the most important. By our other senses the information we obtain is comparatively limited. The touch and the taste extend no farther than the surface of our own bodies. The sense of smell is exercised within a very narrow sphere, and that of recognizing sounds is limited to the distance at which we hear the bursting of a meteor and the crash of a thunderbolt. But the eye enjoys a boundless range of observation. It takes cognizance not only of other worlds belonging to the solar system, but of other systems of worlds infinitely removed into the immensity of space; and when aided by the telescope, the invention of human wisdom, it is able to discover the forms, the phenomena, and the movements of bodies whose distance is as inexpressible in language as it is inconceivable in thought.⁷⁴⁹

In short, the eye is a portal between the world of the living and the supernatural world.⁷⁵⁰ Lizzie’s senses have sharpened to obviate the lack of sight, but Miss Rosa,

⁷⁴⁸David Brewster, Sir, *Letters on Natural Magic Addressed to Sir Walter Scott* (New York City, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1835), Letter III, p. 43.

⁷⁴⁹Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic*, Letter II, p. 19.

⁷⁵⁰For more information on the importance of sight in Victorian literature and science see also Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992). See also Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy*, Kontou and Wilburn,

her antagonist in the story, does not understand how she can walk by the marshes without being able to see where she goes, «why aren't *you* swallowed up?»⁷⁵¹ Rosa stresses Lizzie's disability with that pronoun, meant to highlight her confusion as to why able-bodied people cannot survive the marshes while she, who lacks a fundamental sense, can. Lizzie does not feel diminished by Rosa's words, for she has learnt to cope with her limitations and has adjusted her habits and personality to her blindness:

I know my way, miss, and I know the tread of it too. I can tell when the soil yields more than it should at low tide that I'm nearing a quicksand. When The Almighty takes away one sense He sharpens the others to make up for it. But the sands are full of danger; some of them are shifting too, and you can never tell if they're firm today whether they won't be loose tomorrow. Do take heed, Miss Rosa, and never you ride beyond Corston Point without one of the young gentlemen to take care of you.⁷⁵²

This is a strong assertion of identity on the part of Lizzie, who recognises herself as superior, at least when it comes to the knowledge of the territory, with respect to Rosa. Lizzie explains how she can circulate without help, able to look after herself, despite being blind, while Rosa needs gentlemen to ride the marshes area for, otherwise, she would risk being engulfed by the quicksand. Rosa is represented here as the damsel in distress of the fairy tales who needs the support of her knight to be saved, while blind Lizzie is independent and the guardian of herself. Instead of undermining Lizzie's self-confidence, her blindness becomes the tool through which she builds her own identity, her strength and her uniqueness. Moreover, both Rosa and Lizzie are characters with

The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-century Spiritualism and the Occult, and Srdjan Smajic, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives and Spiritualists. Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For a different nineteenth-century perspective see also Robert Buchanan, *The Origin and Nature of Ghosts, Demons, and Spectral Illusions Generally, Fully and Familiarly Explained and Illustrated* (Manchester: Heywood, 1840), and Catherine Crowe, *The Nightside of Nature* (London: Newby, 1848).

⁷⁵¹Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 288.

⁷⁵²Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 288.

erotic charge: Rosa is beautiful and overtly sexualised, yet controlled by her father and brothers who intend to “desexualise” her in order to give her in marriage to the richest man possible. More openly than in the case of Braddon’s Dorothy, Rosa is currency of exchange to her middle-class family aspiring to prestige. On the other hand, Lizzie is modest and more prudish than Rosa, but she is in love with her cousin Larry and thinks of ways to ameliorate her physical appearance to be attractive for him:

She had a print dress nice and clean for the occasion, and her aunt would plait her hair neatly for her, and she should hear the sound of Larry’s voice as he talked to his companions, and of his feet whilst he was dancing, and, perhaps, after supper one of his famous old English songs.⁷⁵³

When Larry asks Lizzie to marry him, she reacts by underlining her blindness and the uselessness derived by her disability:

‘But I am so useless. I get about so slowly. If anything was to happen to aunt, how could I keep the house clean and cook the dinners, Larry? You must think a bit more before you decide for good.’ But the poor child’s face was burning with excitement the while, and her sightless eyes were thrown upwards to her cousin’s face as though she would strain through the darkness to see it.⁷⁵⁴

Lizzie is clearly eager to marry her loved one, her self-pity is only an innocent strategy to have Larry answer positively to her plea of pondering a bit longer. Her cousin represents her ideal of love, which is different from Rosa’s and the other girls whom she had met during her lifetime: Lizzie’s blindness does not allow her to see the physicality of Larry, so that she can concentrate only on the feelings that he inspires. This idealism derives from her analysis of her inner self conducted during years of solitude, having been excluded from social life due to her blindness. This has made Lizzie very self-conscious of who she is and what she wants, a strong personality shaped around a disability that has not been seen by Lizzie and her family as a limit.

⁷⁵³Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 294.

⁷⁵⁴Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 298.

Larry himself is not concerned at all about having a blind wife, on the contrary, he thinks her perfectly capable to perform her duties.

As in her novels, in this tale Braddon uses blindness as a means to develop the character's personality: Lizzie becomes self-conscious and her identity is well defined thanks to her blindness, which becomes her gateway to explore her consciousness and soul. Following the metaphor of the eyes as windows, if her blind sight does not allow her to see the world she can at least be witness to her own growth, carried out by circumventing the obstacles of her physical impairment.

3.1.3 The Irish⁷⁵⁵

In discussing Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848),⁷⁵⁶ Harner reported phrases from the trial of Jem Wilson, accused of the murder of Harry Carson, where the speakers discuss whether signs of criminal behaviour are detectable in the facial features of the presumed culprit, drawing from the theories of phrenology and physiognomy. Starting with Lombroso, the discourses over the inborn predisposition to criminality led to strategically turn the emphasis towards race, adding racial implications to the analysis of the criminal mind and body.⁷⁵⁷ As Wester wrote, race has always been a «haunting discourse» in Gothic literature, racial minorities representing useful expedients to comment on themes such as civilisation, enlightenment, freedom, and human nature.⁷⁵⁸ Wester also considered the fact that minority authors use the Gothic, in turn, to reflect on their state as discriminated people, thus widening discourses on racial oppression.⁷⁵⁹ The Irish people are an essential part of any discourse about the British and their treatment of racial minorities. In the

⁷⁵⁵See Bruce Nelson, *Irish Nationalists and the Making of the Irish Race* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁷⁵⁶Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, ed. Shirley Foster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁷⁵⁷Christie Harner, «Physiognomic Discourse and the Trials of Cross-Class Sympathy in “Mary Barton”», *Victorian Literature and Culture* 43, no. 4 (2015), p. 705. She also specified that Gaskell was not a proponent of characterological science but was familiar with it.

⁷⁵⁸Maisha Wester, *The Gothic in and as Race Theory*, in *The Gothic and Theory. An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle and Robert Miles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), p. 53.

⁷⁵⁹See Wester, *The Gothic in and as Race Theory*.

nineteenth century, the Irish officially became part of the Union with their own representatives in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, although there still existed a huge imbalance between the two countries in terms of wealth and technological advancement, a comparison from which Britain emerged victorious against underdeveloped Ireland.

The Irish still relied on potatoes as their main source of sustenance by the mid-century, and they lived in an overall state of deprivation and misery. The fault of this miserable condition was attributed to the Irish themselves and to what was believed to be their peculiarity, indolence. Irish people were accused of little industriousness and laziness, prejudices that were transformed into characteristics of the Celtic race as opposed to the energetic, independent, and keen Saxon race. The races were even “gendered” from the British perspective, which saw the Saxons as members of a masculine race that was capable of reason and self-control, against the effeminate Celts, too sentimental and unreasonable, like women. Such uncontrollable characteristics made the Irish dangerous, because when some inner impulse cannot be tamed it can easily turn into violence. The Irish people were also frequently accused of alcoholism,⁷⁶⁰ which contributed to intensify the belief in their dangerousness. The Great Famine, following the potato blight started in 1845,⁷⁶¹ exacerbated this situation because the suffering experienced by the Irish led to outbreaks of riots when much needed help from the British would have been appreciated, but was not granted, at least not enough for a recovery. The result was that they were labelled as uncivilised people even by their own Queen, Victoria. So, in the second half of the nineteenth century the Irish began to be associated with the American natives, all branded as savages, and to be represented as monkeys or ape-like creatures on magazines and vignettes, clearly marking them as belonging to the lowest steps of Darwin’s evolutionary ladder.

⁷⁶⁰Roger Swift, «Heroes or Villains?: The Irish, Crime, and Disorder in Victorian England», *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 29, no. 3 (Autumn, 1997), p. 339.

⁷⁶¹For about a decade, the consequences of the Great Famine contributed to enormous sufferings for the Irish people. The famine was caused by the appearance of the potato blight *phytophthora infestans*, which devastated the crops and led the whole Irish population to starvation. More than a million people perished, and more or less two million emigrated.

The second half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth were an era marked by imperialism and virulent racism, a historical moment when science became the handmaiden of white supremacist ideology and anthropologists, public intellectuals, and politicians fantasized about the superiority of Anglo-Saxon, Teutonic, and Aryan races.⁷⁶²

Depicting the Irish as bloodthirsty criminals was one of the means through which the British reinforced their status as the “good”, white race:

The belief that the Irish in England were the harbingers of crime was by no means novel. With the substantial increase in Irish immigration during the early Victorian period, the host society's widespread belief in the innate criminality of the Irish - and, more particularly, of the Irish poor - formed an integral component of the negative side of the Irish stereotype.⁷⁶³

Phrenology and physiognomy were mobilised to frame the features of Irish criminals. If we consider the representations of the Irishmen as ape-like, we find a quite definite portrait of the Irish criminal in pseudo-scientific treaties. For instance, Marshall explained that

Lombroso, building on the work of Lavater and others, averred that there was a lower, criminal race discernible through very specific, visible physical features. The ape-like qualities of the criminal type included many "inferior" traits, including, "greater skull thickness, simplicity of cranial sutures, large jaws, pre-eminence of the face over the cranium, relatively long arms, precocious wrinkles, low and narrow forehead, large ears, absence of baldness, darker skin, greater visual acuity, diminished sensitivity to pain, and absence of vascular reaction (blushing).⁷⁶⁴

Combe spotlighted that between the Irish and the other British “races” there are characteristic differences as remote as their history, as they can be traced back even to the original Celts and Saxon tribes. In his view, they are attributable to the religious

⁷⁶²Nelson, *Irish Nationalists*, p. 54.

⁷⁶³Swift, «Heroes or Villains?», p. 339.

⁷⁶⁴Marshall, «The Face of Evil», p. 164.

and political policies of the different countries. In particular, Catholicism has the merit of having rendered the Irish generous, but precipitate and unreflecting at the same time, thus guided by violent fits of passion: «ready in the gust of passion to sacrifice his friend, and in the glow of friendship to immolate himself.»⁷⁶⁵

In Riddell's 'The Last of Squire Ennismore', the Squire is called "The Englishman" to differentiate him from the Irish people, since he lives on Irish soil on the western coast; the local Irish community gives proof of Christian compassion by burying the bodies of the victims of the wreckage that had caused a ship to crash against the shore, killing the entire crew. Honesty is a quality attributed to the Scotchmen, for instance, but not to the Irish.⁷⁶⁶ Furthermore, the Irish are defined as addicted to spirituous liquors.⁷⁶⁷ Such a portrait of the Irish is anything but lenient and reflects the combination of feelings that the British felt towards Ireland's people, namely the sense of superiority and fear of aggression, or of contamination. It is probably this dread that is expressed by Rhoda Broughton in her narrative 'Behold! It Was a Dream'. The tale begins and ends in letter form, completing its circular structure, and it commences with an epistolary exchange between the protagonist, Dinah, and her friend Jane, who invites her to visit her country house in Wales, immersed in the most beautiful nature. Jane Watson and her husband, an ugly man in Jane's own words and much older than her, lead a bucolic life amidst farm animals.⁷⁶⁸ The peculiarity of this story is its setting because events take place in Wales, which is Broughton's native country, but they have truly happened in Ireland as the author herself admits: «the facts narrated in the above story occurred in Ireland. The only liberty I have taken with them is in

⁷⁶⁵Combe, *System of Phrenology*, p. 333.

⁷⁶⁶Combe, *System of Phrenology*, p. 333.

⁷⁶⁷Combe went in a slightly different direction with respect to the general tendency to judge the Irish as idle by nature: he affirmed that «idleness is the misfortune, not the fault, of the mass of the Irish people. The country is occupied by a dense population belonging to the lower ranks, reared on small patches of land, and it is merely destitute of capital, of manufactures, and of middle and higher classes, the consequence of which is that the great body of the Irish people cannot get work, although anxious to obtain it. They are idle of necessity, therefore, and not from inclination. When they come to England or Scotland, and obtain employment, they are extremely active and industrious labourers.» Combe, *System of Phrenology*, p. 369.

⁷⁶⁸Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 33.

transplanting them to England.»⁷⁶⁹ By displacing the setting of her tale, Broughton seemed to suggest that if the Irish can emigrate from their country to Britain, there is danger for the British who may fall victim of Irish criminality. There is a strong implication of racial phobia in this perspective, further promoted by the term used to indicate the nation, “England”: in fact, it is Wales the country where the events take place, at Caulfield, a typical Welsh name (but also a frequent Irish surname in the past); Dinah also states that she must cross St. George’s Channel, connecting the Irish sea to the north-eastern coast with the Celtic sea to the south-west of Wales. However, Broughton unified all the British countries with the most important of them, the barycentre of the Empire, England indeed, as if to show unity against Ireland on one side, and to identify the other Celtic branches of Britain, the Welsh and the Scots, with England rather than with the “evil” Irish cousins. By doing so, she makes sure to keep the Irish at a distance from her as a Welsh, thus of Celtic origins, and as a good member of the Union bonded with England, not rebelling against it. Dinah lives in Dublin, so she crosses the Channel and arrives at her friend’s house after a journey during which she felt sick. One of Broughton’s stylistic devices is the accumulation of adjectives, and it is curious how she describes Dinah’s state: she felt «disastrously, hideously, diabolically sick»,⁷⁷⁰ and upon landing she was «landed, battered, tired, dust-blackened, and qualmish»⁷⁷¹ as if her journey had been years long; a series of assonances and alliterations render these series of adjectives particularly enjoyable. Dinah finds Jane in a state of utter happiness. She had married this old, cantankerous man because she was not particularly tempting to her peers, but she has found her dimension of peace and her countenance has even changed for the better thanks to this.

The morning after her arrival, Dinah recounts a dream that she had had the night before, a hideous nightmare about Jane and her husband, a terrible vision that Dinah believes to be a warning, but which, at first, does not particularly disturb Jane.

I have no idea what hour it was *really*; but at some time, in the blackest and darkest of the night, I seemed to wake. It appeared as if a noise had woke me – a noise which at

⁷⁶⁹Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 49.

⁷⁷⁰Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 34.

⁷⁷¹Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 34.

first neither frightened nor surprised me in the least, but which seemed quite natural [...] But as I gradually grew to a fuller consciousness I found out, with a cold shudder, that the noise I heard was not one that belonged to the night [...] It was a sound of muffled struggling, and once I heard a sort of choked, strangled cry. I set up in bed, perfectly numbed with fright [...] Then I thought that if it were anything bad – if I were to be murdered – I had at least rather be in the light than in the dark, and see in what sort of shape my fate was coming.⁷⁷²

This first part of the dream's description sets the scene of a perfect Gothic happening, the total darkness, blackness, with not a single flicker of light in the air, blocks the sight and prevents from seeing how to move, where to go, who may be hiding in the shadows. The prelude to the climax of the dream has the purpose of creating a claustrophobic atmosphere of blindness that frightens the protagonist as much as the reader, terrified at the thought of being defenceless in the dark. The lack of sight heightens the other senses, that is why Dinah could clearly distinguish the sounds and identify their possible source. She walks across the room blinded by the absence of light, and hits the table, a blow that provokes a pain so real that she is surprised not to find any bruises in the morning. The scene develops quickly but, at the same time, the rhythm seems slow, being perfectly articulated step by step: Dinah reaches the door, she stops terrified but then opens it, she looks outside and notices the red light coming from the door before hers, Jane's. The only sound left at this point was of a person quietly moving around the room.

“Do not laugh at me, not pooh pooh me, for it is God's truth [...] I saw you *both* – you and your husband, lying *dead – murdered* – drowned in your own blood! [...] You Jane had evidently been the one first attacked – taken off in your sleep – for you were lying just as you would have lain in slumber, only that across your throat from there to there” (touching first one ear and then the other), “there was a huge and yawning gash [...] then could I have *imagined* the hideous contraction and distortion of feature, and staring starting open eyes – glazed yet agonized – the tightly clenched teeth that go to make up the picture, that is *now, this very minute*, standing out in ugly vividness before my mind's eye? [...] It was clear that [the husband] had fought for his life. He was lying half on the bed and half on the floor, and one clenched hand was grasping a great piece of the sheet;

⁷⁷²Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 39.

he was lying head downwards, as if, after his last struggle, he had fallen forwards. All his grey hair was reddened and stained, and I could see that the rift in his throat was as deep as that in yours.⁷⁷³

The reader is spared no gory detail of the crime scene, described so to convey the violence and brutality that had characterised this double murder; the killer clearly wanted his victims to suffer, he probably despised them and, given the deep wounds on the throat, he wanted to make sure that they could not interfere with his plans. The positions of the bodies, the facial features deformed by pain and *rigor mortis*, the blood covering the corpses and the bedroom's objects, all contribute to create an image of the horrendous atrocity that Jane and her husband could not survive.

Jane grows paler and slightly frightened by Dinah's tale, but her friend still has one more, fundamental detail to pinpoint: she has seen the culprit's face reflected in the mirror in the couple's bedroom, holding the murder weapon, a sickle, in his hands, and busy stealing their valuables. Dinah recognised him as one of their working men:

I felt certain that he was Irish; to no other nationality could such a type of face have belonged. His wild rough hair fell down over his forehead, reaching his shagged and overhanging brows. He had the wide grinning slit of a mouth – the long nose, the cunningly twinkling eyes that one so often sees, in combination with a shambling gait and ragged tailcoat, at the railway stations or in the harvest fields at this time of year.⁷⁷⁴

Dinah is certain in her heart of the man's nationality, for the level of violence immediately reminded her of the Irish people. Dinah's description of the murderer echoes the phrenological presentations of criminals that appeared in pseudo-scientific treatises throughout the nineteenth century. Arthur McDonald summarised the physical aspect of criminals as follows:

The criminal, as to aesthetical physiognomy, differs little from the ordinary man, except in the case of women criminals, who are most always homely, if not repulsive; many are masculine, have a large, ill - shaped mouth , small eye, large, pointed nose, distant from the mouth, ears extended and irregularly implanted. The intellectual physiognomy shows

⁷⁷³Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, pp. 40-41.

