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The Intrusive Supernatural: Disruptions to Order in Nineteenth-Century Society

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Abstract:

The Nineteenth Century was an era of frequent change, making Victorian identity increasingly difficult to identify as the divisions in society splintered the various forms of religious, political and social beliefs of the British public. Within the shadows of all these changes lurked a frequent motif of supernatural intrusion, inserting some form of superstitious element into the multiple aspects of Victorian living. This additional supernatural attribute contributed to the convoluted nature of Victorian existence, destabilising the realities and the perceptions of the social order through a paradoxical age of both rationalism and superstition.

This work will aim to identify the uses of the intrusive supernatural concept in nineteenth-century literature and culture, as well as the consequences that follow its incorporation. The essay will establish the habits of the intrusive supernatural and determine whether it exists as a product or cause of the changes to nineteenth-century life. Subsequently the essay shall seek to explore the relationship between the supernatural and disruptions to the supposed natural order of Victorian society. The research into this subject will involve the exploration of both metaphorical and literary uses of the supernatural, as well as the genuine attempts to confront supernatural phenomena in Victorian culture.

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**Introduction:
Victorian Britain: A Supernatural; Age**

The intrusive supernatural belongs not exclusively to the imaginations of literary artists, instead existing as a cultural phenomenon for centuries. As a force that defies rationalism and typically avoids scientific explanation, it primarily serves as a subversion to the natural order of reality. Tzvetan Todorov summarised the role of the supernatural when he wrote:

It becomes clear... that the social and literary functions of the supernatural are one and the same: it is a question of breaking the law. Whether it occurs within social life or within a narrative, the intervention of the supernatural element always constitutes a rupture in the system of established rules, and this is its justification.¹

Reflecting upon that statement, it would appear the supernatural is inherently disruptive, the consequence of which is ‘breaking the law’ of the established status quo. This would suggest the supernatural exists as an intrusive power, one which juxtaposes the intended systematic nature of any civilized society.

However, the definition of the word intrusive states ‘affecting someone in a way that annoys them and makes them feel uncomfortable.’² The crucial detail of that definition is the ‘uncomfortable’ aspect, which somewhat contradicts certain relationships the Victorians had with the supernatural. A human fascination with supernatural forces has long encouraged attempts to call upon and locate manifestations of the supernatural, so it would be false to label all supernatural interactions with humanity as uninvited. Victorian society, in particular, experienced a resurgence in occultism, although it is a side of the era’s identity that is frequently overshadowed by industrial mechanization and

¹ Tzvetan Todorov, cited in Peter Morey, ‘Gothic and Supernatural: Allegories at Work and Play in Kipling’s Indian Fiction’, *Victorian Gothic*, ed. by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000) pp.201-217 (p.201)

² *Cambridge Dictionary* <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/intrusive>> [Accessed 27 September 2018]

scientific breakthroughs, frequently overshadowing the captivation for the supernatural. Even so, Roger Luckhurst observed that during the nineteenth century, ‘Every scientific and technological advance encouraged a kind of magical thinking and was accompanied by a shadow discourse of the occult. For every disenchantment there was an active re-enchantment of the world.’³ Indulgence in the occult simply provided another state of belief; however, this was not universally approved by Victorian society, as the occult often became branded as an opposing force to the established order of Christianity and the natural order outlined by rationalism and science.

The supernatural was not the only anxiety that unnerved the Victorians; however, the supernatural was the common form that nineteenth-century writers chose to disguise the contemporary apprehensions they were conveying in their texts. Rather than directly referencing the concerns of their society, these writers acknowledged that ‘Fantasy and folklore presented new frontiers that provoked both enthusiasm and objection from all sides: the stakes were political, religious, and personal.’⁴ This form of expression popularised the literary genre of the fairy tale throughout the century, finding new ways to adapt traditional folklore to host moralising tales that expressed relevant lessons to Victorian readers. Carole G. Silver implied that this phenomenon of popular fairy tale literature was yet another extension of the Victorian fascination with the occult, as ‘The nation that had repeatedly decried the exile of the fairies and the silencing of the storyteller thus provided fairy-tale books with their greatest market. This fascination with foreign folktales may have been some resonance with Victorian occultism...’⁵ However,

³ Roger Luckhurst, ‘The Victorian Supernatural’, *the British Library* (15 May 2014) <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-victorian-supernatural>> [Accessed 26 August 2018]

⁴ Jason Marc Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008) p.3

⁵ Jennifer Schacker, *National Dreams* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2003) p.139

Stith Thompson described the fairy tale or *märchen* as a folk tale “‘of some length involving a succession of motifs...in an unreal world without definite locality or definite characters and is filled with the marvellous.’”⁶ This otherworldly element of the supernatural in fairy tales would imply it does not exist as an intrusive force to nineteenth-century lives; however, as critics such as Jung have observed, the fantastical in fairy tales exists as metaphors, ‘that the symbolic imagery of fairy tales may be viewed as depicting the exploration of the unconscious mind.’⁷ The supernatural is not the intrusive force the reader need actually be concerned of, but rather their real world counterparts. Fairy tales from the latter half of the century further implied this through the obvious parallels between a real-world setting and a marvellous world, such as those shown in Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy*, or Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. The popularity of the genre also implies the intrinsic link between these interpretations of the supernatural and human nature, as ‘the best fairy tales are supposedly universal’.⁸ However, the genre was not without its critics, often resulting in it being reduced to whimsical flights of fancy of little educational merit. At its most extreme, criticisms of the fairy tale genre claimed it was dangerous, as stated by Srdjan Smajić:

Narratives dealing with ghosts, fairies, or incubi can come off as a form of unconscionable escapism and irresponsible flight from what is real and what really matters. By twisting reality out of shape and often insinuating the existence of a happier Elsewhere, tales of the supernatural are, in Marxist terms, a dangerous opiate that dulls critical thinking about the Here and Now.⁹

The fairy tale, in this regard, could be seen as the gateway by which the intrusive supernatural invades, disrupting the human perception of reality, which Marxist critics

⁶ Jason Marc Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008) p.4

⁷ Steven Swann Jones, *The Fairy Tale* (London: Routledge, 2002) p.129

⁸ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2012) p.1.

⁹ Srdjan Smajić, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.11

would perceive as a distraction from what truly matters. However, despite Smajić's assessment, the fairy tale, as previously stated, cannot serve solely as a distraction from reality when it is in fact a distorted reflection of it. The real disruption created is the incentive to change inspired by the fairy tale's highlighting of Victorian anxieties with the established status quo.

The fairy tales and folkloric inspired works explored in this dissertation will cover a broad range of the nineteenth-century. From translations of the Brothers Grimm's works from the beginning of the century, to depictions of the witch in the latter half of the century, the longstanding prevalence of their associated pagan and feminine motifs will be analysed in both a literary and a cultural context. As well as spanning a broad time span, the popularity of folklore in various settings, whether they be rural, urban or even abroad, will similarly be explored in the essay.

The fairy tale was not the only genre to receive a surge in popularity as a consequence of the Victorian attraction towards the supernatural, as an increased indulgence in the superstitions of spiritualism resulted in a rise of popular ghost stories. Much like fairy tales, the Victorian ghost story found most of its appeal in its connection to reality; yet unlike the parallel worlds of folkloric tales, ghost stories discussed the concept of invading forces in the genuine Victorian home. Spiritualism and the invasive nature of ghost stories removed the distance between the reader and the gothic elements of the stories, as:

Victorian Gothic is marked primarily by the domestication of Gothic figures, spaces and themes: horrors become explicitly located within the world of the contemporary reader... The exotic and historical settings that serve to distance the horrors from the world of the reader in earlier Gothic are replaced with something more disturbingly familiar: the bourgeois domestic world or the new urban landscape.¹⁰

¹⁰ David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p.26

Just as fairy tales deconstructed and undermined the order of Victorian society, the ghost story invaded further and destabilised the sanctity of domestic environments. Eve M. Lynch draws attention to the fact that, like fairy tales, ‘The Victorian ghost story thrived during an age devoted to literary realism and rational control of unwieldy forces.’¹¹

The obsession with occultism in the nineteenth century was not exclusively fixated on the figure of the ghost, but instead it indulged in a variety of supernatural phenomena. These wonders were the means of exploring more Victorian anxieties, with ideas such as mesmerism and hypnotism similarly finding prevalent places in literature. Literature about spiritualism as well as the cultural phenomena was particularly popular amongst women, as spiritualism as a motif addressed ‘a profound uneasiness about a woman’s autonomy, her willpower and capacity for self-governance, and her ability to manage material property.’¹² As such, spiritualism was perceived by some as an intrusion upon the rule of the patriarchy as women found a new sense of belonging in the occult. Similarly, despite insistence by many spiritualists that the movement was not intended as an alternative or rival to established religion, it found itself being considered as an opponent to orthodox religion. It is little surprise that spiritualism was so readily treated as an adversary of the Church of England, as already faith in Victorian Britain was fractured and divided into various forms that existed outside the established British faith. The supernatural was yet another means of undermining an already destabilised system of faith in Victorian society, as the ‘Victorian era was a religious age, but it was not an

¹¹ Eve M. Lynch, ‘Spectral Politics: the Victorian ghost story and the domestic servant’, *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp.67-87 (p.67)

¹² Susan Poznar, ‘Whose Body? The “Willing” Or “Unwilling” Mesmerized Woman In Late Victorian Fiction’ *Women and the Victorian Occult*, ed. by, Tatiana Kontou (London: Routledge, 2011) pp.138-161 (p.138)

era of peaceful faith and doctrinal conformity—it was an era of religious controversy and, increasingly, of religious freedom.¹³

This dissertation will explore the surge in popularity for spiritualism and the subsequent ghost stories that followed. The subject of spiritualism was a divisive one and thus both sides of the movement will be explored, depicting the anxieties present to both alignments. Furthermore, the crisis of faith as a whole through the century will also be explored through the works of prevalent Romantic writers, exploring the various new approaches to religion, such as atheism, agnosticism and pantheism.