⁷⁷⁴Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 42.

an inferiority in criminals, and when in an exceptional way there is a superiority, it is rather of the nature of cunning and shrewdness. The inferiority is marked by vulgarity, by meagre cranial dimensions, small forehead, dull eyes. The moral physiognomy is marked in its lowest form with a sort of unresponsiveness; there is little or no remorse; there is sometimes the debauched, haggard visage [...] While it is true that many of these characteristics are often seen in ordinary men, yet the large jaw, the masculine appearance of the women, bad look, projecting ears, strabism, thick hair, and receding forehead are much more frequent in criminals [...] There is little doubt but that physiognomic characteristics can be modified by the criminal sometimes. Lombroso has observed that when a murderous man is made to make a violent effort, his physiognomy, especially his face, takes the ferocious look peculiar to the criminal at the moment of the crime.⁷⁷⁵

Lombroso himself had defined the mouth of killers as excessively huge, possibly influenced by habitual gestures such as «the setting of the teeth or tension of the muscles of the mouth, which accompany violent muscular efforts»,⁷⁷⁶ like the «wide grinning slit of a mouth» of Broughton's man. The nose of murderers is generally aquiline according to Lombroso, and the eyes have hard expressions,⁷⁷⁷ other characteristics that recall the author's portrait of Jane and her husband's murderer.

The couple is not worried in the least, on the contrary, Robin, Jane's husband, blames Dinah's superstitious character, although he willingly accompanies the woman on a tour of the property to see if she can detect the suspect. However, the argument does not convince Robin, for he does not understand how could she recognise a face when «there is such a family likeness between all Irishmen, at all events, between all the Irishmen that one sees *out* of Ireland.»⁷⁷⁸ He implies that the Irish people have specific traits that render them recognisable anywhere, but the fact that Robin calls this common traits "family likeness" might imply that he believes them to be all blood-

⁷⁷⁵Arthur McDonald, *Man and Abnormal Man*, pp. 498-499.

⁷⁷⁶See Lombroso-Ferrero, *Criminal Man*.

⁷⁷⁷See Lombroso-Ferrero, *Criminal Man*.

⁷⁷⁸Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 44. This "out" written in italics in the text is intended to specify that such a resemblance is not common to all the Irish because Dinah comes from Dublin, and though the setting is displaced for narrative purposes, she could not be associated with the Irish lowlifes of the working class.

relatives, as if they kept reproducing amongst each other like animals, regardless of the bloodlines, which could contribute to the deviancies they were thought to present.

Dinah recognises the man in the crowd, but Robin reiterates his thoughts on the Irish people by adding that Dinah must have been swayed by the «resemblance which exists between all the Irish of that class»⁷⁷⁹, thus narrowing down the prejudice to the Irish belonging to the working classes, and especially the immigrants. Dinah wishes that they sent the suspect away, but Jane and Robin refuse to do so because they do not believe her dream to be a warning, but simply a nightmare of no importance. Frustrated by their behaviour and terrified at the idea of reliving the scene in her mind again, Dinah decides to set sail and return home. Her farewells, though, announce the tragedy that will eventually take place, for she states that her last memory of her friends is of their happy faces.

Once back to Ireland, Dinah receives a letter from Jane which arrives posthumous, though the woman does not know it yet. Jane confesses that both her and Robin had eventually become agitated by the dream, which led Robin to investigate the presumed murderer and discover that he was a loose worker and rather quarrelsome. The man, a certain Watty Doolan, became aware of the implications against him and, upon being fired by Robin, disappeared into thin air. Jane's letter closes with a sarcastic comment on her part, which has a bittersweet taste considering what Dinah will soon apprehend:

He is now, I hope, on his way back to his native shores, and if he murders anybody it will be *you*, my dear. Good-bye, Dinah. Hardly yet have I forgiven you for the way in which you frightened me with your graphic description of poor Robin and me, with our heads loose and wagging.⁷⁸⁰

Dinah initially reacts to the letter by considering herself a superstitious, hysterical fool, but she soon realises she had been right from the beginning: a newspaper reports a terrible murder that has been perpetrated at Weston House, Caulfield, indeed Jane and Robin's house. The journalist spared the bloody and graphic details that Dinah had, instead, remarked upon, only referring to the room presenting «a hideous

⁷⁷⁹Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 46.

⁷⁸⁰Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 48.

spectacle, being literally swimming in blood.»⁷⁸¹ Watty Doolan was found while he tried to wash his blood-stained clothes, in possession of the loot, and was immediately arrested.

Broughton's tale offers an account characterised by Irish xenophobia, we could say, especially directed towards the poorest members of society, the labourers, and the immigrants to Britain. The negative portrayal of the Irish seems mitigated by Dinah residing in Dublin, where she is said to attend cafes, ballrooms, and Polo games, thus presenting Dubliners as a more refined society; nonetheless, the final comment explaining the reversal of settings suggests that the Irish population may have been despised in its entirety, and that the fashionable Dublin of the tale is just a London in disguise. So, Broughton draws from the prejudices that circulated especially in the second half of the nineteenth century regarding the Irish, creating a portrait of the stereotypical Irish as the violent, quarrelsome, lazy, and criminal personality that populated the chronicles, magazines, and illustrations of the time.

3.1.4 “Coloured” Skins

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a halt in British colonialism and a decline in Britain's global influence for several reasons, mainly the loss of international markets and trading routes and unrest in many colonies. Furthermore, British people began to question the imperialistic policies of the country not only from a political perspective, as the difficulties in managing such widespread territories were undeniable, but from a moral point of view. Part of the fiction of this period investigated the crumbling confidence in British hegemonic cultural and economic power, which had contributed to build the myth of the supremacy of the white race compared to the exploitable, ‘uncivilised’ submitted populations. This conviction had been nourished also by those interested in the pseudo-scientific discourses that spread during the nineteenth century, namely phrenology and physiology. Suffice it to know that Sizer, drawing from previous studies from Lombroso's on, analysed the dimensions of the cranium of people belonging to different races and concluded that the European head is much larger than that of

⁷⁸¹Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 49.

The Hindoo, the Chinese, the New Hollander, the African, or the Peruvian Indian [...] The enslavement of the African by the English races in Europe and America, is a significant proof that large heads are more powerful than small ones, and that those nations having small heads are easily conquered and governed by those having large ones, and a more favorable endowment of brain. The Indian tribes of North America that were easily conquered by the colonists had heads of moderate size, with diminutive intellectual endowment, while those that have struggled to the death to protect their homes and hunting grounds had larger heads, and vigorous, well developed bodies to support them.⁷⁸²

So, the collapse of the ideal of Britain as the greatest world power meant that the country was vulnerable after all, a transformation in the perception of Britain and its policies. Consequently, towards the end of the century a certain dread spread, a fear of what has been defined by Arata as reversed colonization.⁷⁸³ Arata defined reversed colonization as the product of both geopolitical fear and cultural guilt,⁷⁸⁴ two factors that translated into anxiety for the subjugation of the former colonizers on the part of the previously colonised people, considered to be uncivilised and retrograde. Such a process implied that anything Britain had imposed upon its colonies would be returned to the “imperial nucleus”, which was obviously an unpleasant perspective for a people used to rule. Literary transpositions of these fears can be traced in the production of many authors from mid-nineteenth century on, for instance Rider H. Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, H. G. Wells, in part even in Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock tales, and, above all, in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*.⁷⁸⁵

In the corpus, this worry can be identified in Broughton’s narrative ‘Behold! It Was a Dream’ and, as explained in the previous section, it is directed against the Irish. However, various tales present comments denoting a certain unease towards other colonised populations, namely the Indians, that if not a symptom of this kind of fear, at least testify to the wish to keep them at distance.

⁷⁸²Sizer, *Heads and Faces and How to Study Them*, pp. 48-49.

⁷⁸³See Stephen D. Arata, «The Occidental Tourist: "Dracula" and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization», *Victorian Studies* 33, no. 4 (Summer, 1990), pp. 621-645.

⁷⁸⁴Arata, «The Occidental Tourist», p. 623.

⁷⁸⁵Arata, «The Occidental Tourist», pp. 623-624.

In discussing Braddon's *Phantom Fortune* (1883),⁷⁸⁶ Tomaiuolo expanded on Arata's concept of reversed colonization:

It follows that in *Phantom Fortune* Braddon dramatises a form of 'reverse colonization' (as Stephen Arata defines it) according to which '[in] the marauding, invasive Other, British culture sees its own imperial practice mirrored back in monstrous forms'.⁷⁸⁷ This allusion to 'reverse colonization' figures prominently with reference to Gomez de Montesma in the cultural and chronological context of the late eighteen-seventies, where the usurping (colonial) attitudes of the past are replaced by the more hegemonic practices of the (imperial) present, whose economical system is characterised by the 'ghost-like' flow of capital. With his 'olive tint, the eyes of deepest black, the grand form of the head and perfect chiselling of the features' which could belong only 'to the scion of an old Castilian race' (p. 356), Gomez is modelled upon the stereotypical exotic and dangerous alien of imperial (Gothic) fictions and is partially inspired by the Cuban bigamist and villain Captain Manuel in Collins's *Armada* (1866).⁷⁸⁸

Although Tomaiuolo underlined the fact that the novel does not seem to convey any specific political message, it still brings about the question of colonialism, which is vivid also in some of Braddon's short narratives.

'Prince Ramji Rowdedow' is set in the fictional town of Slimeford-on-the-Slushy, described as the ugliest of towns and populated by manufactures that rise «like grimy demons, with outstretched wings of brick and mortar, to shut out the country.»⁷⁸⁹ The presence of the factories led, along with fluvial trade, to a high degree of pollution of the environment and the river Slushy. The unpleasantness of the town mirrors the characteristics of its inhabitants, mostly working classes on perennial strike and very little interested in any form of art. The protagonist is an actor who performs at the Theatre Royal, Slimeford, where the peak of turnout was reached upon the presence of «three to seven in the boxes, a dreary sprinkling in the pit, and a row-and-a-half or so in the gallery.»⁷⁹⁰ To awaken the interest of his fellow citizens, the actor decides to

⁷⁸⁶Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Phantom Fortune: A Novel* (Auckland, NZ: The Floating Press, 2015).

⁷⁸⁷Arata, «The Occidental Tourist», p. 623.

⁷⁸⁸Tomaiuolo, *In Lady Audley's Shadow*, p. 178.

⁷⁸⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 135

⁷⁹⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 136.

invite a star, some famous person who might finally attract the crowd, but there is nobody noteworthy amongst his acquaintances. For this reason, he devises a celebrity from scratch, an Indian prince.

The next morning every patch of paling, every blank wall, every house in Chancery, every stray shutter of every shop to let, was pasted with a staring red-and-blue⁷⁹¹ announcement of the first and only appearance of His Royal Highness Prince Ramji Rowdedow, from the kingdom of Goojeebadanistan, that vast territory between the Ganges and the Himalayas, for the benefit of Mr. John Miffs; while in the principal windows of the town were exhibited lithographed full-length portraits of an imposing individual of the *mulatto* race, in a gorgeous costume of the character usually worn by that interesting Moor who is familiar to all students of the Shakespearian drama.⁷⁹²

The presentation of the Asian prince is interesting, and amusing: the man is presented as “His Royal Highness”, a Western title; he is said to come from an Indian region whose name is fictional, but which seems to correspond to the actual area of the northern United Provinces and Nepal,⁷⁹³ located between the river Ganges and the Himalayan chain, which separates the Indian subcontinent from the Tibetan Plateau. The area of the United Provinces is crossed by the River Ganges, which originates from a north-western Himalayan glacier and reaches Bangladesh. The invented geographical name seems to mimic the sounds of Hindi phonology, rich in vowel and often onomatopoeic sounds, and word-formation: specifically, the suffix *-stan* comes from the Persian root *istan*, “land”. The choice of a fictional name may have two possible explanations, namely Braddon did not wish to mention directly a specific area to avoid controversies, or she has John count on the utter ignorance and disinterest of his fellow citizens, who quite certainly have no knowledge of Indian

⁷⁹¹Two of the three colours of the Union Jack.

⁷⁹²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 137-138.

⁷⁹³The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, the area south of Nepal, was a province of India under the British Raj, which existed from 1902 to 1921, renamed United Provinces in 1935, by which name it will be known as a province of independent India until 1950. The UP resulted from the annexation of Oudh State in 1856, so that the region was called North-Western Provinces and Oudh until 1902. It approximately corresponds to the current states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The suffix was used to forge the names of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

geography. The name of the prince, Ramji, is typical of his native country, whereas the surname is not: “rowdedow” is a variant of “rowdydow”, which means “hubbub”, “uproar”, representing either the effect John hopes to obtain thanks to this visit, or a veiled comment about the stereotypical noisy nature of Indians. John’s reference to Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1604)⁷⁹⁴ and to the thespian costumes used to portray the Moor discloses the actor’s scheme: he will exploit his own theatrical skills and stage costumes to simulate the aspect of an Indian prince and revive the town, also planning every single step and the timing of the prince’s arrival. He certainly succeeds in arousing the crowd’s attention, as now every citizen awaits with trepidation the arrival of the mysterious Asian royal: «they imagined I might keep the prince in my pocket, or in a sealed bottle, like the genie in the *Arabian Nights*». ⁷⁹⁵ John mocks the ignorant labourers, but they have no other means to know how the prince might look like other than their own imagination. Moreover, the *Arabian Nights* became very popular in the eighteenth century and contributed to tie Oriental culture to the element of legend even more strongly.⁷⁹⁶

Contrary to the working classes, John’s colleagues, more versed in the ways of the world and a little more educated, are not in the least fascinated by this prince: being positive that he will never impress the other actors, John downplays the reputation of the Indian, inventing a whole new story that triggers the actors’ disgust:

I was compelled, with that beautiful candour which distinguishes me, to admit to one or two of my intimates that my friend Rowdedow was not in sober earnest actually the scion of a royal race, being in point of fact the private secretary of a rich indigo planter, who had accompanied his employer to England, and who had been dismissed from that service on account of a suspected leaning towards the worship of the goddess Kali, the tutelary divinity of the Thugs, or stranglers, sometimes called Noosers.⁷⁹⁷

This passage strategically re-reverses colonization, by displaying Britain once again as the ruling country, in control of the subjugated people. In fact, the status and

⁷⁹⁴See William Shakespeare, *Othello*.

⁷⁹⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 140.

⁷⁹⁶In Europe they were first translated into French by Antoine Galland between 1704 and 1717.

⁷⁹⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 139.

consequent reputation of the prince is degraded from the position of member of a royal family, thus from a position of supremacy, to the debased state of an employer to a British merchant, who performs a double exploitation: on the one hand, he exploits the land for indigo plantations, whose products he can trade with the motherland and other European countries, contributing to boost Britain's economic power. On the other hand, the planter and tradesman takes advantage of the locals, the presumed prince specifically, by submitting him to his own authority and forcing him to witness the exploitation of his homeland. Furthermore, Prince Ramji is negatively connoted because he is associated with criminal activity, and for this reason estranged by his employer, an act that stands for Britain's iron fist against lowlifes and rebels.⁷⁹⁸ This is why the sarcastic note on the «heartiness of [that] welcome which the true-born Englishman always extends to every foreigner»⁷⁹⁹ appears particularly out of place. Furthermore, the passage fosters one of the stereotypes associated with Indians, which was particularly in vogue in the nineteenth century: the Indians were seen as thugs who strangled and plundered travellers, criminals considered to be members of a sect perpetrating ritualistic crimes in the name of the Hindu goddess Kali.⁸⁰⁰

As the story continues, John feigns a delay in Prince Ramji's arrival, who is supposed to perform a *pièce* with the Royal Theatre's company: this *escamotage* allows John to rehearse his parts without arousing suspicion. In the meantime, he prepares a full procession with splendid open vehicles sailing among crowds of people to welcome the esteemed Oriental prince. As the citizens of Slimeford-on-Slush see Prince Ramji, they immediately notice the resemblance with Shakespeare's *Othello*,

⁷⁹⁸Indigo planting began in Bengal in the second half of the eighteenth century thanks to a French tradesman and planter; indigo continued to be cultivated to become one of the prominent commercial products for the British. In 1859, the so-called Indigo Revolt erupted at the hand of indigo farmers. It had started as a peasant revolt in Bengal, but it grew in proportions and lasted for over a year as a form of protest mainly against the economic treatment the planters offered, for they provided the farmers with loans with exceedingly high interests, which caused the peasants to be in debt for generations. The repression was violent, many indigo farmers were executed, and the revolt was eventually suppressed by mercenary forces hired by the planters, with devastating consequences for the farmers.

⁷⁹⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 144.

⁸⁰⁰Martine van Woekens, *The Strangled Traveller: Colonia Imaginings and the Thugs of India* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

those who had attended some performances at least, but they are also intrigued by the resemblance with a face that they know quite well yet they cannot recognise in such an attire: John's, of course. At this point, the protagonist, and narrator, describes the physical appearance of the prince, a quite entertaining passage carried out by John who undertakes the role of the extradiegetic narrator.

His complexion of a brownish black, was relieved by a crimson glow which illuminated his cheeks and threw out the whites of his eyes with Oriental brilliancy. His long sleek hair, of rather a bluish black (in the sun it looked a thought rusty), was worn with the ends rolled under, after the manner of gentlemen of the equestrian profession. He wore a large beard and moustache, which imparted something of ferocity to his otherwise mild (sooth to say, somewhat timorous) expression of countenance. He wore a magnificent fez cap, surmounted by a rich (though rather tarnished) gold tassel, and decorated with two or three large brooches (somewhat in the style of those which issue from the hands of the theatrical ornament-makers of Birmingham and Bow Street), but which, no doubt, were the royal jewels of imperial race; he also displayed on the ample breast of his dress-coat, which was a little white about the seams, various stars and crosses, besides that noble quadruped, the elephant, usually worn by his youthful highness, Hamlet the Dane. A superb crescent of Bristol paste, mounted on red cloth, shimmered in the dim obscurity of his waistcoat, and, seen from a distance, impressed the young mind with the idea of the diamonds of Golconda.⁸⁰¹ His costume was completed by a pair of white duck trousers, patent-leather alberts, a bamboo cane, and an eye-glass, it being only becoming in royalty, to be short-sighted.⁸⁰²

The omniscient narrator adopts the zero-focalization perspective, which allows him to repeatedly interrupt the tale by commenting upon the accessories that constitute Ramji's outfit, continuously remarking on how the clothes and various items appear worn out by use and suitable for the stage, notably the brooches worn by Hamlet, thus by another actor during a different stage act. The irony that characterises this passage is a peculiar trait of Braddon, who often recurred to this kind of style in her tales. Irony pervades this narrative to the end, when the narrator communicates directly with the reader and challenges him to solve the mystery of Prince Ramji, when he

⁸⁰¹These diamonds are mined in a specific area of India known as the Godavari delta, a part of the Golconda Sultanate, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in present days.