Alternatively, it is often argued that the greatest adversary of supernatural beliefs was the ever-evolving state of scientific thinking. During an era renowned for breakthroughs in science, the belief in superstition was essentially collateral in the wake of rationalism. Ralph O'Connor, in regards to the contrast between fanciful and scientific thinking, stated:

Romance connoted a fictional world of enchantment and make-believe created by the imaginations of storytellers, untrammelled by the demands of sober fact, and calculated to appeal directly and powerfully to the reader's emotions... Science, on the other hand, was increasingly defined during this period as the dispassionate, rational pursuit of knowledge about the real world based on the patient accumulation of facts and observations, and it was often associated by proponents and critics with the disenchantment of nature.¹⁴

Science essentially aimed to tame the mystical, removing its uncontrollable nature by attributing some form of reason or logic to its existence, thus making the supernatural become natural. The purpose of many philosophers was to entirely eliminate the supposed farce of superstitious beliefs, being discomfited by 'the notion of instinct and spirit,' resulting in them, as stated by critics such as Crowe, 'limiting their knowledge' to the

¹³ Julie Melnyk, *Victorian Religion* (London: Praeger, 2008) p.2

¹⁴ Ralph O'Connor, ed., *Victorian Science and Literature*, Vol. 7 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012) p.xi

confines of ‘Reason’.¹⁵ This anxiety, much as with faith, seems to stem from a fear of misguided or irrational thinking from the perspective of these forms of order, rather than an apprehension towards genuine supernatural phenomena. Consequently, this resulted in many attributing superstitions beliefs and claims of supernatural sightings to a bout of madness. This resulted in madness becoming a popular mode of engagement with the supernatural in literature, as:

Madness for nineteenth-century writers was both an alien state of mind and some thing that could afflict ‘our nature; at any time. Imaginatively, therefore, it offered opportunities to explore the extremities of human mental and emotional suffering, uniting the fascination of the strange and the abnormal with the familiarity of the known and the shared.¹⁶

However, it was not universally accepted that science was the enemy or eradicator of the supernatural, but simply an alternative approach to understanding it, and the writers that interpreted the supernatural from a scientific perspective ‘did not see themselves as disenchanting nature, but as replacing old wonders with new ones.’¹⁷ Writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle serve as significant examples of an eagerness to explore and understand the supernatural without disproving it, with the ideas of spiritualism, the study of fairies, and the uncanny similarities between the gothic supernatural and gothic science in literature, all displaying a supportive bond between science and the supernatural in the nineteenth-century, rather than a rivalry. Faith likely contributed in some regard to the unwillingness to sever connections between science and the supernatural, as many scientists ‘remained reluctant to accept a theory that made human life dependent upon the vegetative world; the idea that life might be either maintained or initiated simply through

¹⁵Vanessa D. Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts In The Noontide* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996) p.43.

¹⁶ Valerie Pedlar, *The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006) p.1.

¹⁷ Ralph O’Connor, ed., *Victorian Science and Literature*, Vol. 7 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012) p.xxviii

material causes challenged all traditional beliefs about humanity's unique position within the world.'¹⁸

The incorporation of scientific themes in the dissertation will primarily revolve around three uses of gothic science. Firstly, the dissertation will seek to identify science as an adversary to the supernatural, being used to rationalise and combat superstition. Secondly, the essay will explore the blurred boundaries between gothic portrayals of pseudo-science and the supernatural in Victorian fiction. Finally, the developments in the nineteenth-century understanding of madness will similarly be explored as a potential explanation for supernatural phenomena.

This dissertation will aim to identify the supernatural within nineteenth-century literature and to find the real-world counterparts of these supernatural elements within Victorian society. In particular the dissertation will examine the concept of the intrusive supernatural, defining it as a concept and exploring the extent to which it applies to the Victorian engagement with the supernatural. Once the supernatural phenomena have been identified and their level of intrusiveness assessed, the anxieties it causes or represents will similarly be analysed, helping to determine why the Victorian society seemed so obsessed with the supernatural that seemed to manifest itself in so many aspects of nineteenth-century living.

¹⁸ David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p.20

**Chapter One:
Familiar Folklore, Foreign Fairy Tales and Unsettling Urban Legends**

Traditionally the supernatural has found a place of frequent expression through folklore and fairy tales, genres that permit the manifestations of the yet unexplained in the form of superstitious forces. Despite otherworldly concepts such as fairy land or the sinister magical powers of witches, these supernatural elements were frequently grounded by parallels to real-world anxieties present within nineteenth-century society. Steven Swann Jones has observed that the fairy tale serves ‘a heuristic function, helping us to recognize and cope with typical problems and anxieties that we encounter in life’, and Jones places a particular emphasis on this impact on young people still attempting to define their identity, relationships and ‘assimilating cultural norms, and determining their spiritual outlook.’¹⁹

It is little wonder then that the fairy tale genre became such a prominent literary style in regards to children’s literature. However, it is significant to note that the popularization of the fairy tale as a widely published form of literature was not the origin of many of the motifs present within them, as they existed prior for many centuries in the form of traditional folklore. The advantage to the commercialisation of the fairy tale genre was the success of the imports of foreign fairy tales, through works such as *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* (1812) or translations of *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* (1853), which introduced distant folklore to the British public rather than simply expanding on pre-existing superstitions.

In contrast to the more rural-centric superstitions of traditional folklore, the expansion of cities introduced newer myths to destabilise Victorian society. ‘The

¹⁹ Steven Swann Jones, *The Fairy Tale* (London: Routledge, 2002) p.20

traditional social system collapsed as new types of work and new social roles were established. Emergent capitalism led to a growing sense of isolation and alienation, as increasing mechanization divorced workers from the natural world.²⁰ The obscure and mysterious nature of these new cities made them vulnerable to the infiltration of new supernatural superstitions, often frequently linked to crime such as the infamous Spring-Heeled Jack. Regardless of location, it would appear that supernatural superstitions intruded upon the public conscious in various forms, occasionally for pleasure, and sometimes out of genuine fright. However, in each scenario it serves to signify vulnerabilities in Victorian society as distorted reflections of real anxieties and conventions.

The Witch Outside:

A prevailing mythical figure that survived up to the superstitions of the nineteenth century was that of the witch. The witch as a symbol varied frequently in its uses, occasionally representing the dangers of femininity when unchecked, juxtaposing its other popular use as a representation of female subjugation and ostracization. The latter of the literary uses for the witch seems to become a regular motif of nineteenth-century literature, especially from female writers, as observed by Sarah Bruton, 'As a subjugated, violated, and yet magically powerful figure, the witch symbolises the resistance of every woman, but also the power of the female writer.'²¹ However, as will be observed in the literary representations of the witch by Mary Coleridge and Emily Dickinson, it would appear that the supposed magical potential of the witch is somewhat obscured in Victorian literature, likely as a consequence of the waning belief in such a superstitions. As with

²⁰ David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p.20

²¹ Sarah Bruton, *Bedlam and Broomsticks: Representations of the Witch in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Women's Writing* (Cardiff University, 2006) p.46.

many folklore and fairy tale superstitions, the witch seems to be excluded from the urban environments of the cities, and thus survives primarily through rural and traditional credulous beliefs. An article in *All the Year Round* serves to display this scepticism to old folklore within the cities, stating in regards to a recent trial for witchcraft they do not ‘hear of it much in the busy towns; because there is not so much gossiping rumour in them as in country places, and because the people, with all their shortcomings, are a little less ignorant.’²² It was through this uncertainty of the existence of the witch, and their obscure nature, that made them all the more terrifying as a potential intruder within Victorian society.