⁸⁰²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 142.

excessively gesticulates but pretends to not understand neither English nor Hindustani, blaming his interlocutor who is derided by the crowd; again, when he exalts the architectural beauties of Slimeford declaring that it even surpasses Delhi's enchanted palaces, speaks of himself in the third person, stating that Miffs is nowhere to be found, and comments upon his "fine" teeth being scared that people, his dentist included, might recognise him because of them.

The plan eventually works out smoothly, the prince departs silently and undetected, a fact that, however, does not trigger suspicious thoughts but is rather attributed to the «subtlety of his oriental nature»,⁸⁰³ referring to the aura of mystery that characterises Indians in western imagery; the ability to move undisturbed and unnoticed also favours the criminal behaviours attributed to Indians.

Generally, Braddon tales do not include particularly kind opinions of India and its inhabitants. Jasper Dane from 'His Secret' is said to have fought in India with Geoffrey Wyatt, Isabel's husband, at Buxar.⁸⁰⁴ Dane refers to his experience in India as «ten years of Indian exile», during which his only companions were books, and is excited to be welcomed at Boscobel after all this time,⁸⁰⁵ implying that India is an uncivilised, rough country.

Similarly, in Broughton's 'The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth', Mrs Cecilia Montessor writes in a letter to her friend Mrs Bessy De Wynt that she and her family had been two years exiled from civilised life⁸⁰⁶ while away for business. In a previous letter, Bessy had informed Cecilia about a pretty house that she had found for the Montresors in London, at a surprisingly cheap prize. The place is haunted, so the owners leave as soon as they can: before the Montresors, the house had been

⁸⁰³Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 147.

⁸⁰⁴The Battle of Buxar, Buxur also spelled Baksar (22 October 1764) was a conflict that took place at Buxar in northeastern India between the forces of the British East India Company, commanded by Major Hector Munro, and the combined army of an alliance of Indian states including Bengal, Awadh, and the Mughal Empire. This decisive battle confirmed British power over Bengal and Bihar after their initial success at the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Thenceforth the company took control. See at www.britannica.com.

⁸⁰⁵Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 73-74.

⁸⁰⁶Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 4.

occupied by an Indian that Bessy calls a «member of the demi-monde»⁸⁰⁷, of the underclass, thus a person of little importance and out of place in the upper middle-class social context. The Indian is an officer «without a liver [...] a deplorable old hypochondriac»,⁸⁰⁸ suggesting a profound disgust towards this man on the part of Bessy. There is nothing wrong with the London, domestic, familiar space in question, the Indian officer is the problem, because of his cowardice, which differentiates him from the proper British middle-class people.

In Braddon's 'The Ghost's Name', when Oscar enters the infamous room to face the ghost that is said to haunt it, he has visions of the spirit watching him crouched beside the bed, with fiery eyes and burning hands wrapped around his neck. After the initial fright at the dreadful sight, Oscar reacts with the intention of fighting the phantom and he compares himself to the Indian trapper who lies silently, awaiting his quarry,⁸⁰⁹ echoing characteristics such as brutality and sneaking, at the time always attributed to Indians. Furthermore, the Afghans are said to have savage faces before which Oscar, once a brave English soldier, never faltered.⁸¹⁰ The Afghans are one of the people that are, though rarely, mentioned in the corpus and described in negative, racist terms. These instances generally take the form of comments and remarks by the characters, as is the case of Charlotte Riddell's 'Old Mrs Jones'. As discussed in Section 3.1.1, Mrs Jones is portrayed by her middle-class fellows, for she had married a doctor, as a little woman with black eyes and the face of the colour of mahogany, a characteristic that marks the woman as inferior from the start because it classifies her as "foreign". She is further depicted as dark, wicked, with fierce eyes, with hands like claws.⁸¹¹ Mrs Jones is supposed to be an evil woman on the basis of her physiognomy, even though she is rather the victim of an abusive husband, theoretically a promising specimen of the British middle-class and successful head of the household. Ironically, she is the one who attempts to adapt to the conventions of British society only to see her efforts ruined by Mr Jones's lascivious behaviours. The Tippens children see Mrs

⁸⁰⁷Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 3.

⁸⁰⁸Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 3.

⁸⁰⁹Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 392.

⁸¹⁰Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 391.

⁸¹¹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 149.

Jones visiting their bedroom one night, and they identify the ghost with a «dark [...] man with the turban»,⁸¹² meaning that spirit could have been Indian given her skin colour; however, one gentleman kindly observes that «Jones has married a blackamoor»,⁸¹³ a pejorative adjective used as a synonym of “black”, which leads to believe she might be African instead, even though, according to the *OED*, the adjective can be applied to any dark-skinned person. Yet, Mrs Jones’s name, Zillah, is Hebrew, which opens one more possibility concerning her provenance.

Mrs Jones has no clear origins; therefore, she has no specific place in the world: she is enveloped in a mystery clarified in part only by her skin tone that, being dark, brands her as different because “alien” to British society. Mrs Jones embodies the concept of “Other” which equates both living, foreign characters, and ghosts in the corpus: both categories represent something unknown and beyond the possibility of being deciphered. The Other is traumatising because unknown and unknowable, and it triggers fear of something that is not understandable and, above all, not familiar, the *unheimlich*. In the context of the Empire, Mrs Jones is like Dracula and other fictional characters the epitome of reversed colonization and its dangerous threat to the stability of western supremacy and order; in truth, she is crushed by a social role, the angel in the house, that she is not capable of maintaining because it does not belong to her, and by the abuses that she suffers at the hand of her devious husband, who belongs to the ‘superior’ white race. Though there is no clear political message behind Riddell’s story, the contrast between Mrs Jones and the middle class that made her “unwelcome” echoes the contradictions deriving from the relationship between Britain and its colonies. In part, the colonies were exploited to satisfy the British citizens’ appetite for fashionable exotic goods, fuelled by markets and mass production.

This is also illustrated in Riddell’s ‘The Last of Squire Ennismore’, where a trading vessel, carrying bottles of brandy amongst other goods, crashed on the shore on the west coast of Ireland and sank. All the crew died, and the retrieved corpses were buried in the local graveyard. Yet, their unresting souls still haunt the beach and the house nearby where Squire Ennismore, who is an Englishman, resides. One night, a puncheon of brandy comes ashore, one last relic of that terrible wreckage. The Squire

⁸¹²Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 142-143.

⁸¹³Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 149.

claims it for himself and tastes the liquor, which he evaluates as the most wonderful he had ever drunk. However, The Squire, a dark man wearing «rings in his ears, and [...] a strange kind of hat, and cut wonderful antics as he walked, and had an ambling sort of gait,»⁸¹⁴ is another example of the imperialistic force imposing itself upon the submitted colony, which in this case rebels and enacts its counter-colonization. As the Squire takes the good for himself, the “dark man” bewitches the Squire and has him follow him into the sea waters, so that the Squire is never seen again. The spirit appears as a victim of Britain’s imperialistic policies, which, eventually, he overturns.

3.2 The Ghost Inside

3.2.1 The Space of Dreams

Since its origins, and especially from the Middle Ages on, literature has always been deeply connected with dreams, way before a scientific approach to this subject emerged; the subsequent publication of works like Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900)⁸¹⁵ opened new literary and artistic perspectives. Dreams are such a successful literary trope because they allow the subject to visit the world of imagination, the subconscious, and enhance creativity. Dreams and fantasy are intertwined and represent a counterpart of the materialistic bourgeois mindset that was spreading in the nineteenth century. This perspective was at the basis of the association between dreams and the female gender, since in Victorian imagery women were thought to be dominated by emotions and superstitions.

In 1851 Charles Dickens published an article entitled *Dreams* in his *Household Words*, in which he was particularly concerned with the relationship between morality and dreams. He feels reassured at the thought that when we dream it is still ourselves with our proper conscience that “act” in the suspended state of dreams, even though we become estranged from the social world and, consequently, cannot behave as moral agents. Dickens also referred to the necessity of interpreting the content of dreams, conscious of the meaning they may hold. However, in one of her studies at the end of the nineteenth century, the American philosopher Julia Gulliver pointed out that when

⁸¹⁴Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 117.

⁸¹⁵Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. Sarah Tomley (Chichester: Capstone, 2020).

dealing with dreams we must consider that accounts are made according only to what the dreamer remembers. In fact, memory plays a key role in the interpretation of dreams because, lacking a direct testimony of our consciousness, which is dozing while dreaming, we can only rely on often vague and untrustworthy reports.⁸¹⁶

Another useful aspect to consider is the link between psychology and physiology, which work in unison. Gulliver argued that rarely, during episodes like mesmeric sleep, the mind seems to be freed from physical restraints and follow independent laws of its own.⁸¹⁷ During somnambulism, the relationship between senses and activity sharpens, because the senses become more “sensible” and allow the sleepwalker to perform duties and move across spaces with little difficulty.⁸¹⁸

The most complex question when it comes to dreams concerns the level of consciousness of the acts performed during sleep and dreaming:

The question now before us is whether there is a conscious, as well as a subconscious activity in dreams. If by consciousness we mean an accurate and lucid knowledge of all the thought-processes involved in dreams, the answer is emphatically in the negative. If it means, however, a certain idea, however confused, of what we do, and think, and suffer, then the acts of the soul are always conscious acts. The fact that we retain a knowledge of our personal identity through sleep is a sufficient proof of this. We have only to appeal to our consciousness to know that we who wake in the morning are the same persons who went to sleep the evening before and have been sleeping during the night.⁸¹⁹

The question of the conscious and subconscious was further developed by other scholars, namely by Sigmund Freud, who identified two models for psychic functioning, the topographical (unconscious, conscious, and pre-conscious) and the structural (id, ego, and superego), embedded in a web of symbols, manifest and latent content, and dream-work.⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁶Julia Gulliver, «The Psychology of Dreams», *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (April 1880), p. 206.

⁸¹⁷Gulliver, «The Psychology of Dreams», p. 206.

⁸¹⁸Gulliver, «The Psychology of Dreams», p. 207.

⁸¹⁹Gulliver, «The Psychology of Dreams», p. 209.

⁸²⁰Massé, *Psychoanalysis and the Gothic*, p. 310.

Later, Carl Jung built a similar tripartite organization made up of shadow, persona, and anima:

[this] interpretation moves from the isolated act or symbol, with its conscious and unconscious dimensions, to consideration of it in relation to other elements of the psyche. If, in literary critical terms, the emphasis upon single elements assigned fixed meanings is the metaphoric, we can call this mode the allegorical.⁸²¹

The quasi-impossibility to fully understand the mechanisms of the unconscious, the difficulty in interpreting its symbols and the thin line that separates the conscious and the subconscious generate the uncanny, what Freud will later call the *unheimlich*, that is why the authors of Gothic and sensation fiction became fascinated with psychoanalysis and the study of dreams. This discipline allowed them to investigate the darkest and most remote side of the mind's recesses, exploring traumas, sordid desires and violent impulses that constitute many narratives' plots. Tales of dreams and hallucinations are recurrent because they stimulate the manifestation of those feelings and impulses that remain latent while awake but contribute to shape the characters' personality throughout the narrative. When accounts of dreams are included within a narration, be it a novel or any other literary form, it is because that dream has a specific role within the story,⁸²² either related to the character's psychological identity or to the functional development of the plot. The corpus is rich in reports of dreams of various types, all of them playing key roles in the construction of the story.

For instance, Broughton's 'Behold! It Was a Dream' concerns a premonitory dream that announces the gruesome death of the narrator's friend and her husband at the hand of an Irish thief. Premonition or precognitive dreams have little scientific foundation today, but they were nonetheless included by Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams* and other studies, where he postulated that they are premonitions of future events not

⁸²¹Massé, *Psychoanalysis and the Gothic*, p. 311.

⁸²²Isabelle Hervouette, *Introduction*, in *Dream and Literary Creation in Women's Writings in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Isabelle Hervouette and Anne Rouhette (London: Anthem Press, 2021), p. 2.

as they will actually happen, but rather as we wish them to happen. However, despite the lack of scientific evidence related to this kind of dreams, which might have a number of rational explanations, they are certainly evocative. For this reason, the Gothic is the perfect site for stories centred around premonitory dreams, for they open the doors of the subconscious and project it onto the conscious state of wakefulness. It is the world of the uncanny, allowing to explore the powers of the mind that works according to a logic of its own, not entirely decipherable and, therefore, fascinating and scary.

Also, Riddell recurred to a premonitory dream in 'Forewarned, Forearmed'. The story revolves around a premonition dreamed by a certain Mr Dwarris, a friend of the narrator's family. The account of the dream takes place years after the death of the man, a knowledge that is cherished as a precious family jewel to be proud of by the narrator, who considers it Mr Dwarris's heritage. He calls it an «awful delight[s]» that animated conversation around the hearth,⁸²³ the supernatural being the main topic of discussion in remote country houses «while the wind was howling outside, and the snow falling upon the earth, and the woodfire crackling and leaping as a fit accompaniment».⁸²⁴

Mr Dwarris recurrently dreamt of himself while reading by the window on an autumn evening, while the lights grew dimmer and dimmer in the melancholic atmosphere. Suddenly, a coach comes in a hurry riding up the hill. When the ride stops, Mr Dwarris's friend Harry Hareleigh comes out of the carriage and joins him with a proposal to go on a journey with him. Harry explains that he has just inherited all his family's properties after the death of his uncle Ralph, lands, money, titles. On the contrary, Harry's cousin, George, had been excluded from the will because he already possessed a sum of money; however, Harry must fulfil one condition, that he marries within six months from the date of his relative's death.⁸²⁵ The friends thus set in motion, but, when they are ready to depart, Mr Dwarris notices a peculiar face amongst the crowd:

⁸²³Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 292.

⁸²⁴Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 300.

⁸²⁵Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 304-305. The letter was delivered with one month delay, so Harry now has only five months to find his bride.

“My eye fell on a man who stood back a little from the crowd that always surrounds a coach at starting time, and there was something about him which riveted my attention, though I could not have told why. He was an evil-looking man, dressed in decent but way common clothes, and he stood leaning up against the wall of the ‘Marypole’ and, as it chanced, directly under the light oil-lamp. It was this circumstance which enabled me to get so good a view of his face, of his black hair and reddish whiskers, of his restless brown eyes and dark complexion. The contrast between his complexion and his whiskers struck me forcibly [...] I noticed that he bit his nails nervously [...] Further, he stared not at what was going on, but persistently at the coach window until he discovered my scrutiny, when he turned on his heel and walked away down the street.”⁸²⁶

The mysterious individual is following the two men, and his gestures betray a certain anxiety. He is portrayed as evil-looking, and indeed his physical features correspond to the physiognomic description of criminals. The red whiskers, however, are a swaying detail because they are common to both British and Irish nationalities.

The man follows them along their journey until they reach an inn, a gloomy place called “Bleeding Heart”, an ominous name, surrounded by bare trees whose remaining leaves whirl through the air, under a night sky covered by dark clouds. The man with the red whiskers spies on them all the time, and whenever Dwarris looks at him he disappears into the darkness. At this point, the dreamer always wakes up, so the dream is left with an open ending.⁸²⁷

Dwarris recognises the dream as a warning and informs Hareleigh, for he understands there is a connection between his companion and the stalker. Despite the alarm and anxiety, Dwarris and Hareleigh proceed with their journey; the events come true, though slightly differently from Dwarris’s dream: for instance, when they arrive at the inn, they see no one behind their backs, but the Gothic place and the moody atmosphere are the same. To protect themselves from the man whom they are sure means harm, they take precautions: they avoid drinking, they choose two rooms that look one to the back and one to the front of the inn to keep guard of the surroundings

⁸²⁶Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 306-307.

⁸²⁷Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 309.

and use furniture to barricade the doors.⁸²⁸ In the middle of the night, footsteps are heard along the corridor, and someone tries to force Dwarris's door open; he thus decides to climb down the window and into the garden to monitor his friend's bedroom, and there he encounters the man with the red whiskers. They both climb up to Harry's window and, when the wretched is about to strike Hareleigh, who is fast asleep, Dwarris shoots him in the shoulder. A brawl follows, from which the mischievous man emerges victorious, leaving Dwarris almost dead.⁸²⁹ The assassin disappears without leaving any trace, but Dwarris will nonetheless recognise him after years as George, Harry's cousin, and publicly expose him in the middle of a political election assembly.⁸³⁰

Dream episodes recur in more of Charlotte Riddell's short stories: we have already seen in Sections 1.3 and 1.4 that 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk' is centred on the figures of Graham Coulton, a young man who seeks refuge at the house in Vauxhall Walk, recently vacated by a friend of his, and Miss Tynan, the ghost of an old lady murdered for her wealth. Coulton has various dreams during his permanence at the mansion, all of them providing clues about the circumstances of Miss Tynan's death. These dreams also contribute to build Miss Tynan as a character, and this fact is fundamental in the development of the tale because all that occurs here is the consequence of the woman's conscious and selfish behaviours. Coulton's dreams are the pillars around which the structure of the whole narration revolves. The first visions come on the night of Graham's settling in the empty house: initially, Coulton believes to have been awakened from slumber while, in truth, he is still dreaming; since he does not understand what is going on, he cannot explain to himself why he can see clearly in the dark, especially items reflected in a mirror that hangs far from him. Graham's consciousness is awake in his sleep, he is capable of discerning that something is not right even though the appearances would suggest the contrary:

Lying on the settee, with the fire burnt out, and the room in total darkness, Graham Coulton dreamed a curious dream. He thought he awoke from deep slumber to find a log

⁸²⁸Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 315-316.

⁸²⁹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 316-319.

⁸³⁰Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 321-322.

smouldering away upon the hearth, and the mirror at the end of the apartment reflecting fitful gleams of light. He could not understand how it came to pass that, far away as he was from the glass, he was able to see everything in it; but he resigned himself to the difficulty without astonishment, as people generally do in dreams.⁸³¹

So, Coulton is initially bewildered by the sensation of being awake, apparently questioning rationally what is happening, but then he surrenders to the altered logic of dreams and abandons all astonishment.

Neither did he feel surprised when he beheld the outline of a female figure seated beside the fire, engaged in picking something out of her lap and dropping it with a despairing gesture. He heard the mellow sound of gold, and knew she was lifting and dropping sovereigns, he turned a little so as to see the person engaged in such a singular and meaningless manner, and found that, where there had been no chair on the previous night, there was a chair now, on which was seated an old, wrinkled hag, her clothes poor and ragged, a mob cap barely covering her scant white hair, her cheeks sunken, her nose hooked, her fingers more like talons than aught else as they dived down into the heap of gold, portions of which they lifted but to scatter mournfully.⁸³²

The first part of the dream provides an insight into a past time, when the house was inhabited by its original owner, Miss Tynan indeed, and to the state of utter neglect in which the house was, scarcely furnished and dirty; Graham can also observe how the old woman herself was uninterested in self-care; moreover, he gathers the first piece of information to untangle the thread of the plot: in fact, Miss Tynan obsessively and compulsively repeats the same action, that of lifting and letting some gold drop in her lap. Graham can even hear the sound of the coins falling on one another thanks to the sharpness that his senses acquire in the oneiric context, which also explains why he could so clearly see images reflected in a distant mirror. As the dream progresses, the images that follow become more and more disquieting, and give further evidence of Miss Tynan's character:

⁸³¹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 105.

⁸³²Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 105.

Out of the darkness – out of the corner of the room where the shadows lay deepest – out from the gloom abiding near the door – out from the dreary night, with their sodden feet and wet dripping from their heads, came the old man and the young children, the worn woman and the weary hearts, whose misery that gold might have relieved, but whose wretchedness is mocked. Round that miser, who once sat gloating as she now set lamenting, they crowded – all those pale, sad shapes – the aged of days, the infant of hours, the sobbing outcast, honest poverty, repentant vice; but one low cry proceeded from those pale lips – a cry for help she might have given, but which she withheld.⁸³³

The narration continues with an anaphoric structure that is meant to highlight the condition of the poor people Miss Tynan had refused to help in life: they come from the darkest parts of the room, which metaphorically stands for the mind, and even though it is Graham's mind elaborating these frames, it is Miss Tynan's consciousness that is haunted by those souls. They approach her coming from the darkest recesses of that consciousness that still follows the same schemes as when the woman was alive: the miser old lady acted selfishly while gloating in her gold, abandoning those paupers to a miserable fate. The impression is that Graham is seeing something that is into the woman's subconscious, two minds that seem to fuse together to reveal truths and possibly find peace.

Riddell's description of the poor souls is haunting: they are presented as coming from the darkness to which they were condemned by Miss Tynan's egotism, all together adults, old men and women, innocent children, even new-borns, worn out by a life of extreme hardship and fatigue, hunger and illness, whose pain could have found solace had the woman granted them some financial help. Instead, she mocked their condition, and now she is punished and compelled to see their figures crawling towards her.

They closed about her, all together, as they had done singly in life; they prayed, they sobbed, they entreated; with haggard eyes the figure regarded the poor she had repulsed, the children against whose cry she had closed her ears, the old people she had suffered

⁸³³Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 106.

to starve and die for want of what would have been the merest trifle to her; then, with a terrible scream, she raised her lean arms above her head, and sank down - down – the gold scattering as it fell out of her lap, and rolling along the floor, till its gleam was lost in the outer darkness beyond.⁸³⁴

The scene becomes claustrophobic when the mass of wretched people eventually surrounds Miss Tynan at the climax of the narration, all together and not singly as they had done in life, to remind her of the multitude she had left to die, to whom she had shown no compassion. What strikes the reader is the sequence of sounds that become louder and louder, cries, shouts, prayers, exemplifying the reactions of the poor before her dismissal. Miss Tynan is forced to face her guilt but cannot stand it: the loud voices of grief, anger, hunger, tiredness pierce through Miss Tynan's consciousness and destabilise her, to the point that she must scream louder than the crowd to disperse them, an appalling shriek that, however, has other consequences. In fact, as she performs the quasi-theatrical act of shouting while raising her hand above her head, like a witch casting her spell, the people disappear but so does she, falling into the depths of a hellish pit. Only her coins remain, though swiftly vanishing into the darkness. Graham wakes up sweating because of agony and anxiety, and for the effort that the dream has cost him.

However, the visions continue as soon as he lies to sleep again:

He saw her walking slowly across the floor munching a dry crust – she who could have purchased all the luxuries wealth can command; on the hearth, contemplating her, stood a man of commanding presence, dressed in the fashion of long ago. In his eyes there was a dark look of anger, on his lips a curling smile of disgust, and somehow, even in his sleep, the dreamer understood it was the ancestor to the descendant he beheld – that the house put to mean uses in which he lay had never so far descended from its high estate, as the woman possessed of so pitiful a soul contaminated with the most despicable and insidious vice poor humanity knows, for all other vices seem to have connection with the flesh, but the greed of the miser eats into the very soul.⁸³⁵

⁸³⁴Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 106.

⁸³⁵Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 106.

We understand another aspect of Miss Tynan's personality, namely that she does not use her money for herself either. The woman's obsession for gold leads her to seek to preserve her belongings even if it means to totally neglect herself as much as the people she had refused to provide for. From here derives the state of carelessness in the house and her own body. She is observed while eating a crust from the floor by her ancestor, who displays a look of disgust which is also Graham's and the reader's.

The oneiric journey continues, and another character enters the scene, Miss Tynan's brother; he asks for her help in the name of family, but as always, she proves heartless and repudiates her sibling. At this point, the other man in the room, her ancestor, turns into an angel and, like the mourning angel statues often found in cemeteries, he bows his head, folds his wings around his mournful face and departs.

Graham's dream seems to be structured on different levels, for the scene continuously changes and he is redirected into a new setting: Miss Tynan is now old, dragging herself up the stairs and walking into a dilapidated bedroom, unclean as its owner and the edifice. Coulton approaches the bed and sees close by the repulsive spectacle offered by the woman's appearance. According to the theories on dreams that were developing at the end of the nineteenth century, as those by Gulliver mentioned above, the body retains the capacity of acting while the mind is dreaming, following the consciousness of the individual. I was not able to retrieve information as to Riddell's knowledge of such theories, but it is possible that she was aware of them because Graham acts during his oneiric visions, he moves in space even though he never interacts with the other characters, but his experience seems filtered. We have the impression of a double layer constituting the dream: the first one is made up of Miss Tynan's memories, the second part concerns Coulton's own, external attendance to the events, while he remains unseen and unheard, as if he had entered the woman's own mind.

At this point, the dreamlike scene shifts to Miss Tynan's assassination, which is the only moment when Graham cannot move nor scream or talk in the dream, possibly a subconscious manifestation of the physical impotence we feel when overcome by fear. The cry proceeds from his lips only when he awakes, as if freed from the restraints of the sphere of dreams:

[Miss Tynan was] an awful and repulsive spectacle, but not with half the terror in it of that which followed. Even as the young man looked he heard stealthy footsteps on the stairs. Then he saw first one man and then his fellow steal cautiously into the room. Another second, and the pair stood beside the bed, murder in their eyes. Graham Coulton tried to shout – tried to move, but the deterrent power which exists in dreams only tied his tongue and paralysed his limbs. He could but hear and look, and what he heard and saw was this: aroused suddenly from sleep, the woman started, only to receive a blow from one of the ruffians, whose fellow followed his lead by plunging a knife into her breast. Then, with a gurgling scream, she fell back on the bed, and at the same moment, with a cry, Graham Coulton again awoke, to thank heaven it was but an illusion.⁸³⁶

What Graham calls an illusion is, in truth, a revelatory dream that allows him to discover the hidden secret of the house at Vauxhall Walk while unravelling the personality of the ghost, which is the key point of the events witnessed by the man while dreaming. Miss Tynan's avarice is the cause of her brutal end, but eventually she redeems herself, at least in part, by revealing the location of her gold, which had never been found after her murder. At the same time, Graham undergoes a transformation thanks to this experience, for he realises the importance of family and subsequently restores the relationship with his father, learning from the mistakes Miss Tynan had made. In 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk' the dream is thus a powerful means that Riddell exploited to achieve a series of narrative goals: building the character of Miss Tynan, structuring the narration by placing the series of dream-like flashbacks at its centre, developing the character of Graham.

Riddell used the stratagem of dreams to solve murder mysteries also in 'Old Mrs Jones', specifically to unveil the truth regarding Mrs Jones's assassination at the hand of her husband. The woman's ghost is particularly disturbing because she physically interacts with the mansion's inhabitants, appearing to both adults and children and leaving a trail of dread behind. However, there is one character who is particularly "enthralled" by the spectre, namely Mr Tippens's cousin, Anne. One morning, while Anne is residing at the villa for a visit, Mr Tippens asks her whether she has slept well and she replies:

⁸³⁶Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 108.

Yes; but isn't it funny, all the earlier part of the night I was dreaming about a woman being murdered. It was talking about old times, and wandering about those ancient places and tombs and monuments, I suppose, made me think of such things. I was quite glad to see the sun shining at the window when I woke, for oh, the dream did appear just like reality! [...] I was in a room I had never seen before, with three windows to the street, and one long, narrow window that looked out I didn't know on what. The room was wainscoted about two yards from the floor, well furnished with chairs and tables; I could feel a thick carpet under my feet, and see a glass over the chimney-piece, in which a woman was looking at herself.⁸³⁷

Firstly, we can notice many similarities between this passage and the first recollection of Graham's dream in 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk'. Both characters were able to recognise all the details of the rooms' furniture, which in the case of Anne is even more striking for her setting contains far more items than the other one. There is also a glass reflecting a female figure in both tales. Curiously, Anne tells her dream experience at breakfast, so she stops from now and then to sip her tea and nibble some food, including ham slices cut by her cousin Dick in what he calls the «Vauxhall fashion»,⁸³⁸ possibly an ironic intertextual reference between two tales by the same author that follow similar narrative schemes. The vividness of the dream is testified to by the strong physical sensations that Anne perceives, like feeling the texture of the carpet under her feet, by her memory which has preserved every detail of the room, and by the fact that the room really exists in the mansion, and Anne will recognise it when entering it one day. Like Miss Tynan, Old Mrs Jones is admiring her jewels when the dream first occurs, and both women are murdered in the most intimate space of their houses, the bedroom, by men motivated by lust for gold and jewels. In the case of Mrs Jones, the culprit is her own husband, a fact that makes the murderous act even viler.

All at once, she [Mrs Jones] saw in the glass the door open, and a man come in. With a stifled scream she jumped down from the stool, seized the case, and tried to close her

⁸³⁷Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 159-160.

⁸³⁸Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 159.

dress up round her throat, and hide the necklace; but he was too quick for her. He said something, I could not hear what; and then, as she cowered down, he caught her and wrenched the case out of her hand, and made a snatch at her necklace just as she flew upon him, with all her fingers bent and uttering the most terrible cries that ever came out of a woman's lips – I think I hear them now; then, in a minute she fell back, and I could see she was only kept from dropping on the floor by the tight grip he had on the necklace. I seemed to know she was being choked, and I tried to call out, but I could not utter a sound. I strove to rush at the man, but my feet felt rooted where I stood; then there came a great darkness like the darkness of a winter's night.⁸³⁹

There are more parallelisms between the two tales: both Anne and Graham try to scream and move in defence of the women, but they are prevented from any movement by a strange force that acts upon them in the dream, a sort of paralysing fear that physically manifests in the oneiric space. Here, they are both spectators of facts that they witness as if they were looking at a film screen, so they cannot intervene and, after all, this is not their purpose. The goal of their dream-like visions is to know what happened and be able to report it, for truth and justice.

Mrs Jones is surprised while awake, so she attempts a fight but is eventually overcome, while Miss Tynan is ambushed in her bed and stands no chances; both are depicted with their hands clenched like claws, mimicking an act of protection towards their precious items (Mrs Jones is gripping her necklace), which are their main preoccupation even in the face of imminent death. The phantom seems to have detected Anne's frail personality, because she stalks her and induces her dreams always centred around the murdered woman. Yet, despite the lucid report of the first dream, Anne struggles to remember anything that happens in the subsequent ones. However, she realises that Mrs Jones always wants her to follow her somewhere. The girl's energy is exhausting because of the demanding presence of the phantom in her dreams, which prevents her from sleeping and drive her to the verge of madness.⁸⁴⁰

Furthermore, Mrs Tippens is informed by a medical apprentice that is lodged at the mansion of an alarming fact concerning Anne: the girl has been seen sleepwalking.

⁸³⁹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 160.

⁸⁴⁰Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 165.

To prevent any danger from befalling the girl, Mrs Tippens is advised to consult a doctor and lock the door of Anne's bedroom to avoid her wandering around the house, a state of which the "victim" is not conscious.⁸⁴¹

The pervasive influence of Mrs Jones in Anne's mind has apparently corrupted her health and mental stability, for the girl has become anxious, fearful, and now suffers from somnambulism. Her mind is literally haunted by the ghost, who has found the vector through which to bring justice to herself. The climax of the tale is reached when, one night, Anne has a severe episode of sleepwalking induced by Mrs Jones. Anne is caught while trying to break into a private property by a security guard, but she will not be charged with any accusation because deemed incapable of regulating her behaviour under the "spell" of noctambulism, thus she is not responsible for her actions. Anne

Appeared at her cousin's door, accompanied by a policeman. Early that morning she had been found trying to open the garden gate of a house in the Stratford Road; as, when remonstrated with concerning the impropriety of her conduct, she still continued knocking and pushing the gate, the policeman seized her left arm and told her she couldn't be allowed to make such a noise; then, for the first time, she turned her face towards him, and he saw, as he expressed himself, "there was something stranger about the matter than he thought." Immediately it dawned upon his understanding that though the woman's eyes were wide open, she did not see him, and that she was not drunk, as he had supposed, but fast asleep.⁸⁴²

The policeman wakes Anne up, worsening her state of distress due to her finding herself in a place that she does not recall, half naked, and obsessed by Old Mrs Jones, whose possession of Anne's mind has left severe traces of mental instability in her victim.⁸⁴³

⁸⁴¹Mrs Tippens's bourgeois consciousness leads her to worry more about Anne's respectability than her health, because there are male lodgers in the house; one of them also finds the girl wandering alone and takes her to her bedroom. Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 167.

⁸⁴²Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 170.

⁸⁴³A similar case of possession of another's mind occurs in Oliphant's 'The Portrait', where the protagonist is possessed thrice by the spirit of his mother with the purpose of curing her family's

The description of Anne's appearance while in trance corresponds to the medical records about patients suffering from noctambulism. Sleepwalking, or noctambulism, or somnambulism, is a puzzling state in between sleep and wakefulness, a trance-like state where the subject seems to be conscious of the surrounding environment but is indifferent to it. When the subject wakes up, he generally suffers from amnesia and remembers little to nothing of the experience. This phenomenon attracted scholars for a long time, but it began to be seriously studied in the nineteenth century, when it was believed to be a manifestation of a dream physically enacted by a dreamer.⁸⁴⁴ This was thought to be possible because of the conviction that mind and body react to each other even while sleeping. Sigmund Freud worked on developing theories on sleepwalking over decades, and he concluded that dreams represent an equilibrium destabilised by subconscious impulses repressed because they do not respond to the ego.⁸⁴⁵ Thus, somnambulism may be a reaction of the body following subconscious instincts and moving towards their realisation. Later studies proved this conclusion incorrect, but as far as the knowledge of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries went, Riddell's portrait of dreamers and sleepwalkers is accurate.

There is another sleepwalker in the corpus who, this time, really acts unconsciously according to her own suppressed impulses, which emerge at night in full power in the form of recurrent dreams and noctambulism: Mrs Graham in Florence Marryat's 'Sent to His Death!'. The girl works as a nurse, caring for the new-born child of Bessie, the narrator's friend. Her vampire-like appearance and the baby's declining health conditions seem to suggest that the nurse is feeding upon the little boy. Nonetheless, as the story unravels, we learn that the poor nurse suffered from a terrible trauma that has left her heartbroken and mentally instable, not because she has gone mad, but

discord. In this tale, the man is always awake and perfectly alert to the fact that something is happening to him, because he feels physically ill as if feverish; he is compelled by the supernatural force to enter his father's studio and make him reveal the existence of Cousin Agnes who was meant to be kept hidden. Casually, Agnes looks exactly like the protagonist's mother, also named Agnes, and she will reform the household by becoming his wife and the new angel in the house.

⁸⁴⁴Jennifer Swanson, ed., *Sleep Disorders Sourcebook* (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 1999), pp. 249–254, 351–352.

⁸⁴⁵"*Somnambulism*", in *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Alain de Mijolla (Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference Books, 2005).

because she suffers from recurrent nightmares during which she relives the death of her husband. The damage that the experience has caused prevents her from properly taking care of Bessie's boy because she feels denaturalised as a mother and a woman since she has also lost her only child: the underlying thought is that she was not capable of taking care of her own family, so she cannot possibly be a good nurse for someone else's child.

Mrs Graham is seen wandering the corridors of the mansion every night, but she is initially mistaken for a ghost haunting the house. Noises of cries and sobs are heard, as much as desperate attempts to call those who are no more that provoke dread in the household and in Dolly, the protagonist, herself. When under the spell of somnambulism, the nurse is said to have the same fearful expression in her eyes as she has by day, and to stare back at the people who encounter her only to run away immediately. She does not seem to really see them. Dolly has a close encounter with the presumed ghost twice: the first time, she hears sounds in the nearby corridor and gathers her courage to explore it. She notices an indistinct figure quickly moving out of sight while ignoring her questions, but the desperate cries of the baby distract her, and she approaches the nursery. Upon opening the door, she finds Mrs Graham sitting in bed and screaming sentences like «go away and don't come back again. You let the water in each time you open the door.»⁸⁴⁶ As Dolly will realise by talking to the nurse later in the day, Mrs Graham relives in her sleep the trauma of the shipwreck that has destabilised her, a pain that she is incapable to control and overcome in order to move on. It is likely that the memory of the traumatic event is worsened by the sense of guilt for having chased her husband away while he was checking on the women in the cabin. Guilt combines with shame, caused by the consciousness of having privileged the security of herself, the other women and the children while the men were outside struggling to keep them all alive. The sentence that the nurse often shouts, «I have sent him to his death», is emblematic of the strong feelings that tear her, and which she translates into recurrent nightmares and sleepwalking. Somnambulism enacts her desire to find her husband again. Frightened and worried about the baby boy who is weeping in his cradle, Dolly acts without second guessing her approach, and she

⁸⁴⁶Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 264.

wakes Mrs Graham up by shaking her arm and calling out to her. As a consequence, the girl wakes up abruptly and terribly agitated, so that she needs to be appeased before Dolly can leave her.