Mary Coleridge’s *The Witch* (1893) conveys a particular overarching anxiety in regards to the Witch and similar supernatural entities, being the fear of letting in the ‘Other’. The subtext of the first narrator’s agony implies previous rejections or, at the very least, a long absence from civilisation, as they have ‘walked a great while over the snow.’²³ However, an interesting aspect of the first narrator’s two stanzas is the lack of any reference to the possession of supernatural powers. Coleridge primarily uses the first narrative to portray the harshness of nature and to create the image of a victim of unfortunate circumstances, ‘My clothes are wet, and my teeth are set,/And the way was hard and long’ (ll.3-4). The namesake of the poem is never decisively identified within the poem, only hinted at through the final stanza, reemphasising the subtle and obscure nature of the Victorian witch. All that can be deduced from the poem is the dire circumstances of the wandering woman, a stranger in the area who has ‘wandered over

²² Charles Dickens, ed., ‘Witchcraft in the Nineteenth Century’, *All the year round* (Nov 6) 1869; Vol.2, Iss.49, pp. 541-544 (pg. 541), in *Proquest*
<<https://search.proquest.com/docview/8379329?accountid=14620>> [Accessed 15 August 2018]

²³ Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, *The Witch* (1893), l.1, in *Poetry by Heart*
<<http://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/poems/the-witch/>> [Accessed 15 August 2018]. All further references will be given in the body of the text,

the fruitful earth,/ But [they] never came here before'. (ll.5-6) This aspect of the narrator's character makes them a representation of 'otherness', a repurposed use for the literary witch, as explained by Susan Elsley, 'While belief in witches melted like a wax image under the light of rationalism... [they] were reformed by pens and paintbrushes into metaphors of 'otherness', reflected in artistic mirroring of nineteenth-century society.'²⁴ Elsley also references that the symbolic uses 'of witchery was being utilised most effectively during a period when those who claimed to be witches were suffering the final humiliation of being prosecuted under the 1824 Vagrancy Act', which bears an uncanny resemblance to the circumstances of the first narrator as depicted in Coleridge's poem.²⁵ The witch is thus a metaphor for a more real and widespread issue of discrimination against non-conformist to the traditional structure of society, especially women, as even the second narrator simply describes her as having 'the voice that women have,/ Who plead for their heart's desire' (ll.15-16).

However, the potential bias of the first two stanzas has to be considered, being voiced by the supposed witch. The final stanza is narrated by the homeowner of the threshold the witch eventually crosses, and is distinctly more ominous yet equally obscure in portraying the consequences of the witch's presence. The second narrator retrospectively describes that 'She came - she came- and the quivering flame/ Sunk and died in the fire./ It never was lit again on my hearth.' (ll.17-19) The flame is as metaphorical as the figure of the witch, being a source of warmth and comfort that likely represents a form of order and stability, with Sarah Burton stating 'the light refers directly

²⁴ Susan J. Elsley, *Images of the witch in nineteenth-century culture* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 2012) p.1, in *ChesterRep* < <https://chesterrep.openrepository.com/handle/10034/253452> > [Accessed 15 August 2018]

²⁵ Susan J. Elsley, *Images of the witch in nineteenth-century culture* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 2012) p.1, in *ChesterRep* < <https://chesterrep.openrepository.com/handle/10034/253452> > [Accessed 15 August 2018]

to Christianity.²⁶ The witch has for centuries been a figure associated with opposition to Christian values, and yet not independent from it, often aligning witchcraft with malevolent Christian forces, as Minutius Felix wrote they “not only know the demons, but whatever of the marvellous they pretend to perform they do it by the aid of demons.”²⁷ This association with a disruptive force to Christianity lends credence to Burton’s theory that the flame is a metaphor for Christianity.

However, as an intrusive force that is capable of disrupting the Christian presence in the home, it is important to acknowledge the witch did not intrude via force, but rather by invitation. The second narrator’s final lines acknowledge their own involvement in the intrusion, ‘Since I hurried across the floor,/ To lift her over the threshold, and let her in at the door’ (ll.20-21). The loss of the flame could thus be attributed not to a theft by the witch, but as a price to be paid for the homeowner dabbling in aspects of the occult and paganism. The retrospective nature of the narrative shows that the homeowner did not lose their life, so what was lost must be different, and the idea that it was faith follows a pattern with superstition being ‘far from baseless. It was largely a survival of primitive heathenism.’²⁸ The homeowner’s conversion may be signified by their echoing of the final line of each of the witch’s stanzas, ‘Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!’ (l.7) This bears an uncanny resemblance with the Christian attitudes towards Victorian spiritualism, denouncing its followers who similarly interacted with supernatural forces not through chance or being intruded upon, but rather by willing invitation and participation with the occult. Alternatively, the flame could represent

²⁶ Sarah Bruton, *Bedlam and Broomsticks: Representations of the Witch in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Women’s Writing* (Cardiff University, 2006) p.40.

²⁷ H. M. Doughty, ‘Witchcraft and Christianity’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh magazine*; (1898), Vol. 163, Iss. 989, pp.378-397 (p.379).

²⁸ Henry Bett, *English Myths and Traditions* (London: B. T. Batsford LTD, 1952) p.95

rationalism and sanity, as ‘Witchcraft, and all manner of Spectre-work, and Demonology, we have now named Madness, and Diseases of the Nerves.’²⁹

Coleridge’s undefined figure of the witch also separates her from the typical imagery associated with witches throughout common myth and literature, avoiding the stereotypical visual clues of a witch. *The London Magazine* (1822) remarked upon the removal of the defining aesthetic traits of the witch by stating ‘Now-a-days...an old crone may be ugly, blear-eyed, [decrepit], poor [...] without being a whit the better for it; she may be blessed with “a wrinkled face, a furred brow, a hairy lip” [...] but yet she will be no witch.’³⁰ As previously mentioned, the second narrator refers to the witch’s voice as merely being that of a desperate woman, and the first narrator describes herself as ‘but a little maiden still,/ My little white feet are sore,’ (ll.12-13). She is described in a dainty way, doing little to disassociate her from the typical representations of nineteenth-century femininity. If the witch is indeed a metaphor for the ‘other’, there is reason to determine that nineteenth-century women had become the conduit for ‘otherness’. Men and women in Victorian society were separated socially through ‘what Victorians thought of as “separate spheres”, only coming together at breakfast and again at dinner.’³¹ Already serving as representations of the ‘other’, women served as an ideal template for the figure of the witch; however, the more disturbing aspect of this form of witch is the ease with which it can infiltrate and intrude upon society. The witch is disguised as a woman that men already struggle to understand due to the separation between the genders in Victorian culture.

²⁹ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, eds Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) p.199.

³⁰ ‘On Witchcraft’, *London Magazine* (1822), vol.5, no.27, pp. 205-215 (p.206), in *ProQuest*, <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/5243656?accountid=14620>> [Accessed 17 August 2018]

³¹ Kathryn Hughes, ‘Gender Roles in the Nineteenth Century’, *British Library* (15 May 2014) <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century>> [Accessed 17 August 2018]

In many ways this speaks more to the ignorance of Victorian men in regards to women, and tragically this occasionally resulted in misunderstandings of identity, as women were falsely labelled as intrusive supernatural forces. Besides simply being called a witch, alternative accusations include concepts such as changelings, the most infamous example from the Nineteenth Century being the case of Bridget Cleary. As another example of ignorance, the burning of Bridget Cleary exemplifies the use of the intrusive supernatural to punish actions that were not fully understood. *The National Observer* stated that Bridget ‘was recently attacked by an illness which in another rank of life would have been called hysteria at most...’, and for this reason alone she was accused of being a changeling.³² Concepts such as hysteria and mental illness could be considered flawed areas in Victorian knowledge, particularly in rural, uneducated areas, thus exposing a gap in their understanding that allowed for the intrusion of supernatural ideas in the place of rational explanations. The article goes on to suggest that Bridget’s fate was a consequence of ignorance that ‘produces monstrous-fear, such as that of fairies, which in turn produces more monstrous cruelty, such as the torturing of one’s wife to death’ (p.245). This concept of ignorance being the cause of supposed supernatural intrusions is further emphasised by the article’s theory that superstition ‘is less prevalent among wives who have changed their homes than among men who have grown up in the scenes and among the traditions of their childhood’ (p.245).

In regards to the condemning of Bridget Cleary and the various other examples of folklore being treated sincerely, there appears to be a common idea of lost control or disruptions to the status quo. As observed by E.F. Benson, ‘This changeling idea is common enough among early superstitious beliefs-though it is somewhat rare for an adult

³² ‘Folk-Lore in Operation’, *The National Observer* (1895), vol.14, no.347, pp. 245, in *ProQuest*, <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/5885574?accountid=14620>> [Accessed 17 August 2018] All further references will be given in the body of the text,

to be changed, the victims being usually children...'³³ So far, the primary conduits for supernatural intrusion in the form of witches and changelings are women and children, both of whom are subjects of the patriarchy. As with the case of Bridget Cleary, the accuser often seems to be male and appears to feel a loss of control over what he believes should be obedient to him, as Richard Cleary stated in references to his actions ““You cowardly dirty set, would you rather have her in Kinagranagh with the fairies than have me have her?”” (p.245). Fathers of Victorian households often underwent a sense of separation from their families due to their work, and so ignorance of the norms of children and women’s behaviours is to be expected. Therefore, as much as the supernatural is finding ways to intrude in the form of women and children, the men are equally responsible for its appearance due to the breaches in rationality created by their own ignorance. Yet, not understanding something does not remove the desire to provide an answer, and in this regard the superstitious believers in witches and changelings are following a similar instinct to primitive man, accepting the goods of life without question, ‘but misfortunes- diseases, for instance-he attributes to the special malice of spiritual foes.’³⁴

The Supernatural in the Streets:

The supernatural, so far, has been attributed primarily to the superstitions of the rural labouring classes, specifically those isolated in the rural countryside, and the periodicals from the cities have been openly critical of these beliefs and ridiculed them for their ignorance. However, the cities were not devoid of their own superstitions or indulgences in the supernatural, as shown by the rise of spiritualism in the nineteenth century, which

³³ E. F. Benson, ‘The Recent ‘Witch-Burning’ at Clonmel.’ *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review* (1895), vol. 37, no. 220, pp. 1053-1058 (1054), in *ProQuest*, <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/2664774?accountid=14620>> [Accessed 17 August 2018].

³⁴ H. M. Doughty, ‘Witchcraft and Christianity’, *Blackwood's Edinburgh magazine*; (1898), Vol. 163, Iss. 989, pp.378-397 (p.395).

some have argued fostered ‘a new attention towards the link between crime and the supernatural’.³⁵ In addition to this, the cities seemed as equally susceptible to invasions by supposed supernatural forces, as mysterious and unexplained phenomena quickly transitioned into urban legends. Despite the periodicals’ claims that the cities were hubs for rationalism, the larger cities were a fairly new landscape to many due to increased urbanisation as ‘young men and women poured in from the countryside, eager to find work in the new factories and mills’.³⁶ As such, the cities were still a fairly obscure and uncharted place for many Victorians, and as Stephen Knight states ‘The constantly growing city seethed with activity, all of it in many ways inherently mysterious, because no one could know many people or many places in the extraordinary new megalopolis.’³⁷ Cities were the ideal environment for a new series of supernatural phenomena. A population of similar yet unfamiliar faces explains supernatural phenomena such as doppelgängers, whereas the frequency of unexplained crimes during an era of lacking crime detection similarly created scenarios ripe for superstitious explanations.

Much like folklore, urban legends rose in the place of rational explanations to unexplained events, and one of the most infamous cases of this was the legend of Spring-Heeled Jack, the first sighting of whom was in 1837. A series of targeted criminal attacks, primarily against women by an unknown assailant, served as the catalyst for many penny-dreadfuls about the notorious criminal, whom many authors attributed supernatural powers to increase the terror he invoked. Jack was a devil-like figure that ‘vomited forth a quantity of blue and white flame from his mouth, and his eyes resembled red balls of

³⁵ Maurizio Ascari, *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction* (Hampshire: Palgrave macmillan, 2007) p.57

³⁶ Emma Griffin, ‘Manchester in the 19th Century’, *The British library* (15 May 2014) <<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/manchester-in-the-19th-century>> [Accessed 03 October 2018]

³⁷ Stephen Knight, *The Mysteries of the Cities* (London: McFarland & Company, 2012) p.60

fire.’³⁸ It was not simply the penny-dreadfuls that attributed these supernatural powers to Jack, but also the periodicals writing about reported sightings of the figure, claiming he had a ‘human body, with long horns-emblematical of Satan himself-clad in a suit of mail’, and in another sighting he was ‘enveloped in a white sheet and blue fire.’³⁹ Similarly, even towards the end of the century, poetry continued to associate Jack with the supernatural and gothic, as displayed in a poem by ST. John Hamund, who describes Jack as:

His eyes are like balls of fire
 His hands are like bars of lead,
 His hands face is bright with a still grey light,
 His lips are the lips of the Dead.⁴⁰

The reason Spring-Heeled Jack was received so frequently as a supernatural entity, in contrast to the vast majority of criminals, was due to the obscurity of his existence, seemingly existing throughout a large part of the century, as despite his initial appearance in 1837 sightings were just as prevalent in the 1880s. Additionally, his origin is uncertain, as it ‘is difficult to assign the exact locality which gave birth to this extraordinary freak, either side of the Thames claiming the distinction’.⁴¹

The real question that arises in light of Jack’s existence is his immense popularity within the many penny-dreadfuls and various other literary representations of him. When examining the actions of the supposedly real Spring-Heeled Jack, his assaults are genuinely terrifying and gruesome, especially in regards to his ambushes of women. ‘Her assailant, however, followed her, and caught her on the steps... he again used

³⁸ Anonymous, *Spring-Heeled Jack-The Terror of London* (July 2006)

<<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0602571.txt>> [Accessed 10 April 2018]

³⁹ ‘Spring-Heeled Jack’, *All the Year Round* (1884), vol. 34, no. 819, pp. 345-350 (p.347), *ProQuest*, <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/8295134?accountid=14620>> [Accessed 18 August 2018]

⁴⁰ ST. John Hamund, ‘Spring-Heeled Jack’, *The Idler* (1900), vol. 17, 1900, pp. 492-493 (p.493, ll.5-8), in *ProQuest*, <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/3325934?accountid=14620>> [Accessed 18 August 2018]

⁴¹ ‘Spring-Heeled Jack’, *All the Year Round* (1884), vol. 34, no. 819, pp. 345-350 (p.346), *ProQuest*, <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/8295134?accountid=14620>> [Accessed 18 August 2018]

considerable violence, tore her neck and arms with his claws, as well as a quantity of hair from her head.’⁴² Penny dreadfuls had a tendency to romanticise notorious criminal figures, as observed by John Springhall who remarked that the ““so-called novelettes, romances, tales, stories of adventure, mystery and crime; pictures of school life hideously unlike the reality; exploits of pirates, robbers, cut-throats, prostitutes, and rogues, that, but for its actual presence, it would seem incredible.””⁴³ In *The Quarterly Review*’s assessment of *Spring-Heeled Jack: The Terror of London*, it is referenced that Jack’s tale was adapted to follow a similar trend, romanticising him as a roguish, highwayman figure, unlike ‘the sorry and sordid rogues we know them to have been in real life, but always ‘dashing,’ ‘high-spirited,’ and ‘bold.’⁴⁴ Even so, the penny dreadful does not avoid referencing the gothic and sinister aspects of Jack’s character, and much like the previously mentioned witches, is aligned with opposing forces to Christianity, as a witness claims ““It must have been the devil...It couldn’t have been anybody else, or I must have seen ‘em””.⁴⁵

Jack’s popularity is especially questionable due to his uncanny resemblance to Jack the Ripper. However, whereas there was an abundance of literary material on Spring-Heeled Jack, there was a ‘paucity of overtly Ripper-inspired Victorian fiction of the time, which seems odd given the numerous novels and films based on the Whitechapel Murders that we have today.’⁴⁶ This likely can be attributed in some respects to the nature of the

⁴² Anonymous, *Spring-Heeled Jack-The Terror of London* (July 2006)

<<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0602571.txt>> [Accessed 10 April 2018]

⁴³ John Springhall, ““Pernicious Read’? ‘The Penny Dreadful’ as Scapegoat for Late-Victorian Juvenile Crime”, cited in *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, eds., Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004) p.1

⁴⁴ ‘Art. VI.-1. Spring-Heeled Jack, Or the Terror of London.’ *The Quarterly Review* (1890), vol. 171, no. 341, pp. 150-171 (p.152), in *ProQuest*,

<<https://search.proquest.com/docview/2482094?accountid=14620>> [Accessed 18 August 2018]

⁴⁵ Author of the "Confederate's Daughter", *Spring-Heel'd Jack, The Terror of London* (London: Newsagents' Publishing Company, 1867) p.84. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

⁴⁶ Emelyne Godfrey, *Femininity, Crime and Self-Defence in Victorian Literature and Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p.147

depiction of crime in Victorian fiction, as outlined by William D. Rubinstein, ““Until the 1950s explicit sex and gratuitous, sadistic violence were largely absent from detecting fiction, which revolved around the ingenious solution of a fairly-presented puzzle. The villain never got away with it and was always revealed and punished...””⁴⁷ Both Jacks meet the criteria for taboo subjects of fiction, being uncaught and unidentified figures of sadistic violence, yet somehow Spring-Heeled Jack was permitted to be the subject of sensational fiction.