Dolly has not yet realised that the spirit and Mrs Graham are the same person, so when she hears again the noises produced by the spectre, she decides to face the creature:

I heard footsteps distinctly sounding along the corridor. I was out of bed in a moment, with my hand upon the lock of the door. I waited till the steps had passed my room, and then I turned the key and looked gently out. The same white figure I had seen the night before was standing a little beyond me, its course arrested, as it would appear, by the slight sound of unlocking the door [...] The figure had recommenced walking, and was some paces farther from me. I followed it, saying softly, 'What are you? Speak to me'. But it did not turn, but went on, clasping its hands, and talking rapidly to itself.⁸⁴⁷

Mrs Graham hears the click of the opening door and stops for a second, reacting, in her dream-like state of trance, to an external sound, but she moves while performing acts that probably derive from her memory of that tragic day. She compulsively talks to herself and clasps her hands, signs of instability that she keeps at bay while fully awake during the day, but that unleashes at night when the logic of dreams takes over. A further example of this occurs a few lines later, when Dolly hears the girl calling out to her husband: Mrs Graham asks the absent man to take her hand and guide her out of the cold and darkness, and Dolly reacts instinctively by stretching out her own hand, to which Mrs Graham clings. At this point, Mrs Graham's voice changes into words of joy at the thought of finally having her man back, for she believes to be really holding his hand. Mrs Graham is still in a state of trance, again physically responding to the surrounding environment, but not capable of discerning its elements: it is her memory at work, building the space around her according to where she was and what she was doing when the calamity occurred. Dolly behaves properly in this case, for she gently accompanies the girl to her room and puts her to bed without waking her up: in doing so she avoids plunging the girl into a state of confusion, panic, and shame

⁸⁴⁷Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 264.

due to her vulnerability, and worsening her condition by inflicting another trauma upon her.

The pseudo-sciences that still attracted Victorians proved that somnambulism could be induced through specific methods to cure diseases. Mesmerisers were believed to be able to provoke these trance-like states. It all began around 1778, when Anton Mesmer moved to Paris, where he spread his theory of animal magnetism. He claimed to have discovered a superfine fluid that penetrated and surrounded all bodies, invisible and thus existing as the medium of gravity, a theory that he applied to medicine. According to Mesmer, sickness resulted from obstacles that prevented the correct flow of the fluid through the body. This flow could be re-established by mesmerising or massaging the body's "poles", a procedure that provoked crises in the form of convulsions but restored the balance between man and nature.⁸⁴⁸ Therefore, the main methods employed to cure patients were the induction of epileptic fits and somnambulism. These séances often took the form of itinerant spectacles devised as theatrical performances during which the mesmeriser dressed in silk robes and used a wand, as Mesmer himself used to do. According to Parssinen,

These performers were entrepreneurs who sought to make a living out of mesmerism; if they succeeded, it was because they put together an "act" that appealed to their audience's tastes. Commercialization added to the subject's controversy, for it seemed to its detractors, and sometimes even to its advocates, that the "professors" of mesmerism were mere entertainers, posing as scientific lecturers and healers. In fact, there is an element of truth in this allegation. Mesmeric performers of the 1840s and early 1850s drew on the rich traditions of scientific lecturing, lay healing, and popular entertainment. To a very considerable extent, their collective success, and the longevity of the doctrine in Britain can be understood only by analyzing the ways in which mesmerists managed to fuse all three traditions into their performances.⁸⁴⁹

Soon the interest in mesmerism spread across Europe; deeply fascinated by the macabre and by the occult, Victorians were particularly captivated by mesmerism: an

⁸⁴⁸ Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 3-4.

⁸⁴⁹ Terry M. Parssinen, «Mesmeric Performers», *Victorian Studies* 21, no. 1 (Autumn, 1977), p. 89.

1843 article on *The Zoist* attributed its introduction to England to an Irishman, Richard Chenevix, in 1828. From a literary perspective, mesmerism offered several possibilities that were exploited by Gothic fiction: the power to control the mind of people by putting them in a trance-like state implied that the same power, originally meant for the good, could be distorted and used for evil purposes. Such control on a person's psyche, practiced, in addition, on an unconscious subject, meant that the victim could become the means by which awful deeds could be perpetrated.

Rhoda Broughton's 'The Man with the Nose' provides the example of a literary piece where mesmerism is turned into a devilish practice and used to abduct a woman. At the beginning of the story, a young English couple has just married and is deciding where to spend their honeymoon. The husband's first proposal is to go to the Lakes region, but his wife emphatically disagrees. She confesses that, years before, during a holiday with her family, a dreadful episode marked her ever since and left her traumatised:

"We were at Ullswater", she says, speaking rapidly, while a hot colour grows on her small, white cheeks – "Papa, mamma, and I; there came a mesmeriser to Penrith, and we went to see him – everybody did – and he asked leave to mesmerise me – he said I should be such a good medium, and – and – I did not know what it was like. I thought it would be quite good fun, and – and – I let him [...] And after that I do not remember anything; I believe I did all sorts of extraordinary things that he told me – sang and danced, and – and was off my head, and said odd and wicked things that you would not have expected me to say – that dreadful bed! Shall I ever forget it?"⁸⁵⁰

The bride's speech is fragmented, her skin becomes inflamed, and she trembles in agitation, all signs that she panics whenever she recalls her traumatic experience. The mesmerising séance left her not only psychologically hurt, but also very ill and in a state of unconscious jabber during which she pronounced the strangest things. She also feels ashamed of the ridiculous actions that she had been compelled to do, because she had lost control over herself and allowed a stranger to take hold of her

⁸⁵⁰Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, pp. 14-15.

mind. The mesmeriser's power was so strong that it actually possessed her, and it continues to haunt her even in the present day:

“Sometimes, in the dead black of the night, when God seems a long way off, and the devil near, it comes back to me so strongly – I feel, do not you know, as if he were there, somewhere in the room, and I *must* get up and follow him.”⁸⁵¹

The girl associates the experience of mesmerism with the night, the Gothic time *par excellence*, when the devil and its minions are at the height of their power. It is at night that she still feels the grip of the mesmeriser unto her mind and body, as if she were possessed by a demon. Very similarly to Marryat's Mrs Graham, the bride has recurrent nightmares and subsequent hallucinations to the point that she does not distinguish the dream from reality. One night, the husband is suddenly awakened by the presence of his wife beside his bed, and finds her in a state of utter panic and anguish:

I see my wife standing beside my bed; the extremity of terror on her face, and her fingers digging themselves, with painful tenacity into my arm. “Tighter, tighter!” she is crying, wildly. “What are you thinking of? You are letting me go! [...] You saw him”, she says, with a sort of sobbing breathlessness; “you know you did! You saw him as well as I!”⁸⁵²

The nightmare or vision that the girl has that night is presumably caused by the mesmeriser in an attempt to reclaim her. Her husband blames himself for what he believes to be just a nightmare; in fact, he had brought her to visit the museum of Antoine Wiertz (1806-1865), a Belgian Romantic painter renowned for his colossal works of arts, predominantly representing scenes from classical myths and portraits. Many of his works include disquieting details or characters: in *Battle of the Greeks and Trojans for the Corpse of Patroclus* (1836), the two opposing armies compete for the body of Achille's lover pulling on the corpse, that appears unnaturally twisted, in

⁸⁵¹Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, p. 16.

⁸⁵²Broughton, *Twilight Stories*, pp. 18-19.

the pallor of death. *The Young Witch* (1857) portrays a young witch fully naked, and bent over to show her back, a combination of sexuality displayed and grotesque, given by the extremely wrinkled body of the older sorceress and the distorted faces in the background. Nakedness as a remainder of a licentious sexuality appears also in *La Liseuse de Romans* (1853), where a girl reads a book on the bed while a demonic figure emerges from the corner of the canvas, stretching its hand towards her. Death recurs as the theme of various paintings, from *Last Thoughts and Visions of a Decapitated Head* (1853), *Guillotined Head* (1855), *The Strange Afterlife of Antoine Wiertz* (1865), and *Burial* (1854) amongst others; *La Belle Rosine* (1847) portrays a beautiful young woman on a total black background, which partially shadows her body, and a skeleton, symbolising imminent death, which she is facing and staring directly in the eyes. The most disturbing of Wiertz's images is certainly *Hunger, Madness, Crime* (1851). In this painting, a woman in the throes of folly sits on a stool in her kitchen, in a pose reminding of the Virgin Mary, with her child on her lap, covered by a bloodstained shroud; she lives in conditions of extreme poverty: the stray roof of her hut is collapsing, she has nothing to eat but some dried and rotten remnants of fruits or vegetables, and was obliged to break some pieces of furniture and clothes to make firewood for the hearth. The painting depicts the consequences of this miserable lifestyle, a grotesque, violent and extreme representation of a desperate mother who falls into madness and kills her child. The woman's sneer and hallucinated eyes are signs of this state of mind, and the viewer is at first disgusted by the blood-stained knife that she is holding, the weapon used to sever one of her baby's legs, which is visible in the cauldron. Starvation has brought to derangement to the point of cannibalism; yet the great sufferance of this mother is latent in the painting: her left breast is naked, meaning that she had tried to feed the child, but she probably could not produce enough milk, and her red, puffed eyes signal that she might have been weeping before completely losing her mind.

Going back to the tale, considering that women were generally seen as fragile, superstitious, and irrational, it is not surprising that the girl's husband believes her to have been negatively influenced by the sight of Wiertz's works of art, but she retaliates by insisting on the presence of a stalker. She even describes his physical appearance while claiming to have never seen him before:

“He had a *nose!*” [...] “It was very prominent,” she answered, in a sort of awe-struck half-whisper, “and very sharply chiselled; the nostrils were very much cut out.” A little pause. “His eyebrows were one straight black line across his face, and under them his eyes burnt like dull coals of fire, that shone and yet did not shine; they looked like dead eyes, sunken, half-extinguished, and yet sinister.”⁸⁵³

In physiognomy, this kind of nose is a clear mark of wickedness and criminality, but the nature of this individual seems even darker, not entirely human, as his eyes are vampire-like, apparently clouded yet sinisterly bright. The bride recalls the eyes of the mesmeriser at the Lakes, which were exactly like those of the man “with the nose” now stalking her. She explains to her husband that the man does not need to move a finger to lure her, his gaze alone commands her to do as he pleases. The mesmeric connection that he establishes with her plunges the girl into somnambulism, although she can perceive her body moving forward towards the stalker. The bride has more visions of her “nightmare” even during the day, but she alone can see the figure, her husband never does. The young man decides to temporarily interrupt the honeymoon for personal reasons concerning his father’s finances: he does not comprehend why his wife is so terrified at the idea of being left alone, and he does not care to after all, for he leaves convinced that she is just being fanciful. Upon his return, he will find her gone: a tall, dark gentlemen with a peculiar nose and singular eyes, had come for the bride, and they had left together on a carriage. The dark complexion of the mesmeriser is proof of both criminality and foreign nationality, a consideration reminding of the fear for reverse colonialism that haunted Victorians at the end of the century.

Broughton’s position on the colonised people was made quite clear in ‘Behold! It Was a Dream’, where the antagonist is an Irish murderer, therefore, it is possible that she embodied this anxiety in the figure of the mesmeriser. Wynne found the same scheme in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, arguing that mesmerism threatens the mind’s

⁸⁵³www.arthistoryarchive.com. Upon his death, Wiertz donated his canvases to the State that established the museum where his works can be seen today. So, the tale is certainly set after 1865, the year of Wiertz’s death.

authority and exposes the limitations of conventional science,⁸⁵⁴ which alludes to the subjugation of all that is British, its culture and power, contaminated by reverse colonisers.

A different kind of oneiric experience is presented in Mary Molesworth's 'Witnessed by Two', namely a case of lucid dream. The protagonist is Anne, recently widowed, who is in love with Kenneth Graham, a major who is about to embark headed to India. He returns her feelings, although neither of them is capable of admitting them. Sometime after Kenneth's departure, Anne's attendant, Ambrose, announces the presence of Major Graham in the library, though nobody understands when nor how he had come in. Anne finds the man in the exact same spot where he was standing the night they parted ways, and his aspect is quite strange as an anxious Ambrose had also noticed:

There he stood – on the hearthrug as she had last seen him in that room. But he did not seem to hear her come in, for he made no movement towards her; he did not even turn his head in her direction [...] She had held out her hand as she hurried towards him, but he did not seem to see it. He stood there still, without moving, his face slightly turned away, till she was close beside him [...] Then at last he slowly turned his head and looked at her with a strange, half-wistful anxiety in his eyes – he gazed at her as if his very soul were in that gaze, and lifting his right hand, gently laid it on her shoulder as he had done the evening he had bidden her farewell. She did not shrink from his touch, but strange to say it, she did not feel it, and some indefinable instinct made her turn her eyes away from his and glance at her shoulder. But even as she did so she saw that his hand was no longer there, and with a thrill of fear she exclaimed again, "Speak, Kenneth, speak to me!" The words fell on empty air. There was no Kenneth beside her. She was standing on the hearthrug alone.⁸⁵⁵

This visit from Graham plunges Anne into a pit of despair, for she convinces herself that he must be dead, which is corroborated by the news that she reads a few days later: a certain Major R. R. Graham has died on the same ship that is carrying Kenneth

⁸⁵⁴Catherine Wynne, «Mesmeric Exorcism, Idolatrous Beliefs, and Bloody Rituals: Mesmerism, Catholicism, and Second Sight in Bram Stoker's Fiction», *Victorian Review* 26, no. 1 (2000), p. 44.

⁸⁵⁵Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 62-64.

to India. Ambrose notices the misspelling of his initials, “R. R.” instead of “K. R.”, which Anne explains as a simple printing error. However, another turn of events occurs a few days later when Anne receives a letter from Kenneth himself, who informs her that another Major Graham had died onboard and that, fearing that the similar initials might induce errors in the national reports, and consequently distress Anne, he had preferred to warn her, also adding that he is coming home. When they finally meet again, Graham recalls the strange episode of his ghostly appearance:

Well, Anne, when I fell asleep that afternoon, I at once began dreaming about you. I had been thinking about you a great deal, constantly, almost, ever since we set sail [...] It came into my head just as I was falling asleep that I would write to you from the Cape, and tell you of Graham’s death to avoid any mistaken report, and that I might in my letter somehow feel my way a little. This was all in my mind, and as I fell asleep it got confused so that I did not know afterwards clearly where to separate it from my dream [...] I fancied myself here – rushing upstairs to the library in my haste to see you – to tell you I was not dead, and to ask you if you would have cared much had it been so. I saw all the scene [...] But the words would not come, and the agony seemed to awake me.⁸⁵⁶

Kenneth’s dream can be seen as an instance of lucid dream, yet there is a supernatural component in this episode given by the actual, physical projection of his soul into a faraway physical environment, seen by two different people, caused by Graham’s intense eagerness to see Anne. Lucid dreams are episodes in which dreamers are fully aware that they are dreaming and may even control, in part, the space and characters of the dream. They are basically “conscious” dreams. Centuries of studies on this phenomenon led to recent hypotheses regarding their mechanisms: the dreamer recognises that he is dreaming, and then remains conscious enough to separate the oneiric experience from reality and remember that it is a dream. In the tale, we see that Kenneth confuses reality and dream, but he manages somehow to walk outside the boundaries of his physical body while imagining to be doing so: apparently, it is his will that allows him to wander this intermediate state. Moreover, he is capable, though faintly, of communication with Anne: this is a trait that has been

⁸⁵⁶Molesworth, *Four Ghost Stories*, pp. 82-83.

identified in lucid dreamers, who sometimes seem capable of real-time two-way communication with awake interlocutors, but we should not forget that Kenneth and Anne are distant in space.

A similar experience is narrated in Riddell's 'Sandy the Tinker', where the dreamer is not capable of defining whether he is dreaming or hallucinating because he feels to be physically moving within the oneiric events. The narrator, Mr. Morison, receives a letter from Edward Crawley, the minister at Dendeldy, Scotland, where the man urges his addressee to make haste and reach him or he «shall go out of [his] senses.»⁸⁵⁷ The sender does not specify the reason of his discomfort, but Morison wrongfully suspects that he is in a difficult economic position, so that he is initially bothered when the minister starts talking about dreams:

It was not a dream – it was a vision; no, I don't mean a vision – I can't tell you what it was; but nothing I ever went through in actual life was half so real, and I have bound myself to go through it all again. There is no hope for me, Mr. Morison. I sit before you a lost creature, the most miserable man on the face of the whole earth.⁸⁵⁸

The priest exhibits a certain agitation while he reports the dream, and speaks as if he were sentenced to death for he feels haunted, stalked by the Devil:

I found myself walking on a beautiful summer's evening beside the River Deldy [...] It was a lovely evening and I never thought the earth had looked so beautiful before. I walked on and on, till I came to that point where, as you may perhaps remember, the path, growing very narrow, winds round the base of a great crag, and leads the wayfarer suddenly into a little green amphitheatre, bounded on one side by the river, and on the other by the rocks, that rise in places sheer to a height of a hundred feet or more.⁸⁵⁹

The initial setting of the dream is a natural oasis in the tranquillity of a clear summer evening, a comforting view provoking soothing sensations that are, however,

⁸⁵⁷Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 118-119.

⁸⁵⁸Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 121.

⁸⁵⁹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 122.

counteracted by the presence of a crag and a quite majestic rocky face; these are instances of the sublime that infiltrate into the peaceful environment and, metaphorically, into the dreamer's subconscious. Moreover, there is a waterfall nearby formed by the junction of three streams, therefore the jet is so powerful that it provokes roaring sounds: the waterfall falls into a basin ominously known as the Witches' Cauldron, an evocative name that forewarns about the nightmarish turn of the dream. Crawley recognised the spot in his dream because he used to go there as a child. He remembers the sensations of solitude that those places used to inspire; the pleasant recollection of his childhood is contrasted, like the beautiful summer landscape, with the sublime crags of otherworldly threats. The contemplation of that beautiful yet unsettling scenery is interrupted by a vision:

My astonishment was great, to see a man standing in the pathway, with a drawn sword in his hand. He did not stir as I drew near, so I stepped aside on the grass. Instantly he barred my way [...] He was like a god. Majesty and power were written on every feature, were expressed in every gesture. But, oh, the awful scorn of his smile, the contempt with which he regarded me! The beams of the setting sun fell full upon him, and seemed to bring out, as in letters of fire, the wickedness and terrible beauty of his face.⁸⁶⁰

The figure echoes the biblical fallen angel Satan, the most handsome of God's angels, banished from Heaven and turned into the lord of the infernal regions. Crawley identifies the figure with the Evil One, and as soon as the name is pronounced it resounds everywhere around the satanic figure and the minister, causing an overwhelming darkness to cover everything but the spot where the conversation occurs, until

The darkness seemed in part to clear away and we walked side by side across the grass in the twilight, straight up to the bare black wall of rock. With the hilt of his sword he struck a heavy blow, and the solid rock opened as though it were a door. We passed through and it closed behind us with a tremendous clang – yes, it closed behind us.⁸⁶¹

⁸⁶⁰Riddell, *Weird Stories*, pp. 123-124.

⁸⁶¹Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 124.

At this point of the narration, a blast of wind thrusts the windows open and blows out the candles, while the fire in the hearth «go[es] roaring up the chimney.»⁸⁶² This manifestation appears as the supernatural provocation of natural elements, as if the devilish creature of the dream, Satan or one of his demons, were reminding Crawling that he can seek help, but this will not save him. In this dreadful atmosphere, the minister proceeds in his report, and explains that he continuously sees images of unimaginable suffering: scenes from Hell inhabit the priest's mind, as he witnesses the various punishments inflicted upon sinners, whose cries, curses, weeping, and blasphemies haunt his imagination.