The most distinguishing feature that separates the two Jacks is the supernatural powers attributed to Spring-Heeled Jack, somewhat dehumanising him and thus removing the association between sadistic violence and human nature. Besides the demonic associations already made, another frequently used comparison is that of Spring-Heeled Jack and a spectre. In *Spring-Heeled Jack: The Terror of London*, many witnesses are quick to cry ghost in response to Jack’s appearances, ““A ghost! A ghost!” ... “I tell you it’s a ghost,” said the officer, fairly out of breath with exertion’ (p.29). Similarly, the less romanticised periodicals were also reliant upon the comparison between Jack and ghosts to convey the terror he invoked, ‘the alleged spirit carried on similar gambols. His ghostship then extended his operations to the town...all Richmond was aghast at the tales of women frightened to death and of children being torn to piece by him.’⁴⁸ Jack and spectres were both manifestations of terror that relied upon obscurity to invoke fear, for as Edmund Burke stated ““To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes.””⁴⁹ In contrast to genuine crime

⁴⁷Emelyne Godfrey, *Femininity, Crime and Self-Defence in Victorian Literature and Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p.149

⁴⁸‘Spring-Heeled Jack’, *All the Year Round* (1884), vol. 34, no. 819, pp. 345-350 (p.346), *ProQuest*, <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/8295134?accountid=14620>> [Accessed 18 August 2018]

⁴⁹ Maurizio Ascari, *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction* (Hampshire: Palgrave macmillan, 2007) p.46

fiction, Spring-Heeled Jack seems to have accessed the same appeal of popular supernatural and gothic fiction, but this in turn suggests that as invasive as Jack might have seemed as a threat to the safety of the Victorian public, he was somewhat invited to stay in the literature and imaginations of those he threatened. Much like many Victorian ghost stories, Jack had all the right qualities to create ‘the temporary “hoodwinking” of reason’ as ‘to experience “the strange luxury of artificial terror” requires some sort of surrender to “the weakness of superstitious credulity”’⁵⁰

Frivolous Fairy Tales:

The gothic and ghost stories of the nineteenth century were not the only genres to capitalise upon the inherent allure of the supernatural, as the fairy tale genre found itself appealing to a wide audience of both adults and children. Much like with Spring-Heeled Jack, there was a willingness to engage with the supernatural outside of reality; however, this is not to suggest that the subjects of these fairy tales were distinctly separate from the realities they appealed to. Michael Newton insisted that in regards to fairy tales, ‘far from pure flight from life, such stories are rather a way to expose social tensions and psychological conflicts and to devise their potential solutions.’⁵¹ Although rationalism might have diminished the genuine threat of invasion from supernatural forces, these folkloric elements were allowed to exist as metaphors in the literature of fairy tales. The invasive supernatural in fairy tales, as with the previously mentioned depictions of the supernatural, existed symbiotically with a real-world counterpart, invoking genuine responses from their readers due to their striking similarities to reality.

⁵⁰ E.J Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.107

⁵¹ ‘Introduction’, *Victorian Fairy Tales*, ed.by Michael Newton, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p.ix.

To return to the figure of the witch, *Hansel and Gretel* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm provides a fairly traditional depiction of the common folkloric figure, yet interweaves it with contemporary nineteenth-century anxieties. To begin with, it is likely of little coincidence that Hansel and Gretel come from a poverty stricken lower-class, being the children of ‘a poor woodcutter’ who had ‘very little to bite or to sup, and once, when there a great dearth in the land, the man could not even gain the daily bread.’⁵² As previously mentioned, involvement with folkloric superstitions such as witchcraft was more commonly attributed to the nineteenth-century rural lower classes, with periodicals commenting that ‘a belief in witchcraft still prevails amongst the peasantry of our native country to a considerable extent.’⁵³ A possible explanation for this affinity between the impoverished and the supernatural is that ‘human beings fall easily into despair, and from the very beginning we invented stories that revealed an underlying pattern, and gave us a sense that, against all the depressing and chaotic evidence to the contrary, life had meaning and value.’⁵⁴ Regardless, this inviting nature of the supernatural in *Hansel and Gretel* is most obviously depicted by the witch’s house ‘built of bread, and roofed with cakes; and the window of transparent sugar.’ (p.89) However, the children display an initial reluctance to confess their indulgence of the unnatural house, lying when asked ““Who is nibbling at my house?”” by replying ““Never mind, / It is the wind.”” (p.89). This would suggest they are indeed aware of the distasteful view of carelessly involving oneself with the unnatural, which some have regarded as an allegory for indulging in the fairy tale genre itself. Ralph O’Connor observed that there was some backlash against the popularity of Victorian fairy tales, remarking:

⁵² Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, ‘Hansel and Gretel’, *Household Stories*, trans. by Lucy Crane (London: Macmillan, 1882) pp.85-92 (p.85). All further references will be given in the body of the text.

⁵³ ‘Popular Superstitions’, *The Mirror of literature, amusement, and instruction* (1828) Vol.11, Iss.316, p. 391

⁵⁴ Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (London: Canongate, 2006) p.2

some educationalists who feared that stories which encouraged (And derived from) the exercise of unbridled poetic ‘fancy’ threatened the moral and intellectual health of children and adults alike by dislocating their imaginations from real life and/ or the true faith. It was widely felt that excessive indulgence in such sensational and irrational narratives could easily result in delusion and madness.⁵⁵

The materials used to construct the house are no coincidence either, consisting of alluring treats that despite an appealing taste are considerably unhealthy. In addition to this, once the inviting walls of the house are removed, the true wicked nature of what is housed within is revealed, as it is owned by ‘a wicked witch, who lay in wait for children, and had built the little house on purpose to entice them.’ (p.90). The witch, in this case, need not be an invasive force, for instead she feigns the part of a benevolent and comforting presence, ““Ah, my dear children, how come you here? You must come indoors and stay with me, you will be no trouble””. (p.89) However, it is all a ruse for the purpose of preying upon the vulnerability of the dispossessed.

Unlike the previously mentioned depictions of the witch, Hansel and Gretel encounter a witch who is less bound to the ‘otherness’ of femininity, instead being a more traditionally monstrous witch. In the same vein as the depiction of Spring-Heeled Jack, the witch is depicted as obviously demonic, as the ‘witch’s eyes were red, and she could not see very far, but she had a keen scent, like the beasts, and knew very well when human creatures were near.’ (p.90) The comparisons to beasts and the idea that she herself is not one of the ‘human creatures’ she preys upon, dehumanises the threat she presents and thus implies the obstacle she represents is of an otherworldly nature. The witch can be seen as a metaphor for paganism, being an ancient force, as described in another translation of the tale during the witch’s entrance as ‘Suddenly the door opened, and a

⁵⁵*Victorian Science and Literature*, Vol. 7, ed.by Ralph O’Connor (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012) p.xiii

woman as old as the hills, who supported herself on crutches, came creeping out.’⁵⁶ In this translation it is easy to see the witch as a representation of a weakened pagan tradition, being ‘as old as the hills’ to imply her predating the introduction of Christianity throughout Europe. The witch as an invasive supernatural figure is not a singular entity, but rather a representative of an invading or even resurfacing interest in pagan traditions. Michael Newton has regarded this as a fairly common attribute of fairy tales of the nineteenth century, and even observes that ‘some writers worried over the potential impiety of the fairy tale, as though the supernatural it offered was contaminated by ancient paganism.’⁵⁷

However, it would arguably be false to receive the *Household Stories* (1882) as promoting the resurgence of paganism, as the tale of *Hansel and Gretel* displays that the rival and triumphant force against the witch is Christianity. Early in the story Hansel displays his faith that God will protect the children, “‘Be easy, dear little sister, and go to sleep quietly; God will not forsake us’” (p.86). Once ensnared within the witch’s control, Gretel similarly prays for divine aid “‘Dear God, pray help us!’” (p.91), and this prayer is made shortly before the witch begins pushing ‘poor Gretel towards the oven, out of which the flames were already shining’ (p.91). The heathenistic existence of the witch exists permanently close to the flames of Christian hell, represented by the oven, and she survives by condemning others to the flames so that she might sustain her existence. However, once Gretel becomes aware of the damning intent of the witch, ‘Gretel perceived her intention...’ (p.91), she gives the final push required to send the witch ‘in further, and she shut the iron door upon her...and left the wicked witch to burn miserably’

⁵⁶ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, ‘Hansel and Gretel’, *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*, trans. by Edgar Taylor and Marian Edwardes (November 7, 2016), in *Project Gutenberg*
 <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2591/2591-h/2591-h.htm#link2H_4_0020> [Accessed 21 August 2018]

⁵⁷ ‘Introduction’, *Victorian Fairy Tales*, ed. by Michael Newton, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p.xx

(p.91). Besides being uncannily similar to the witch burnings of history, it also represents the triumph of Christian enlightenment over pagan ideas in regards to a nineteenth-century mindset towards Christianity and heathenism. This is addressed in the *London Quarterly Review*, which stated ‘To heathenism Christianity presented an utter contrast as superior in every moral characteristic as it was inferior in material strength and resources. The weapons which it brought to the conflict were all spiritual. It conquered by teaching and suffering.’⁵⁸