Eventually, "Satan" grants the man permission to leave, but if he wishes to live longer, he must return to him the following Wednesday to stay permanently or send a substitute in his stead. Edward Crawley is torn between his Christian morals, meaning his role as minister and protector of his community, and the fear of the eternal punishment awaiting him. Instead of proving his moral integrity, thus sacrificing his life in the name of Christian love and fraternity, Edward chooses his substitute amongst his parishioners, one Sandy the Tinker, whom he deems fit to be thrown into Hell because of his drinking habits. Religion teaches that only God can judge his children, yet Edward claims the right to be the judge of another soul; this behaviour unveils the flaws of the priest's Christian morals, so distorted that he is ready to sacrifice a life in the selfish attempt to save himself.

The variety of sins and their relative punishments signal the degeneracy of humanity, and it is probably for this reason that the good religious minister⁸⁶³ was chosen as the one to be sacrificed, his good soul the means to cleanse the world from sin. Edward's dream recalls the revelatory dreams of Scrooge in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843).⁸⁶⁴ The demon visits Edward to show him what he is destined to, like the Ghost of Christmas future does to Ebenezer Scrooge; but while Scrooge is called to transform himself into a better human being, the minister is not offered the

⁸⁶²Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 124.

⁸⁶³Crawley is only said to be a little solitary and alienated from his community at times, sometimes refusing to meet people who asked for his advice. Riddell, *Weird Stories*, p. 118.

⁸⁶⁴Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol. A Ghost Story of Christmas* (Auckland, NZ: The Floating Press, 2009).

same chance, he is simply placed before a choice: his life or another's. There is a time before the encounter with the Evil One and the appointed time for Edward's demise in which the minister starts to feel ashamed of his choice, he is torn between saving his life and the price that this might cost to an innocent soul. The tormented mind of the minister suffers a powerful blow during his last mass, for the drunkard he had judged worthy of Hell participates in the ceremony, all cleaned up and sober. The sight strikes Edward, who collapses; he realises that even a lowlife like Sandy can become a decent individual, while he had quickly evaluated himself as worthier than the poor man because socially valuable in his role of spiritual guide. Upon seeing the new version of Sandy enter the church, Edward cries and falls into a state of unconsciousness from which he will awake the morning after his appointment with the Devil. Instead of Crawley's, it is eventually Sandy the Tinker's the soul claimed by the Evil One: in fact, while Edward is recovering in bed, unconscious, Sandy walks to the Witches' Cauldron and falls down the rocky side of the mountain. His death occurs at the time and in the place where Edward was supposed to be taken by Satan, but the reader is left with no explanation as to whether this is a mere coincidence, or the minister managed to create a mesmeric connection with the poor victim and send him there. The open finale leads to speculations as to the death of Sandy, also considering that Edward wakes up smiling, as if he knew what had happened and that he had been spared. The priest immediately resigns and leaves as a missionary, a further sign that he felt the need to be purged and redeemed. Edward, unlike Scrooge, does not change into a better individual, he simply masks his faulty morals, his lack of courage and responsibility under the veil of the good missionary.

Other dreams are narrated throughout the corpus, although these have a lesser impact on the structure of the plots: in Oliphant's 'Old Lady Mary', young Mary struggles in her sleep to tell her dead benefactor that she is satisfied with how Old Mary had treated her and that she should not worry about not having written a will. Young Mary feels sorry for not being able to personally interact with her godmother, for being unable to comfort her, afraid that Old Mary might be suffering for having left her girl destitute.⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶⁵Oliphant, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 156-157.

In Braddon's 'Sir Hanbury's Request', Hanbury dreams of past times, when the city of Loomborough was free from the pollution brought along by industrialization,⁸⁶⁶ whereas in 'The Ghost's Name', the miasmas caused by the cesspool retrieved below the room's floor cause the illness that kills the children who reside in the room and induces hallucinations; that is why the place is called the «room of dreadful dreams.»⁸⁶⁷ Similarly, the recurrent use of chloroform and the blood transfusions lead young Bella to hallucinate in 'Good Lady Ducayne'.

3.2.2 Mental Instabilities

Drawing from Lemoine,⁸⁶⁸ Gulliver wrote that hallucinations occur when the mind «assigns to an external object a sensation produced by an internal disturbance»:⁸⁶⁹ in the case of Braddon's tales mentioned above, this is caused by the illness and by the abuse of chloroform and the blood draining. Gulliver argued that

Hallucinations are by no means confined [...] to the sense of sight. It is a well-known fact that, after the amputation of a limb, the patient continually refers the pain he suffers to the amputated part. In some cases the sensation has been so strong that the diseased member has been actually dug up to see if something was not torturing it. From all of which it appears that error is not peculiar to sleep, any more than reasonableness is peculiar to our waking states. We do not mean to deny that wildness and misrule are more common at night than during the day. But we maintain that this is for the very reason that the mind obeys the same laws in sleep as in wakefulness. Accustomed to accept as trustworthy the testimony of the senses, it continues to do so even in sleep; utterly unconscious and without warning of the somnolent condition of the bodily organism.⁸⁷⁰

⁸⁶⁶Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 158-161.

⁸⁶⁷Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 365.

⁸⁶⁸Albert Lemoine was a nineteenth-century French psychiatrist who studied extensively the sleeping condition and its related disorders. One of his most important works is *Du Sommeil du point de vue physiologique and psychologique* (Paris: Baillière, 1855), where he discussed for instance the state of consciousness and the state of the soul during the sleeping phases, the difference between dreaming and thinking, or somnambulism as either a natural or an artificial condition.

⁸⁶⁹Gulliver, «The Psychology of Dreams», p. 215.

⁸⁷⁰Gulliver, «The Psychology of Dreams», p. 213.

Later studies have proved that hallucinations can involve all senses, not sight alone, and that they are close to real perceptions, vivid, occurring in the absence of any external stimulus; they are very common symptoms of mental disturbances like schizophrenia. Victorians widely explored the world of the mind, and subjects such as «moral insanity, hereditary insanity, and hysteria» allowed to frame women's attitudes that were considered deviant.⁸⁷¹ In the nineteenth century, madness was largely regarded as a «female malady.»⁸⁷² Showalter argued that starting from the mid-century, treatment of mental illness in asylums became softened thanks to the abolition of physical restraints and the use of force. In fact, in 1845 the Lunatic Act was promulgated, advocating better life conditions for all mentally disabled patients even if destitute. Physicians aimed to create a home-like therapeutic environment where patients could feel at ease and not scared, while promoting a type of management that relied on the development of self-control, self-respect, patience, and industry.⁸⁷³ Apparently, this historical moment in the treatment of mental malady coincided with an increase in the numbers of women affected by mental disorders, while men confined for such disturbances used to be in greater numbers before:⁸⁷⁴

As rapidly as they were built, new asylums filled to overflowing and had to be expanded [...] With this enormous expansion of the asylum population, sex ratios also changed. According to the census of 1871, for every 1000 male lunatics, there were 1182 female lunatics; for every 1000 male pauper lunatics, 242 females. By 1872, out of 58.640 certified lunatics in England and Wales, 31.822 were women. There were more female pauper inmates in county and borough asylums, in licensed houses, in workhouses, and

⁸⁷¹See Logan, *Sensational Deviance*.

⁸⁷²See Elaine Showalter, «Victorian Women and Insanity», *Victorian Studies* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1980), pp. 157-181.

⁸⁷³Showalter, «Victorian Women and Insanity», p. 158. See also Andrew Scull, *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors, and Madmen. The Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

⁸⁷⁴Showalter, «Victorian Women and Insanity», p. 160. Busfield contradicted the feminist perspective adopted by Showalter in the analysis of mental health in the Victorian Era. See Busfield, Joan, «The Female Malady? Men, Women and Madness in Nineteenth-Century Britain», *Sociology* 28, no. 1 (February 1994), pp. 259-277.

in single care. Men still predominated among private patients of all categories and in registered hospitals.⁸⁷⁵

Paupers were more likely to be considered mad because of their frail economic status, that is why their numbers increased four times between the mid-century and the 1890s, a condition that affected mainly women. The painting by Wiertz mentioned in the previous section⁸⁷⁶ gives a precise idea of the reasons why women suffered more than men when afflicted by misery: if a woman lacked food, she could produce nutrients neither for herself nor for a baby when she became pregnant, nor could she produce milk to feed the child.

Some asylum cases were really suffering from malnutrition; “lactational insanity”, for example, was chiefly encountered in mothers of large families who continued to nurse for long periods in order to save money and to prevent conception, and was caused by starvation and anemia. Asylum population also included many women who were senile, tubercular, epileptic, physically handicapped, mentally retarded, or otherwise unable to care for themselves.⁸⁷⁷

Hysteria and monomania were amongst the most frequent mental disorders from which Victorian women suffered. Generally, female patients were believed to be unable to heal from any mental disorder, so that they occupied asylums for longer periods, they were considered less capable of restraining themselves and were frequently reported for obscenity and abusive behaviours.⁸⁷⁸ Women’s mental health was still discussed, despite all the improvements that the end of the century brought, in terms of inferiority, also biological: for example, menstruation was deemed a cause of insanity in females, a mark of their predisposition to insanity which started to manifest at puberty.⁸⁷⁹

⁸⁷⁵Showalter, «Victorian Women and Insanity», pp. 160-161. She drew the statistics from John Arlidge, *On the State of Lunacy and the Legal Provision for the Insane* (London: Churchill, 1859), p. 102.

⁸⁷⁶Showalter, «Victorian Women and Insanity», pp. 160-161.

⁸⁷⁷Showalter, «Victorian Women and Insanity», p. 162.

⁸⁷⁸Showalter, «Victorian Women and Insanity», pp. 162-167.

⁸⁷⁹Showalter, «Victorian Women and Insanity», pp. 171, 177.

The asylum reforms from mid-century on contributed to the popularisation of mental disorders, which also penetrated the literary world. Like dreams, mental illnesses offered the chance to investigate a darker side of the human mind, obscure and often uncontrollable, a fertile field for the celebration of the uncanny. Many Victorian authors experienced madness first-hand by visiting asylums: for instance, Charles Dickens visited several asylums across Britain and America, Bulwer-Lytton had his own wife institutionalised for madness, and Thackeray's wife became insane after the birth of their third child. The representation of Mrs Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)⁸⁸⁰ is that of a beast, a hyena and even a vampire, as her husband defines her; she is clearly classified as "other", as something rather than someone, thus she is relegated to the attic because the integrity and respectability of the house has to be maintained with her out of sight.

Charles Dickens offered one of the major representations of mental illness in literature through the instable character of Miss Havisham from *Great Expectations*.⁸⁸¹ The woman was abandoned by her fiancé right before their marriage in her youth, and since that day, she has dressed in her wedding gown, missing one shoe, with the wedding cake left rotting on the table, living a life of self-inflicted solitude in her now dilapidated house. Dickens wrote extensively of madness in his *Household Words*, and exploited insanity as a recurrent theme in many of his works, from the *Pickwick Papers* (1837)⁸⁸² to *David Copperfield* (1850)⁸⁸³ and *Little Dorrit* (1857).⁸⁸⁴ Mary Elizabeth Braddon treated insanity in her most famous work, the novel *Lady Audley's Secret*, where Lady Audley herself is convicted in the Belgian asylum at Villebrumeuse towards the end of the text. Tomaiuolo argued that

In Braddon's novel, the 'peaceful' retreat of the British country house where Lady Audley lives looks strikingly similar to the Belgian asylum of Villebrumeuse in which

⁸⁸⁰Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: HarperCollins, 2010).

⁸⁸¹See Dickens, *Great Expectations*.

⁸⁸²Charles Dickens, *Pickwick Papers; Or, the Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (Auckland, NZ: The Floating Press, 2009).

⁸⁸³Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (London: Penguin Books, 1997).

⁸⁸⁴Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. Helen Small and Stephen Wall (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

she will be secluded. This provocative association emerges between the lines of the final dialogue between Lady Audley and Robert, with the latter comparing the madhouse to a convent.⁸⁸⁵

The comparison is appropriate if we consider the condition of women as angels of the house, relegated to the domestic space in the service of the family, in both cases victims of submission on the part of men or authorities considered to be above them.

Lady Audley's confinement in the Belgian asylum represents a victory for the representatives of middle-class patriarchal power, namely professionals such as Dr Mosgrave, alienist Dr Val and lawyer Robert Audley. But, despite their actions, Lady Audley's rebellion will survive the memory of her defeat [...] [It] is the sign of the precarious condition of Victorian women, left at the mercy of middle-class professional man who acted as their confessors, judges and executioners. Indeed, Braddon's novel was written when the Madhouse Act (1828), according to which a single certificate signed by two medical men sufficed to lock up a private patient in an asylum, still exerted a form of violent coercion.⁸⁸⁶

Mulvey-Roberts considered more literary characters affected by mental disorders, and connected them to the figure of Jean-Martin Charcot:

Gothic heroines presenting symptoms of hysteria include Catherine Earnshaw in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Lucy Westenra in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Stoker's contemporary and Freud's mentor, Jean-Martin Charcot, treated hysterics at his Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, which provided him with a kind of living museum of pathology. Under his orchestration, they 'performed' their illnesses in a lecture theatre for an audience of doctors and medical students. The body of the hysteric was believed to be so sensitive that it was susceptible to dermatographism or skin-writing by doctors and, around 1893, one woman was photographed, not entirely untypically, with the word 'SATAN' inscribed upon her back (Beizer 1994: 25), in what can be seen as a modern form of witch-pricking. According to Beizer, 'Doctors fascinated by

⁸⁸⁵Tomaiuolo, *In Lady Audley's Shadow*, p. 27.

⁸⁸⁶Tomaiuolo, *In Lady Audley's Shadow*, p. 31.

dermographism often used the sign of the devil in their writing experiments' (1994: 25).⁸⁸⁷

Accounts about hysteric patients filled newspapers columns as they were turned into entertaining phenomena by the press and by doctors themselves, including Charcot, who often organised “open days” at Salpêtrière and put patients on display, while the public craved to see them act out of their malady’s symptoms. Hysteria was made a spectacle of, and the stalls areas were always crowded by scientists, writers, mere curious from middle class and nobility, and more.⁸⁸⁸

Like the Salpêtrière hospital, the London Bethlem Royal Hospital, known as Bedlam, was a famous psychiatric institution in the nineteenth century. Bedlam was originally founded in 1247 by the Italian Bishop Goffredo de Prefetti, who aimed to raise money for the Crusades through charity to the hospital. When exactly this hospital was turned into a psychiatric institution is unclear, but mentally ill patients started to overflow the facility by the seventeenth century. Bedlam is still known today as the hospital “of horrors” for the treatments inflicted upon the patients, in particular since the placement of James Monro as chief physician in 1728. The patients were beaten, starved, subjected to cruel treatments such as blisters, bloodletting, and hydrotherapy, prolonged baths in cold water meant to calm down the schizophrenic behaviours; another torturous kind of treatment was rotational therapy, in which patients were strapped on a chair suspended from the ceiling and made to spin around for minutes: this was meant to induce vomiting, through which ailments could be expelled from the body. The asylum’s patients eventually became an attraction for the

⁸⁸⁷Mulvey-Roberts, *Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Poisoned Prose*, pp- 110-111. See Janet L. Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies. Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁸⁸⁸Ari Hustvedt, *Medical Muses. Hysteria in 19th Century Paris* (New York City, NY: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 3. Charcot began working at the Salpêtrière as chief of medical services in the first half of the 1860s. He provided the Salpêtrière with laboratories and teaching rooms, turning a structure renowned as a prison for women in poor economic and health conditions (but also prostitutes, criminals, witches, etc.) into a modern hospital equipped with the newest technologies. Hustvedt, *Medical Muses*, pp. 14-16. See also John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

wealthiest European families, who even organised trips to visit the hospital: these “freak shows” were promoted because they granted funds to the institutions that, being public, had to rely on donations to survive.⁸⁸⁹

Before Charcot engaged in studying the symptoms and progress of hysteria, a certain confusion reigned in the field as to manifestations of hysteric behaviours and their treatment. Charcot revolutionised the approach to this mental disorder through his “anatomy-clinical” method: it aimed at studying the symptoms of mental illness also through the analysis of tissues after a patient died, to investigate the lesions left by the malady on the body. In doing so, he managed to avoid experimenting on animals while reaching a more precise classification of mental disorders, grouping together those with similar symptoms but paying attention to define their different nature.⁸⁹⁰ He was even admired by Freud, whose psychoanalytical studies had yet to be developed. Charcot devised an archetypical model of hysteric behaviour that, however, could vary according to each patient’s condition:

He legitimized the disease by defining it as an inherited neurological disorder, not madness or malingering. He classified its many sensory deficits, such as hemianesthesia, or loss of feeling on one side of the body, and other sensory disturbances as hysterical ‘stigmata’ [...] “The hysteric always seems to be outside the rule: sometimes her organs behave in an exaggerated way, sometimes, to the contrary, her functions are slowed to the point of being completely suppressed.” A hysteric, he noted, might suffer from anesthesia and hypersensitivity [...] from both depressed *and* heightened intellectual functions, from insomnia *and* “attacks of sleep”. They also collapsed in fits of violent seizures.⁸⁹¹

Charcot further developed his studies by “de-gendering” hysteria, indicating that it is not a female malady alone, but men and women altogether can suffer from this universal disease, where the action of emotions and suggestions plays an important role. Although Charcot’s theories were dismantled after his death, they remained the

⁸⁸⁹See The Lineup, «Bedlam: The Horros of London’s Most Notorious Insane Asylum», www.huffpost.com, and Natasha Ishak, ed. Jaelyn Anglis, «Bedlam: Europe’s “Palace of Chaos” that Turned into a Circus Show», www.allthatsinteresting.com.

⁸⁹⁰Hustvedt, *Medical Muses*, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁹¹Hustvedt, *Medical Muses*, pp. 12-13.

basis on which his contemporaries and posterity worked to increase knowledge on this delicate mental disorder.⁸⁹² Charcot's modernity stood in his understanding that hysteria is no mental illness at all, but a neurological disorder that could be cured, therefore he allowed his female, hysteric patients to roam rather freely the Salpêtrière's corridors; these patients could also engage in many entertaining activities, such as art classes, gymnasium classes, photography laboratories and many more.⁸⁹³ He put into practice the theory around which phrenologists and physiognomists battled themselves: is it possible to correct criminal or deranged behaviours by exercising the mind? According to Charcot, this certainly helped and favoured improvement.