However, a conflict of religions is not the only battle of concepts in *Hansel and Gretel*, as the survival of the children against the pagan witch is as equally attributable to their use of rationalism. The children first return home after their parents abandon them through the logical and tactful use the trail of stones, as when they were led into the woods Hansel ‘had been taking every now and then a flint from his pocket and dropping it on the road’ (p.86). Unfortunately, the children do not continue following a rational course, failing to learn from the first abandonment that it was likely to reoccur, and they are unable to adapt to the lack of flints during their second excursion into the woods and instead ‘stopped to throw a crumb [of bread] on the ground’ (p.88), which is swiftly eaten before they can follow the trail. The forest becomes more difficult to traverse as time passes, the children becoming more lost as ‘They were always trying to get back to it, but instead of that they only found themselves farther in the wood, and if help had not soon come they would have been starved’ (p.89). Once one falls out of rational thinking it becomes harder to escape from the obscurity of not knowing, as symbolised by starving in the forest, and this is what makes the allure of superstition so appealing. Rationalism is what allows the children to foresee the dangers ahead and tactfully avoid them, as

⁵⁸ ‘ART. VI.-the Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism.’ *London Quarterly Review* (1880) vol. 54, no. 108, pp. 422-445 (p.430), in *ProQuest*
<<https://search.proquest.com/docview/2514367?accountid=14620>> [Accessed 21 August 2018]

shown in the first attempt to abandon them, where as they fail to predict the dangers of a second and harsher abandonment and the temptations of supernatural forces. The children cannot rely upon both rationalism and superstition for they are opposing forces, as there was a nineteenth-century mindset that people ‘must choose between mythology and rational science, and there could be no compromise. Reason alone was truthful and the myths of religion truthless.’⁵⁹ Rationality returns to the children when Grethel predicts the witch’s intent and thus they both escape, their minds enriched by the experience, as represented by the ‘chests of pearls and precious stones’ that Hansel rejoices are “‘something better than flint stones” (p.91).

Ultimately, fairy tales and folkloric myth, despite containing intrusive and threatening supernatural forces that if believed would be treated with extreme severity, endured as popular subjects of fiction before and long after the nineteenth century. There is a willingness to engage with the supernatural so long as it remains contained in literature; however, even the literary depictions of these superstitions seemed to instruct how to morally engage with the supernatural, as stated by Karen Armstrong ‘myth is not a story told for its own sake. It shows us how we should behave.’⁶⁰ This element of myth is substantially more important when acknowledging the intrinsic bond between folklore and truth, as encounters with superstition similarly present applicable lessons for perils of reality. Ruskin emphasised this idea when he wrote “‘For every fairy tale worth recording at all [...] is the remnant of a tradition possessing historical value [...] historical, at least so far as it has naturally arisen out of the mind of a people under special

⁵⁹ Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (London: Canongate, 2006) p.138.

⁶⁰ Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (London: Canongate, 2006) p.4.

circumstances.”⁶¹ They serve primarily as warnings against overindulging with superstition and attempts at subverting order.

On the other hand, not all fairy tales were seen to successfully meet the criteria of an insightfully and morally instructing text, as Edward Lane’s translation of the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments*, was generally regarded as ‘appealingly fanciful, if slightly self-indulgent, reading material’, and was ‘cast as a “frivolous text” used or manipulated by Europeans to support preconceived notions of Arab character’, which stood for ‘irrationality, indolence, and the imagination itself.’⁶² This reaction is bizarre given the uncanny similarities between the supernatural entities in the *Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* and those of traditional European folklore, with beings such as the jinn which acts in a similar way to creatures such as changelings, spectres and fairies. The jinn or genie can disguise itself and infiltrate human society, much like a changeling, ‘we know not whether he be a human being or a Genie’.⁶³ In addition to this the Genie’s repertoire of supernatural skills allow for possession, ‘The disease that she suffereth ariseth from her being possessed by a Genie’ (p.488), and haunting like a ghost, ‘hath taken up his lodging in the house that is haunted by the Genie...’ (p.512). The Arab fairy tales may have been treated as ‘frivolous’ by European readers, despite such striking similarities to Eurocentric myths, due to the disassociation between the Europeans and the traditions and beliefs of the Arab world. It has been noted by critics such as Robert Irwin that the Middle-Eastern response to western translations of the text was typically displeasure due to the irrational nature of the interpretations, focusing primarily on the

⁶¹ John Ruskin, cited in Jennifer Schacker, *National Dreams* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2003) p.143

⁶² Jennifer Schacker, *National Dreams* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2003) pp.78-81

⁶³ Edward William Lane, *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* (London: J. Murray, 1853) p.478. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

superstitions and not the science or faith behind it.⁶⁴ Far from being mere apparitions of imaginative minds, jinn were a long standing part of Muslim tradition, as ‘The Muslims, in general, believe in three different species of created intelligent beings; namely, Angels, who are created of light; Genii, who are created of fire; and Men, created of earth’, and the common interpretation of devils is that ‘they are rebellious Jinn.’⁶⁵ With the understanding of the religious significance of the jinn, acts such as the exorcism of a Genie, ‘With thy permission and leave, desire to burn perfumes, and to recite a form of exorcism, and imprison the Genie here, that he may never return to her’ (p.488), are recognised less as frivolous acts of the imagination and more as practises of faith. Ultimately, it serves to display how the intrusive aspect of the supernatural is significantly lessened when introduced without a familiar counterpart to convey a recognisable lesson or struggle that might better help the reader to comprehend their own obstacles of reality.

⁶⁴ Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights A Companion* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2005) pp.82-83.

⁶⁵ ‘Notes of the Introduction’, *The Thousand and One Nights*, Vol. 1, trans. by Edward Lane, ed. by Edward Stanley Poole (London: Chatto and Windus, 1912), Note 21, in *Project Gutenberg* <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34206/34206-h/34206-h.htm>> [Accessed 22 August 2018]

Chapter Two: Spiritualism and Victorian Faith

The supernatural in fictitious composition requires to be managed with considerable delicacy, as criticism begins to be more on the alert...The marvellous, more than any other attribute of fictitious narrative, loses its effect by being brought much into view. The imagination of the reader is to be excited if possible, without being gratified.⁶⁶

The ambiguity and obscure nature of acts of spiritualism in the Nineteenth Century somewhat juxtaposed the primary intent of the movement, being that of discovery in regards to the spiritual realm and phenomena that existed beyond material existence. However, as Walter Scott's statement observes, the supernatural in literature is at its most impactful, whether it be in invoking fear or intrigue, when maintaining a certain level of vagueness, the result of which is doubt that inspires greater curiosity. The spiritualist exploration of otherworldly phenomena was not universally appreciated, with many aligning it with forces opposing Christianity. Spiritualism was, to some, an extension of the reach of trespassing supernatural forces, as spiritualists aided the intrusion by extending a form of invitation. As the ghost stories of Charles Dickens exhibit, ethereal entities already present a terrifying threat to the natural order of human life, possessing various means to destabilise and invade the domestic sphere of the Victorian home. In contrast, some viewed faith or religious institutions as being similarly invasive upon the natural order. The Nineteenth Century was one of religious doubt, yet still faith significantly influenced the lives of the Victorians, affecting 'men and women in their private lives – in their sense of personal identity and self-worth, their moral beliefs and behaviour, their family relationships and friendships, their spending habits, and their use

⁶⁶ Walter Scott, "On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann," *Foreign Quarterly Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1827) pp.60-98. In <https://saxonianfolkways.wordpress.com/2014/03/04/on-the-supernatural-in-fictitious-composition/> [Accessed 13 September 2018]

of leisure time.⁶⁷ This level of control over the structure of human life led many writers, particularly some of the Romantic poets, to question the necessity of such demanding and intrusive supernatural forces of religious origin.

Inviting in the Supernatural:

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *One Thing Needful* (1887) displays the methods of spiritualism that permit the interaction between humans and spiritual entities. The child-medium Griselda, and her controlling guardian Mrs Minchin, are spiritualists approached by Lord Lashmar, who hopes to rely upon their clairvoyant abilities. Lashmar approaches the spiritualists and confesses "I am troubled by the disappearance of someone who is very dear to me. Do you think the spirits will tell me how to find her?"⁶⁸ However, a particularly noteworthy consequence of Lashmar's interaction with the spiritualists is the embarrassment he displays afterwards, as following his first attempt to see Mrs Minchin he 'blushed like a girl when he came to the story of his haunt for a clairvoyant, and his call upon Mrs. Minchin. "It was utter foolishness of course, inspired by a silly woman"' (p.320). A possible explanation for Lord Lashmar's shame in seeking out spiritualist services may be found in the typical believers of the movement, as 'What is significant here is the fact that by the 1870s spiritualism was most securely established amongst the ranks of respectable working- and middle-class people'.⁶⁹ Respectable members of the upper-class were somewhat excluded from the frivolity of spiritualism, often disregarded as a consequence of its superstitious origin as well as its denouncement by the Church of England. Even so, Lashmar's inclination towards supernatural methods displays that this exclusion somewhat denies upper-class men a form of expression and comfort that is