This excursus on hysteria is useful to comprehend the extent to which this disease was central to medical practice in the nineteenth century, and how it spread beyond the borders of hospitals like Bedlam in London and the Salpêtrière in Paris to become a popular topic of discussion, literary and artistic production. The corpus indeed presents instances of characters that fall prey to mental instability as a consequence of external factors that lead to strong fits of emotions. The connection between Gothic literature and mental illness is indeed very strong, because the Gothic as a genre is suitable for the representation of traumatic events, which generate unease, terror, and horror as well. Gothic figures like the ghost can be exploited to represent tropes like

⁸⁹²«Charcot died without finding a lesion for hysteria. Without an etiology, hysteria remained ungrounded, and the diagnosis expanded to accommodate virtually any pathological breakdown of bodily function that could not be attributed to an organic source. Charcot did acknowledge the role of suggestions and emotions in the production of hysterical symptoms, and, by doing so, he paved the way for a psychogenic model of the disease. Two years after Charcot died, Freud claimed that hysterics were suffering not for a lesion in their nervous system but from repressed memories and ideas [...] The medical professionals who came after Freud responded much like the professionals who survived Charcot: they dismantled the diagnosis and then discarded it altogether. Jacques Lacan noted the state of things in a playful lament: "Where are the hysterics of former times, those magnificent women...?"» Hustvedt, *Medical Muses*, p. 30. See also Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studien über Hysterie* (Leipzig and Wien: Franz Deuticke, 1895); Jacques Lacan, *On the Disappearance of Hysteria*, cited in Mark S. Micale, «On the "Disappearance" of Hysteria: A Study in the Clinical Deconstruction of a Diagnosis», *Isis* 84, no. 3 (September 1993), p. 489.

⁸⁹³Hustvedt, *Medical Muses*: this freedom of movement often led to encounters between physicians and patients who fell in love with each other, pp. 46-47.

unfinished business in the living world and, therefore, impossibility to move on, or they can express traumas that haunts the victim possibly for life: phantoms stand as a representation of real “ghosts”, or negative experiences that do not allow those who suffered from them to elaborate for a long time, until they find a way to cope and go on living, just like some of the spectres from the corpus learn to let go of earthly life. This is reinforced by the fact that ghosts themselves originate from traumatic, often violent events, that lead to a premature death. Avery Gordon credited psychoanalysis with being the sole human science that has taken the theme of hauntings seriously, but she still recognised that psychoanalytic discussions of haunting such as Freud’s spring from the ideas of unconsciousness and repression. Stephen Frosh moved from Gordon’s work and Freud’s theories to discuss the exchanges between haunting and psychoanalysis, declaring that

Whilst psychoanalysis might be dedicated to the laying of these disagreeable ghosts, it is also the case that, as a theory and as a practice, it would not exist without them [...] If the truth is spectral, then there is something true about what has been repressed, lost, maybe murdered too. These lost truths keep coming back to haunt us, and demand recompense. They are unwanted apparitions, truths troubling us; we often wish they would let us alone. Yet as well as troubling the calmness which we seek [...] these spectral truths give psychic life its depths.⁸⁹⁴

So, there is a clear correlation between the representation of the spectral in Gothic fiction and that of the mysterious world of the mind and psychic analysis, a joint that was widely exploited by Victorian authors, as this corpus suggests. For instance, we are already acquainted with Mrs Graham from Florence Marryat’s ‘Sent to His Death!’, who displays some of the symptoms of hysteria: the woman suffers from violent attacks of uncontrolled bodily seizures that keep her alert at night, causing her to hallucinate and to physically react to her visions, for instance by clapping her hands before her eyes and screaming.⁸⁹⁵ The nurse alternates moments of depression during the day, where she acts as if anaesthetised, with a fixed, frightful gaze, mechanically

⁸⁹⁴Stephen Frosh, «Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmission», *American Imago*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (Summer 2012), pp. 246-247.

⁸⁹⁵Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, p. 259.

reacting to the needs of the child whom she is nursing. Insomnia, accompanied by somnambulism, makes the girl roam the mansion at night, when her emotions reach their height and are released only to be suppressed by day. Mrs Graham is described as pale, her skin as white and smooth as wax, which is one of the characteristics that Lombroso attributed to hysterics.⁸⁹⁶ On a psychological level, in his rudimentary analysis of hysteria based on the observation of criminals, Lombroso recognised a series of behaviours ascribable to hysteria, in particular variability of mood, «the subject passes with extraordinary rapidity from laughter to tears»,⁸⁹⁷ and the insistence on fixed ideas, which in Mrs Graham's case is the obsession for her husband and child's death. Lombroso theorised that hysteric patient could also suffer from melancholia, thus depressive episodes as described also by Charcot, or monomaniacal delirium,⁸⁹⁸ the obsession or fixation for a specific emotion or idea.⁸⁹⁹

Florence Marryat was particularly interested in medicine and sciences as testified to by a number of her works: apart from the short stories mentioned above, an example is her novel *Nelly Brooke* (1868),⁹⁰⁰ a sensation fiction that includes themes such as domestic violence, alcoholism, inheritance scandals, deaths and a clandestine passion experienced by the heroine. This text presents a case of hysteria, but in this case, it is

⁸⁹⁶Lombroso-Ferrero, *Criminal Man*, p. 77. Lombroso believed hysteria to be a milder form of epilepsy, and much more common in women than men «in the ratio of twenty to one.» Lombroso-Ferrero, *Criminal Man*, p. 77.

⁸⁹⁷Lombroso-Ferrero, *Criminal Man*, p. 77.

⁸⁹⁸Lombroso-Ferrero, *Criminal Man*, p. 77. Lombroso considered monomaniacs a great danger for society: «monomaniacs, especially if subject to hallucinations, frequently manifest a tendency to homicide, either to escape imaginary persecutions or in obedience to equally imaginary injunctions, motives prompt them to commit special kinds of theft and arson.» Lombroso-Ferrero, *Criminal Man*, p. 77.

⁸⁹⁹Marryat presented another monomaniac character who, however, cannot be said to suffer from any mental disorder: Charlotte Cray, the homonymous protagonist of 'The Ghost of Charlotte Cray', an authoress who earns her living from her employment in the publishing industry. Charlotte is so jealous of her editor, Mr Braggett, that she becomes obsessed with the intention of seeing his wife. Upon her death, she keeps on visiting the publishing house hoping to see her rival; this eventually happens, so the spectre disappears from the world of the living. See Marryat, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 267-284.

⁹⁰⁰Florence Marryat, *Nelly Brooke. A Homely Story* (London: Richard Bentley, 1868).

a man the one suffering from it, namely Nelly's twin brother, Bertie. He also exerts a manipulative behaviour towards his sister in an attempt to control her love life, acting like the dominant male figure to counteract the weakness caused by his poor health conditions, which also cause him to demand excessive attention on the part of his sister.⁹⁰¹

The protagonist of Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant' is believed to be monomaniac by her husband, Hector, when she confesses to him that she sees a man in their castle's park every day: it is Hector's cousin André seeking revenge on his cousin for his murder by stalking Eveline. The woman's health rapidly declines as soon as she starts seeing the spirit, whom she does not recognise as such because she is unaware of her husband's past. She feels drained, slowly passing away, and becomes obsessed by the figure who «will not let [her] be at peace.»⁹⁰²

Two short narratives by Margaret Oliphant include episodes of hysteric behaviour on the part of a female character in 'The Library Window' and a male one in 'Earthbound'.

The female protagonist of 'The Library Window' is haunted by the man inhabiting the room behind the window opposite hers: the library window hides a family secret that condemns the girl to a life of yearning for a man who is no longer alive and, therefore, whom she cannot love. The narrator's fixation for the library window and the mysterious man is so strong that she cannot bear to move away from her observation spot. One night, a friend of her aunt invites them to his mansion for a party, meaning that she will not be able to see the stranger that night. The emotions provoked by this estrangement are an alternation of extreme agitation and composure perceived in a state of utter confusion.

Something, however, struck me strangely as we walked up the room. It was the air, rather fresh and strong, from an open window at the east end of the hall. How should there be a window there? I hardly saw what it meant for the first moment, but it blew in my face as if there was some meaning in it, and I felt very uneasy without seeing why. Then there was another thing that startled me. On that side of the wall which was to the street there

⁹⁰¹See Greta Depledge, «Conflicting Interpretations of Gender: Hysteria, Masculinity, and Marriage in Florence Marryat's "Nelly Brooke"», *Critical Survey* 23, no. 1 (2011), pp. 42-57.

⁹⁰²Braddon, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction*, pp. 32-34.

seemed no windows at all. A long line of bookcases filled it from end to end. I could not see what that meant either, but it confused me [...] If there were no windows on the wall to the street, where was my window? My heart, which had been jumping up and calming down again all the time, gave a great leap at this, as if it would have come out of me – but I did not know what it could mean.⁹⁰³

At this point, the girl can no longer distinguish her own words when she speaks, she grows paler and more and more disquieted. She has more visions, the frame containing the man's picture for instance, and eventually she experiences sensorial disturbances as she believes that her senses have left her.⁹⁰⁴ The climax comes in the form of a violent fit of excitement, during which she gives voice to her obsession for the library window by repeatedly screaming that she intends to find it and convulsively moving around the room. Consequently, she is treated as an invalid all night long.

“Where is my window? – where is my window?” I said. And all the time I was sure that I was in a dream, and these lights were all some theatrical illusion, and the people talking; and nothing real but the pale, pale, watching, lingering day standing by to wait until that foolish bubble should burst [...] I went to the picture again and looked at it without seeing it: and then I went across the room again, with some kind of wild thought that if I insisted I should find it. “My window – my window!” I said.⁹⁰⁵

The curious aspect of this passage is that the girl feels as if she were on a stage being watched by strangers, whose mingling voices she cannot distinguish: perhaps a figure for the theatrical display of lunatics in asylums as those organised by Charcot, which attracted crowds of people as if mental instability were a circus spectacle, «the theatre and the gas, and the people all in murmur and clang of talking [...] a reflection of those vulgar lights in the hall.»⁹⁰⁶ The protagonist of this tale feels indeed restrained by the social codes that she is supposed to follow as a middle-class woman of her age. Her window stands for her way out of a misogynistic world that aims to entrap her,

⁹⁰³Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 225.

⁹⁰⁴Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 226.

⁹⁰⁵Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, pp. 226-227.

⁹⁰⁶Oliphant, “*The Open Door*” and *Other Stories*, p. 228.

and when this possibility is taken from her, in the form of the party that she must attend away from home, she gives in to desperation that becomes hysteria.

A similar behaviour characterises Edmund in 'Earthbound'. Signs of Edmund's altered mental state become evident when one of Robert's children walks through Maud's spirit in the garden, obviously not seeing her. Anger rises inside of Edmund, who grabs Fred by the throat and flings him upon the ground, shouting insults in his direction, with a wild gaze in his eyes. Fred, bewildered by Edmund's absurd reaction, approaches him but the man once again violently thrusts him away, accusing him of having murdered Maud who, in the meantime, has disappeared. Fred tries to talk to him gently, but Edmund grabs him again by the throat, furious; then his mood abruptly changes, he lets go of the boy and starts crying. Edmund's fixation for Maud has reached its peak, for the man now jumps from one part to the other of the garden searching for the ghost, screaming "where is she", like the girl of the previous story who looked for her window desperately.⁹⁰⁷

Edmund tells the whole story to Sir Robert, who discloses details about Maud: the girl had died nearly a century before, there is a painting of her in the mansion dating back to 1777. At this point, Edmund is too startled to let any emotion transpire, he is calm and accepts to rest as Robert urges him to do. Nonetheless, Edmund's obsession for Maud does not diminish, he writes a letter to a non-specified addressee stating that taking care of her, even if she does not live anymore, would be more valuable to him than spending time with any other living human. He walks up to where the portrait hangs and weeps, gripped by a sense of loss. Maud appears to him one last time:

"Maud!" He threw himself at her feet again with a great cry. "Touch me – mark me, that I may be your always. If not in life, yet in death. Say we shall meet when I die" [...] "I will not let you go!" he cried: "I will not let you go!" and he seized her in his arms. Then Edmund's head was roaring of echoes, a clanging of noises, a blast as of great trumpets and music; and he knew no more.⁹⁰⁸

Edmund's raving stops, and he falls asleep when his strength and senses definitively fail. It will take him about a year to recover from the hysterical attacks he

⁹⁰⁷Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, pp. 64-65.

⁹⁰⁸Oliphant, "*The Open Door*" and *Other Stories*, pp. 64-65.

suffered from, a process that involved never returning to the country villa of the Beresfords again, to avoid suggestions and melancholic emotions.

Emotion is a key word when it comes to consider mental sciences in Victorian times. Matus's groundbreaking study on Victorian psychology in relation to fiction considers four different theories on unconscious mental processes, altered states of mind, memory science and the nature of emotions, themes that are also all recurrent in the brief analysis here presented. Her work is important in that it offers a new perspective on the Victorian approaches to psychology, especially shock (which will be later developed by Freud with his research on shell-shock victims), as a science that offered materialist explanations of the mind yet originating from debates on the spiritual explanation of material phenomena.⁹⁰⁹

The *OED* offers a huge number of shades of meaning of the term “shock”, but those related to emotions are in use since the Seventeenth-century:

A sudden jolt or onset of emotion which surprises, disturbs, or upsets a person or causes them to lose equilibrium (frequently with of); a feeling of astonishment or unpleasant surprise [...] A sudden unexpected event or experience which surprises, disturbs, or upsets a person, or causes them to lose equilibrium; something which causes a shock, a source of shock [...] The feeling of astonishment, disequilibrium, horror, or indignation caused by a startling or outrageous event or experience.⁹¹⁰

The social and political events that interested Victorians from the second half of Nineteenth century were paramount in changing the conception of the mind and mental illness or unease as discussed in this chapter, and the definition of shock changed as well. The *OED* reports a new medical interpretation of this “event” that first appeared on a British medical journal in August 1862:

⁹⁰⁹Jill Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 26. For more information on the Victorian mental sciences, see also Jill Matus, «Victorian Framings of Mind: Recent Work on Mid- Nineteenth Century Theories of the Unconscious, Memory, and Emotion», *Literature Compass*, vol. 4, no. 4 (June 2007), pp. 1257–76, and Suzy Anger, «The Victorian Mental Sciences», *Victorian Culture and Literature*, no. 46 (2018), pp. 275-287.

⁹¹⁰*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

Medicine. Originally: a medical condition described as occurring after physical or mental trauma and causing depression of the vital processes of the body, and often attributed to a dysfunctional or exhausted state of the nervous system. In later use: spec. a syndrome resulting from inadequate oxygenation of the tissues and organs of the body, resulting from a variety of causes such as impaired function of the heart and blood vessels, loss of blood, abnormal metabolic, inflammatory, or toxic states, etc., and potentially terminating in organ failure and death.⁹¹¹

A shock as experienced by Edmund in Oliphant's tale was caused by strong "mental" emotions, which Victorians deemed responsible for shock, along with surgical or physical factors.⁹¹² Matus defined shock as the ultimate exhaustion that appeared as a mystery to late Nineteenth-century scientists, because the physical conformation of the body does not change and there are no apparent organic modifications to the biological structure so as to justify such a mental crash, as it happens to Edmund and to the female protagonist of Oliphant's 'The Library Window' in particular. Victorians were especially concerned with self-possession, with the ability to control one's own mind, that is why they were interested in understanding the mechanisms of powerful emotions that led to shock, which they compared to the effects of hypnosis: in fact, both processes imply the alteration of the state of consciousness or even its loss, determining the loss of self-control and of power over one's own body; moreover, both shock and hypnosis might compromise mental health by generating a damaging strand of memories, thus causing a psychic wound,⁹¹³ as is the case of the mesmerised girl in Broughton's 'The Man with the Nose'. In her afterwords, Matus concluded that strong emotions, such as those depicted in the texts mentioned above, are comparable to trance states that, in her words, result in a «self that is dazed, stunned or numbed, transfixed, stupefied, amazed, fascinated, haunted, absent to itself, and even fragmented»,⁹¹⁴ a theme that has a now obvious affinity with the Gothic genre in literature.

⁹¹¹*Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com.

⁹¹²Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*, p. 67.

⁹¹³Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*, p. 69.

⁹¹⁴Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*, p. 185.

Chapter 3 takes into consideration the Gothic body, in particular the vampire body, represented in Marryat's 'Sent to His Death!', in the figure of Mrs Graham, and Braddon's 'Good Lady Ducayne', where old Lady Ducayne presents the traits of the vampire both in terms of physical appearance and in terms of taking the blood of young women to preserve her life. Section 3.1.2 discusses the impaired body in Braddon's 'Herself', where Violetta Hammond, suffering from a pulmonary disease, slowly withers until death, in Braddon's 'Dorothy's Rival', where Betty has to undergo a process of judgement on the part of the characters to be considered a human being rather than a monster, and, eventually, in Marryat's 'Lost in the Marshes', where the blind Lizzie finds her own way to assert her identity as a full woman in an environment that sees her as weak.

Sections 3.1.3 and 3.1.4 investigate the body of the "Other", namely the Irish and people of dark skin, classified as criminals by the xenophobic attitude of Britain and its claims of superiority over the Celtic race and the colonised people. The tales analysed here are Broughton's 'Behold! It Was a Dream' and 'The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth', and Braddon's 'Prince Ramji Rowdedow' and 'The Ghost's Name'. Finally, Riddell's Old Mrs Jones is a dark-skinned woman reminding of a man with a turban, an Indian, but whose name is Hebrew for "shade", a figure mid-way between the Indian retrograde and the Wandering Jew, with the dark traits and the black eyes of an assassin yet subjugated by an abusive husband.

Section 3.2 explores the unfathomable space of the mind, reflecting the nineteenth-century increasing interest in psychoanalytical studies: dreams and mental illnesses, with their altered logic, dominate this section as they play a significant role in tales like Broughton's 'Behold! It Was Dream', Riddell's 'Forewarned, Forearmed', 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk', 'Old Mrs Jones', all depicting different kinds of oneiric experience, including sleepwalking as in Marryat's 'Sent to His Death!'. Pseudo-scientific theories like animal magnetism and lucid dreams, which generated widespread interest in the Victorian Era, were exploited for instance by Broughton in 'The Man with the Nose' and Molesworth's 'Witnessed by Two' and Riddell's 'Sandy the Tinker' respectively.

The last section of this work, Section 3.2.2, briefly deals with hysterics: in the corpus, madness and mental disorders are never extensively treated, although some

stories present characters that fall victim of hysteria as a consequence of events that are emotionally devastating to them. The stories here analysed include Marryat's 'Sent to His Death!', Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant', Oliphant's 'The Library Window' and 'Earthbound', presenting a rare instance of hysteric male character.

Chapter 3 differs from the first two chapters in that it contemplates a wider variety of themes. The stories analysed give the opportunity to treat and explore, even if not thoroughly, interesting questions that enriched nineteenth-century debates, providing a different perspective on the idea of space as not merely physical and geographical.

Conclusions

This thesis is based on a corpus made up of forty-seven short stories by female authors of the Victorian Age, whose productions range from the 1860s to the 1890s. The writers included in this study are Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Margaret Oliphant, Florence Marryat, Charlotte Riddell, Rhoda Broughton, and Mary Molesworth. These women have been selected to create a rich corpus of tales produced both by well-known and extensively explored female authors and less studied ones, whose production proved equally interesting, nonetheless.

As explained in the *Introduction*, the choice fell on short stories because, as a literary genre, they still attract less criticism with respect to novels and even drama: all the authors investigated in this work were also novelists, and their long fiction is more widely discussed than their short fiction, especially in the case of Mary Elizabeth Braddon. The short story genre developed remarkably in the second half of the nineteenth century, and it allowed women to subtly discuss delicate topics that they were not supposed to deal with because they fell outside their conventional sphere of interest. Since criticism on the so called 'Female Gothic' is still a growing field of literary studies, it seemed intriguing to add a further contribution to it also by delving into less known authors such as Molesworth and Broughton.

Women were mainly relegated to the space of the house in the nineteenth century, as they were supposed to act as proper angels of the hearth. The house being the core of Victorian social gatherings, it was deemed to be a safe and sacred space, a shelter from the struggles of the outside world. It became the main setting of novels and short stories; however, home was no longer seen exclusively under a positive light; on the contrary, in Gothic and sensation fiction it became the place where rules of decorum were reversed. This proved true also with regards to the thesis' corpus: an analysis of the short stories demonstrated not only that the house was a common theme, but also that space on a general level, both internal and external, gave these authoresses the "space", indeed, to express themselves and their ideas under the veil of the fantastic and the *unheimlich*. The choice of the theme thus derived from this consideration: so, the discussion departed from the apparent safety of home and moved externally first

close to the house, to the garden, then to further geographical distances and, eventually, it examined the metaphorical space of the body and the mind.

Chapter 1 concentrates on the house as a Gothic space. The first part of the discussion concerns the drawing-room, the “most haunted” room in a house due to its role of centre of social gatherings. The drawing room represented the public façade of the family, thus it had to be decorated according to certain canons testifying to the good tastes of the household, and the ability of women to perform their duties as hosts. Even medieval settings, namely abbeys and monasteries borrowed from eighteenth-century Gothic fiction, are adapted to the codes of nineteenth-century sensation and Gothic fiction.

Houses also have ways of access, doors, and windows, to which a variety of metaphorical meanings are attributed, being liminal spaces on the border between the inside and the outside. Whether they are interpreted as means of escape from oppressing situations or as passages towards new experiences, an impulse towards the external world, both doors and windows are often exploited in the corpus, mainly by ghosts, to communicate with the living, as in Riddell’s ‘The Old House in Vauxhall Walk’ and Oliphant’s ‘The Library Window’.

Doors and windows represent passages from one status to another, acceptance or denial of a condition. Tales like Margaret Oliphant’s ‘The Open Door’, Florence Marryat’s ‘Sent to His Death!’, Rhoda Broughton’s ‘Poor Pretty Bobby’ and Mary Molesworth’s ‘The Story of the Rippling Train’ show that spirits and the living alike must all acquire full conscience of their status and role in life, equally accepting their fate and, consequently, coming to terms with what life has been and will be for all of them.

The third liminal space discussed in the first part of the study is the corridor: this is important because Victorian houses were devised to have different passages for the house tenants and their servants. The strife for a clear distinction between middle and working classes led to represent the hierarchy even architecturally inside buildings, a differentiation that falls apart in Riddell’s ‘Vauxhall Walk’.

Other items have been discussed, objects that populate Victorian middle-class houses, namely mirrors and portraits. Mirrors are exploited in some of the stories as expedients to lead their protagonists, and the reader, to the resolution of mysterious events. In the corpus, mirrors have thus several metaphorical meanings, but portraits too are key elements in the progression of plots. Their main function is that of recognition of a person's identity through resemblance, as in the case of Hector de Brissac in Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant', or through identification as in Oliphant's 'The Portrait'.

The stories analysed in this chapter exemplify the deviance from the idealised role of the house as sanctuary. They testify to the discomfort created by the consciousness that evil can originate from inside the safe space of "home", at the hand of trustworthy members of the family. The drawing-room represents women's management of the house on one side, and of the construction of an image of public respectability on the other. However, the corpus presents stories that defy the angel in the house trope, staging female characters that do not fulfil the Victorian requirements of decorum and delicacy, as in Charlotte Riddell's 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk' and Braddon's 'The Winning Sequence'. These stories spotlight a theme that is pervasive in the corpus: that of women who do not accept the chauvinist rules of Victorian society. Authoresses themselves exploited Gothic fiction's fantastic frame to comment upon this sexist tendency, denouncing the inequality that they experienced and their relegation to the domestic space. In their narratives, these authors, Riddell and Braddon above all, portray female characters who face this kind of repression in different ways, either by introducing into their drawing-rooms dissolute behaviours, like Miss Tynan and Sybilla, or as perpetrators or victims of crimes. The tensions between private and public sphere were epitomised in Victorian sensation and Gothic fiction by showing that the outside world is not the only threat that respectable families could face, aggravated by the presence of strong female characters who openly defy the male members of their families, further destabilising the domestic equilibrium as much as the social order: movements for female rights were the factual proof of a change in consciousness about the condition of women. Many female characters in the corpus claim their economic and social independence by resorting to illegal

actions, the sole means they perceive as available to them to overcome male superiority, eventually turning into negative characters.

Contrary to these ladies, other women achieve their economic independence, namely Riddell's Miss Tynan and Old Mrs Jones, both rich women but different in their management of their money. Both characters can be considered as symbols of the 'New Woman', a term that will only become popular in the late nineteenth century. They are independent ladies who can rely on their own economic strength, which they self-administer, killed by men who were not equally successful in economic terms. The killers force their masculine, physical force upon the ladies because brutality is the only means they have to defeat such powerful women. Murder, annihilation, is the culprit's solution to punish women who refuse to comply with the norm of the woman submitted to the husband's wishes, violence being the last resort of frustrated masculinity in the face of economically and intellectually superior women.

The last section concentrates on the distinction between "ghost", "guest", etymologically cognates, and "host". Since ghosts and the living occupy the same physical space in various narratives within the corpus, it appeared interesting to analyse whether spirits can be considered as guests in their former houses or hosts of the living that come to share that space. As we have seen, the phantoms seem to ask humans for help by means of different expedients, for instance the open doors in Riddell's 'Vauxhall Walk' and 'The Open Door', and they never appear as threats to the living. The only exception to this is in Braddon's 'The Dreaded Guest', where the guest is not a phantom but a human being, indulging in the entities' "unorthodox" methods to finally achieve the truth. Despite the limits of human comprehension, the living and the dead's interchanges can be interpreted as mutual assistance in a process of acceptance, understanding of the necessity to move on and, therefore, of amelioration of this condition.

Chapter 2 moves from the domestic space of Victorian houses to the external space of the mansions' gardens and parks, towards the wide-open spaces of the British countryside and the European tourist routes, namely the mountainous regions of Switzerland and Germany, the countryside of France and the heterogeneous Italian

landscapes. The ultimate destination is the Arctic, the great mysterious North that Victorians were so eager to conquer.

The first Section discusses the picturesqueness of British gardens and private parks, which become the setting of various tales in the corpus, a literary manifestation of the frenzy for landscape gardening that took over both the eighteenth and the nineteenth century and was infused with the picturesque aesthetic. These locations, outside of the house yet so closely linked to the domestic environment, either offer solace to the characters in the stories, as is the case of André de Brissac in Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant', or they reflect the mood of their dwellers, as in Oliphant's 'Earthbound'.

However, parks and gardens offer another possible interpretation directly connected with the nation and its imperialistic endeavours, detectable in Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant' and 'Sir Luke's Return', seemingly suggesting that an extreme had been reached in Britain's imperialistic policies, and that Otherness might threaten the Empire and the nation.

Gardens and parks often host ruins of ancient or derelict edifices that take on the role of vestiges: Victorians contemplated ruins as cultural items blended into nature, a "picturesque" activity that fuelled "sublime" feelings of horror and melancholy combined. Ruins are liminal features between the past and the present, between the artificial and the natural, means to re-create the past and give it new value.

The second part investigates the aesthetic principles of the picturesque and the sublime. The strong emotions perceived in the presence of sublime landscapes are perceivable also in the countryside when its pastoral beauty is menaced by the enactment of evil, so that it becomes the stage of tragedy as in Braddon's 'Herself' and 'Good Lady Ducayne', in Broughton's 'The Man with the Nose' and Molesworth's 'Unexplained'. Despite the presence of elements of the sublime aesthetic, these stories celebrate life in nature or pastoral life; the countryside or other uncontaminated natural landscapes are considered the best destinations to find solace and relaxation and for health improvement, far from the excessive noises and pollution of urban areas. Stories like Riddell's 'Nut-Bush Farm', Oliphant's 'The Open Door', Molesworth's 'Unexplained' and Oliphant's 'The Lady's Walk' promote a rural lifestyle lived following the rhythm of nature, where man adapts to its cycles. In some stories, the characters experience a return to their childhood by returning to the

countryside they had abandoned to initiate a prosperous career in the city, as is the case of Jack in Riddell's 'Nut-Bush Farm'.

Section 2.3 concerns two specific types of landscapes, completely different from one another: the marshes in Florence Marryat's 'Lost in the Marshes' and the Arctic in Braddon's 'My Wife's Promise'. The marshes are the type of habitat attributed to criminals and monsters because, since the origins of British literature, they are deemed as unsuitable for civilised life. The marshes are described as unfathomable depths, sublime in their vastness, opposed in the story to the fertile fields that grant the local population a variety of products for nourishment. The marshes eventually acquire a religious meaning: the sacrifice of the protagonist, Lizzie, for love of her fiancé.

As for the Arctic, it represents the British strife for the supremacy of the world as an imperial power. Feelings of loneliness and hopelessness fill the hearts of the explorers who find themselves before the immense vastness, thus sublime, of the white and icy polar lands. The protagonist is framed within the imperialistic discourse of Britain, characterised by male dominance, and he feels empowered by his "imperialistic" endeavours in the form of Arctic expeditions.

So, on one side the stories could convey a critique of the growing imperialistic claims of Britain, and on the other side, they praise European nature as a refuge from the unhealthy conditions of life in urban areas, implying a nostalgia for a past where the history and culture of Britain were valuable and not simply "past", and when nature and men co-existed harmoniously. In particular, this last statement led to the speculation in Section 2.4, which deals with possible ecocritical readings. The alienation caused by everyday life in the industrialised centres led many authors and intellectuals to interrogate themselves about the consequences of human action of the surrounding environment and on the place of humanity within the natural system. What emerges from the attempted analysis is the concern of the authors in the corpus for pollution of water (Oliphant's 'The Open Door' and Braddon's 'Prince Ramji Rowdedow'), air (Oliphant's 'The Beleaguered City' and Braddon's 'Sir Hanbury's Request') and acoustic pollution, caused by the often-unsustainable sounds provoked by traffic and machines at work (Riddell's 'Walnut-Tree House'). The brief conclusion to this equally brief analysis is that the stories in the corpus reflect a growing concern for the consequences of human activities shaped by the Industrial Revolution and the

start of mass production. As a consequence, they present natural landscapes, whose suffix, “-scape”, combines nature and escape, as a shelter.

Chapter 3 deals with the body and the mind.

Section 3.1 concentrates on the representation of various types of Gothic bodies in the corpus, starting with the vampire body. Various stories stage characters that, although they are not real vampires, share characteristics with these bloody creatures, namely Mrs Graham from Marryat’s ‘Sent to His Death!’ and, above all, Lady Ducayne from Braddon’s homonymous tale, whose physical aspect, analysed through the phrenological theories on the time, marks the woman as a criminal and an assassin. Lady Ducayne and other figures such as Miss Tynan and Old Mrs Jones are represented as evil antagonists, misers or murderers. Braddon draws from the pseudo-medical sciences that pervaded Victorian scientific and cultural debates, including studies on mesmerism, electricity, and blood transfusions. The unethical behaviour of Ducayne’s doctor questions the ethics of medical experimentations which became particularly relevant at the end of the century, when human and animal rights were discussed, and laws passed forbidding vivisection.

Moreover, Lady Ducayne is described as harpy-like, with fingers like claws to represent her voracity for lifeblood. This description places Ducayne near Riddell’s Old Mrs Jones and Miss Tynan, whose fingers like talons represent their greedy personality and egotism. Furthermore, Mrs Jones’s dark skin brands her as foreign, an Indian or a Jew, thus as necessarily wicked. These stories suggest a possible economic reading of their main characters: their hands shaped like talons are symbols of a distorted economic context where people act out of selfishness. Consequently, these women are targeted as evil while trying, in their difficult position of female inferiority, to build and establish a position for themselves in Victorian patriarchal society.

The economic discourse is also related to the imperialistic one, in particular to fears of “reverse colonisation” according to which the superior, white race of colonizers dreads an invasion on the part of the submitted peoples who might contaminate Britain with the stain of “otherness”, and this is especially true for the characters that are specifically depicted as “coloured”, in particular Old Mrs Jones.

The second type of body analysed is that of impaired characters: Victorian fiction was particularly concerned with issues of body fragmentation and identity; in the case of disability, the discourse was still mediated by pseudo-sciences like phrenology and physiology combined with medical advancement and proto-eugenic questions of hereditariness, a concern that informs Braddon's 'Herself'. Disability was dangerous because scary to Victorians: they wondered whether disabled individuals could have a role in society despite their either physical or cognitive limitations. Braddon answers positively to this question with the figure of poor Betty, a girl saved by the good heart of a priest and taught to work and be productive according to her deficit. Similarly, the protagonist of Marryat's 'Lost in the Marshes', the blind girl Lizzie, is completely autonomous and capable of performing house duties despite her blindness, which, on the contrary, becomes a means to assert her identity as a woman in her social circle.

Sections 3.1.3 and 3.1.4 investigate the body of the "Other", namely the Irish and people of dark skin. The Irish people are classified as criminals by the xenophobic attitude of Britain and its claims of superiority over the Celtic race, a question exemplified by Broughton's 'Behold! It Was a Dream', where the protagonist has dream visions pre-announcing a gruesome murder at the hand of an Irish labourer, a symptom of this racial phobia against Irish people.

The other side of the coin is represented by the people from the colonies, a topic that really captured the attention of late Victorians in a time where Britain's imperialistic rule was starting to crumble. Indians in particular were catalogued as uncivilised criminals, their physical traits classified according to phrenological and physiognomic rules. Braddon's 'Prince Ramji Rowdedow' presents a stereotypical Indian character mocked and turned into a sideshow; they are also sneaking trappers in Braddon's 'The Ghost's Name'. In Broughton's 'The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth', Indians are branded as members of the demi-monde, that is to say the uncivilised and possibly criminal underclass, incapable of adapting to the British respectable society.

All these tales share a crucial concern of late Victorian society: as trust in the power of the Empire staggered, and the rightfulness of its methods of control and extensive exploitations of lands and people started to be questioned more vocally, a fear for "reverse colonisation" rose. The Other becomes traumatising because unknown and,

at the same time, because it might cause Britain's demise through the contamination of British supremacy.

Section 3.2 explores the unfathomable space of the mind. The nineteenth century saw an increasing interest in psychoanalytical studies along with pseudo-sciences and actual medical improvements. Dreams and mental illnesses were largely studied but little was really known about them. Their altered logic worked in mysterious ways that perfectly suited the Gothic genre and sensation fiction, allowing authors to draw from the scientific theories and discussions of the time to penetrate the human mind and twist its logic to create the uncanny.

Section 3.2.1 analyses a number of different oneiric experiences that play a crucial role in the development of the tales, in that these passages contribute to structure the plot on one side, and to develop the characters' personality and identity throughout the narration. Broughton's 'Behold! It Was a Dream' and Riddell's 'Forewarned, Forearmed' include premonitory dreams that reveal future events; revelatory dreams occur in Riddell's 'The Old House in Vauxhall Walk', where Graham Coulton's visions have a triple effect, apart from articulating the narrative's rhythm: they reveal Miss Tynan's identity and the reasons that led to her murder, and as a consequence of this they contribute to solve a murder mystery and the question of Miss Tynan's vanished gold; last but not least, the dreams allow Graham to meditate on the importance of family links: Graham undergoes a transformation thanks to this experience and restores the relationship with his father. Similarly, in 'Old Mrs Jones', Mrs Jones's mysterious death is clarified by means of recurrent dreams. Riddell probably drew from the medical records of her age to describe the aspect and behaviour of sleepwalkers, as does Florence Marryat to portray Mrs Graham in 'Sent to His Death!', describing quite accurately typical hysteric personalities and cases of noctambulism: amongst the symptoms these authors portray are fits of passion turning into depression, insomnia, hallucinations.

In particular, hallucinations are also caused by states of induced mesmeric trance, according to another pseudo-scientific theory that was still, in part, circulating in the late Victorian Age: mesmerism. Broughton exploited the theories of animal magnetism to create one of the most disquieting figures in the corpus, the stalker of the narrator's wife in 'The Man with the Nose': fear is generated by the knowledge

that the mesmeriser can possess another human's mind with the strength of his will, or the intensity of his gaze as in this short story, manipulating it as he pleases. This tale can be interpreted also as another instance of the fear for "reverse colonization", in that "the man with the nose", typically depicted as non-British, penetrates the mind of the British girl with no difficulty, symbolising the possibility that Britain be taken over by those it previously controlled. The question of control is fundamental both when dealing with mesmerism, and all activity related to the mind, and theories of "reverse colonization": in fact, losing control implies being weak and conquerable, at the mercy of another's will.

The last section of this work, Section 3.2.2, briefly deals with hysterics: in the corpus, madness and mental disorders are never extensively treated, although some stories present characters that fall victim of hysteria as a consequence of events that are emotionally devastating. Mental disorders became a popular theme in the nineteenth century thanks to the "spectacularisation" of hysteric patients. Authors populated their fictional works with mentally instable characters, because folly and mental disorders opened the doors to the uncanny: like dreams, these themes allowed fiction writers and artists to fathom the dark recesses of the human mind. The authors here analysed make no exception: characters displaying symptoms of hysteria occur in Marryat's 'Sent to His Death!', Braddon's 'Eveline's Visitant', and Oliphant's 'The Library Window'. The Victorian house, the sole space granted to women, and asylums were indeed two different kinds of prison for female members of society in an age dominated by male authority. The greater number of female hysterical characters both in literature and actual clinical records testifies to the adequacy of this parallelism. All these characters have in common an obsession, a fixation for particular events or people that cause wild surges of emotions originating instability in their already scarred minds and hearts.

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