⁶⁷ Julie Melnyk, *Victorian Religion* (London: Praeger, 2008) p.1

⁶⁸ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *One Thing Needful* (London: J. and R. Maxwell, 1887) p.331. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

⁶⁹ Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989) p.8

enjoyed by the lower classes, as his acquaintance Nestorius declares ““Yes, no doubt it is all foolishness...and yet how we all hanker after it, that mysterious something, beyond the border-line of hard fact.”” (p.320)

There are various other explanations for Lashmar’s embarrassment, including the Christian disapproval of spiritualist arts. Following Griselda’s first contact with the spirits on Lashmar’s behalf, he becomes terrified by the experience and declares that the séance is ““holding communion with the devil...Trick or no trick, it is diabolical”” (p.334). Christian Orthodox views condemned spiritualist phenomena, particularly séances that were ‘denounced as diabolical at worst, or as blasphemous at best, but with the rising body of evidence came a secular frame through which one could view psychic phenomena as morally neutral, and within the domain of science.’⁷⁰ Mrs Minchin uses the scientific explanation to counter Lashmar’s views, exclaiming ““It is in the cause of science she has wasted herself, as you in your enlightenment would call it. She had dedicated herself to the advancement of psychology, to the etherealisation of humanity...”” (pp.371-372). Lashmar continues to express that ‘Such things must come from direct traffic with Satan’ (p.335), yet even as he condemns it he finds himself ‘deeming the whole spirit-system diabolical, and yet wanting to know more about it’ (p.347). The anxiety the intrusion of spiritualism created was somewhat enhanced by the era of religious doubt the Victorians inhabited As much as some viewed spiritualism as the opponent of Orthodox faith, to some it attempted to provided answers and examinations into questions traditional faiths could no tangibly prove. The natural curiosity towards spiritualism, despite its

⁷⁰ Peter Lamont, ‘Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol .47, No.4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.897-920 (p.917)
<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4091661>> [Accessed 14 September 2018]

denouncement, was a natural response to the desire to understand the unknown, as people ‘found in spiritualism deeply consoling evidence for the immortality of the soul.’⁷¹

A natural curiosity towards the supernatural does not eliminate the presence of scepticism. Luke Thurston wrote, in regards to the late nineteenth century, ‘readers were no longer to be pictured as the wide-eyed dupes of gothic fantasy, but now as sceptical modern rationalists’.⁷² Lashmar is, by his very nature, a sceptic of supernatural phenomena, as he has:

always ridiculed spiritualistic performances and pretensions of all kinds. For mesmerism or clairvoyance, he had a faint, half-hearted belief; but for the floaters in the air, and the rappers on the underside of tables, and the flourishes of spirit hands—generally turning out on investigation to be mortal feet—he had no respect whatever. (p.311)

One of the first inquires made by Lashmar when learning of Mrs. Minchin and Griselda is to ask “‘Is she a public performer—a person who exhibits her supernatural powers for money?’ (p.310) This again serves to exhibit Lashmar’s scepticism of spiritualist practices, aware that many supposed mediums simply exploited the inherent curiosity towards the supernatural, as bitterly stated by Nestorius ‘But our aspirations after the supernatural have been vulgarised by modern charlatans, until it is hardly possible to define the distinction between the conjuror and the sibyl’ (p.320). The “charlatans” prey upon the Victorian anxiety of the unknown, providing answers and comfort to those desperately in need of it; however, the supernatural forces present are not truly otherworldly intruders, but artificial manifestations of vague supernatural phenomena. The scepticism exhibited by Lashmar is unsurprising given Braddon’s own attitude towards the supposed gifts of spiritualist, as she wrote once in regards to the Davenport

⁷¹ Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989) p.21

⁷² Luke Thurston, *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2012) p.2

brothers ““I cannot understand these spirits or the manner of their demonstrations. I can fancy Edgar Poe’s Raven – or any spirit coming to a lonely watcher in the dead of night ...I *cannot* imagine Dark seances at so much a head””.⁷³

The very atmosphere of the séance is designed to make this illusion of an intrusion even more deceiving. Sight often dominates as the sense humans rely upon to distinguish real from unreal, and so the séance deliberately occurs in a darkened room, negating that sense. *One Thing Needful* similarly depicts the dwelling of the medium as a ‘dismal drawing-room. Again no fire. It was natural that the spirits should be indifferent to atmosphere, but Mrs. Minchin must surely have suffered as a moral, if ever she sat in that damp and chilly apartment.’ (p.329) Marlene Tromp wrote of the darkened séance room that it ‘invited and embodied the disruption of the ordinary...the linked hands of the sitters violated customary barriers of age and gender, and the intimate spaces underneath the tipping tables set the stage for more than just spiritual stimulation.’⁷⁴ The stimulations beyond the spiritual is an important aspect of Tromp’s statement, as it implies that the intrusion of the supernatural, artificial or not, is aided by additional factors, such as different senses and possibly the state of the mind, for as Andrew Mangham states ‘The undead make frequent, spectral appearances in Victorian fiction, yet their presence is often offered a natural – rather than a supernatural – explanation.’⁷⁵

However, the most peculiar aspect of Braddon’s narrative is its interpretation of the supposed unique bond between women and spiritual entities. The ‘Victorian spiritualists also held that women were particularly gifted as the mediums of this

⁷³ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, ‘Letter to Bulwer-Lytoon (9th December 1864), cited in Kate Mattacks, ‘Beyond These Voices: M. E. Braddon and the Ghost of Sensationalism’, *Women and the Victorian Occult*, ed. by, Tatiana Kontou (London: Routledge, 2011) p.50

⁷⁴ Marlene Tromp, *Altered States* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006) p.21

⁷⁵ Andrew Mangham, ‘Life After Death: Apoplexy Medical Ethics and the Female Undead’, *Women and the Victorian Occult*, ed. by, Tatiana Kontou (London: Routledge, 2011) pp.8-25 (p.8)

communication...Spiritualism emerged contemporaneously with the consideration of women's proper role and sphere which became known as 'the woman question'.⁷⁶ As the previous quote from Lashmar displayed, there typically was a male disregard for the spiritual as women's business, as he stated his involvement with spiritualism was 'inspired by a silly woman' (p320). However, regardless of Lashmar's criticism, Mrs. Minchin is able to run her own establishment without a male authority in her household, exhibiting the somewhat liberating effect spiritualism has had on her life. Additionally, ignoring the traditional expectations of femininity, someone like Griselda, is able to function in this spiritualist system, despite being described as 'dull and dead looking as to, and the most expressionless countenance Lashmar had ever seen. It had no more meaning than a log', and from a patriarchal perspective such as Lashmar's 'If this was the mortal with whom spirits loved to hold commune, they had indeed strange predilections' (p.330). Mrs. Minchin even outlines Griselda's separation from the expectations of Victorian femininity, stating she "is above all considerations of earthly dross. She has no pleasure in the things that please other women" (p.370).

However, Braddon is not content with depicting spiritualism as definitively advantageous to women. Much of the fiction on the subjective of women and spiritualism attempted to 'addresses urgent late Victorian anxieties about women's ownership of their bodies'.⁷⁷ In many cases the depiction was that of enrichment, as 'And it is no accident that spiritualism, a movement which privileged women and took them seriously, attracted so many female believers during a period of gender disjunction and disparity between

⁷⁶Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989) p.1

⁷⁷Susan Poznar, 'Whose Body? The "Willing" Or "Unwilling" Mesmerized Woman In Late Victorian Fiction' *Women and the Victorian Occult*, ed. by, Tatiana Kontou (London: Routledge, 2011) pp.138-161 (p.138).

aspiration and reality.’⁷⁸ Conversely, Braddon depicts spiritualism as another means of confinement for some women, redefining their lives yet keeping them equally under control. Griselda’s life is strictly governed by Mrs. Minchin, as Lashmar is informed by a servant that ‘Griselda was never allowed to see anyone except in the presence of Mrs. Minchin; that she never left Mrs. Minchin’s roof except to walk in the garden; had never been outside those walls within the servant’s memory’ (p.346). There is a heavily-implied idea in the text that Griselda is being held against her will, or at the very least she has been brainwashed by Mrs. Minchin to serve as the ideal medium to enhance her business.

The ideas of the supernatural have intruded so far into Griselda’s way of thinking that she no longer seeks happiness in life, but rather she is content with believing that the afterlife will offer her greater bliss, remarking to Lashmar “‘I am as happy as I can ever be in this world. There will be a greater happiness, a newer, wider life when I am free, like them’” (p.373). Even Griselda’s original identity as Sarah Anne Curtis is overwritten in the service of spiritualism, as Mrs. Minchin relays that “‘Griselda is the name the spirits gave her when she first came to live with me... It is the name by which she is known in the spirit world’” (p.330). Worse still is the state of her body, seemingly failing in health during her confinement with Mrs. Minchin, as the servant says “‘I don’t think Miss Griselda is long for this world. They say mediums always die young’ (p.347). There was a need for Victorian spiritualist to firmly reject ‘medicine’s attempts to equate mediumship with female deviancy and sickness’, which does imply there was a common trend of ill-health amongst female mediums.⁷⁹ Regardless, what is evident in Braddon’s text is that spiritualism is not so liberating as to provide a new way of life for women in

⁷⁸Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989) p.4

⁷⁹ Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989) p.202

which they take full ownership of their own bodies. Spiritualism, in cases such as Griselda's, is as intrusive and exploitative as the patriarchy or even haunting supernatural forces.

Uninvited Spectres:

The supernatural forces that spiritualists conjure are not always invited in, and are in fact at their most terrifying when trespassing unannounced. The hauntings that occur in Victorian ghost stories enhance the terror they invoke through the removal of the supposed sanctity of the domestic home, presenting the vulnerability of every individual to spiritual forces, not merely those who believe in or call upon them. The uninvited presence of spirits is perhaps most famously depicted in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843), and as is typical of the supernatural in fiction, their appearance serves to disrupt the natural order of Scrooge's life. However, Dickens's tale, as much as it is a terrifying depiction of the defenceless nature of man against spirit, there is also a significant shift in Scrooge's psyche that occurs in its wake, for as the first spirit states to Scrooge its purpose for invading is "[His] welfare!".⁸⁰ The ethereal invasion is motivated by very real and physical parts of his life that seem to have required the spirits to act as an agent of change after he has shut himself off from feeling the impact of the physical world around him.

Baring this in mind, the invasion of the supernatural into Scrooge's home serves as a proxy for material concerns that are incapable of reaching him any other way. As Eve M. Lynch states about the Victorian ghost stories, they 'offered evidence that the

⁸⁰ Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911) p.37. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

home was no haven from powerful and exacting social pressures'.⁸¹ Marley's fate of dying alone with only a single mourner in Scrooge does little to unsettle Scrooge's life, as the physical death of his business partner barely moves him to grieve, for 'even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event' (p.2). Even so, isolated in the safety of his home and supposedly unmoved by Marley's death, Scrooge is unable to hide from the haunting spirit that later visits him, as his 'colour changed, though, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried, "I know him! Marley's ghost!"' (p.21). In fiction the ghost serves as a useful tool for the writer to force their character to confront real-world anxieties or problems in a way that is unavoidable or uncontrollable. However, another interpretation of the haunting spectre is as a creation of the mind, implying that the imprints the material world leaves on the subconscious may resurface in supernatural forms should these issues not be properly dealt with. This aligns with the theory presented by Louise Henson that 'All the ghosts in Dickens's haunted house are unambiguously traced to a mental origin'.⁸²

Dickens's approach to spiritualism acquiesced 'to the scientific theory of his day, that paranormal phenomenon had a physiological basis: that apparitions were a result of, as he put it, "a disordered condition of the nerves or senses"'.⁸³ Such a view is similarly shared by the character of Scrooge, who responds to the appearance of Marley's ghost by doubting his own senses "Because [...] a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You [Marley] may be an undigested bit of

⁸¹ Eve M. Lynch, 'Spectral politics: the Victorian ghost story and the domestic servant', *The Victorian Supernatural*, eds., Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.67

⁸² Louise Henson, 'Investigations and fictions: Charles Dickens and Ghosts', *The Victorian Supernatural*, eds., Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.45

⁸³ Bryan Kozlowski, 'A Dickens of a Good Ghost Story', in *Historic UK* <<https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/A-Dickens-of-Good-Ghost-Story/>> [Accessed 17 September 2018]

beef[...]There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!" (p.23). What is interesting about Scrooge's disbelief is that it oddly seems to console him, deeming it better to know something is madness than to be uncertain of its origin. However, madness is by its very nature a state of disruption in which no certainty exists, and this is similarly how the figure of the spectre operates 'as the rupture of consistent presentation, of the plausible discursive "order of things"'.⁸⁴ Scrooge's initial and naïve sense of safety comes from the supposed security of isolating the spectre to a natural cause of madness, eliminating the immediate physical threat it poses. However, the spectre is a figure that 'can be seen and yet which inhibits knowledge. Seeing a spectre both is, and is not, knowing...'⁸⁵ In this regard, Scrooge cannot truly comprehend or prepare himself for the possible threats posed by these ambiguous figures, hence his unshakable trepidation in the presence of the final spirit:

It thrilled him with a vague uncertain horror, to know that behind the dusky shroud, there were ghostly eyes intently fixed upon him, while he, though he stretched his own to the utmost, could see nothing but a spectral hand and one great heap of black.

"Ghost of the Future!" he exclaimed, "I fear you more than any spectre I have seen." (p.99)

However, intrusions by spiritual entities force characters to acknowledge their own mortality, and similarly direct their concerns beyond their present life. In the case of spiritualism, it offered consolation in the form of an expanded existence, depicted by 'forms unseen, and mightier far than we', and so 'our imagination, darting forth, explores with rapture the new world which is laid open to its view, and rejoices in the expansion of its powers.'⁸⁶ This comforting feeling taken from indulgences in spiritualism is shown

⁸⁴ Luke Thurston, *Literary Ghosts from the Victorians to Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2012) p.6

⁸⁵ Ruth Robbins, 'Apparitions Can Be Deceptive: Vernon Lee's Androgynous Spectres', *Victorian Gothic*, ed. by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000) pp.182-200 (p.183)

⁸⁶ J. and A. L. Aikin, 'On the Pleasure Derived From Objects of Terror; with Sir Bertrand, A Fragment', *Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose* (London: 1773), pp.119-37 (p.125)

by Griselda and Mrs. Minchin in Braddon's text, who proclaim "Call it not death but promotion" (p.371). Dickens, by contrast, contemplates the terrifying concept of an afterlife that is so heavily dependent on the quality of one's life in the present. Unlike the mortality of life, the spirit is supposedly destined to a more eternal existence, and as Marley's ghost shows, that existence can be more akin to limbo or damnation than heaven. Marley laments that "I wear the chains I forged in life" (p.25), and reveals to Scrooge the reason for his eternal suffering is because "It is required of every man [...] that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellowmen, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death" (p.25). Ultimately, the intrusion of the spectre invokes various anxieties about the long-lasting consequences of present lives, as well as creating an unnerving sensation regarding the nature of human existence, as despite the momentary 'otherness' of the ghost, it is only temporary, as in actuality it represents every man and woman's eventual state of being.

Anxieties of Faith:

Whilst Christianity viciously denounced spiritualism as a disturbance to the natural order of Victorian faith, the church was similarly subjected to criticisms as doubt began to redirect approaches to nineteenth-century faith. The rigid structure of established religious institutes was viewed by some as intrusive in the same way spiritualism was to Christianity, having somewhat strayed from the natural order of the world. Coleridge wrote on the subject of Christianity that "He who begins by loving Christianity better than Truth, will proceed by lobbing his own Sect or Church better than Christianity, and end in loving himself better than all".⁸⁷ This egotism of faith can consequently lead to blind faith, in which asking questions or refusing to accept conventional answers is

⁸⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, cited in Elizabeth Jay, *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1986) p.53

deemed wrong, for as Coleridge says, ‘The opposite of Faith and its worst enemy is Credulity.’⁸⁸ Ironically, just as Christianity condemned spiritualism for intruding on the natural order of things, spiritualists would argue they were merely attempting to examine and understand that order from an alternative perspective, and it was Christianity that intruded on their right to question. Despite many spiritualist’s attempts to use ‘Spiritualism to support Christianity, and to combat atheism, agnosticism, materialism and rationalism’, it’s support was considered unnecessary and unnatural, and thus ‘Spiritualism was condemned as the work of Satan, a sordid commercial ‘business’, an ‘epidemic delusion’, a ‘wretched superstition’’.⁸⁹

Coleridge was not the only writer amongst the Romantics to explore themes of doubt and religious intrusion upon natural human curiosity. Byron’s *Cain: A Mystery* (1821) depicts a crisis of faith in his interpretation of the biblical figure of Cain, who is pleaded to by Lucifer not to allow his freedom of thought to be intruded upon by religious authorities. Lucifer states to Cain:

*One good gift has the fatal apple given,—
Your reason:—let it not be overswayed
By tyrannous threats to force you into faith
'Gainst all external sense and inward feeling:
Think and endure,—and form an inner world
In your own bosom—where the outward fails;
So shall you nearer be the spiritual
Nature, and war triumphant with your own.*⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Notebook 37’ in Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p.52

⁸⁹ Richard Noakes, ‘Spiritualism, science and the supernatural in mid-Victorian Britain’, *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp.26-27

⁹⁰ Lord Byron, ‘Cain: A Mystery’, *The Works of Lord Byron, Poetry. Vol. V*, eds, Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: John Murray, 1901), 2.2.459-466, in *Project Gutenberg* <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/23475/23475-h/23475-h.htm>> [Accessed 13 September 2018] All further references will be given in the body of the text.

In this moment, Lucifer deems that reason and curiosity are natural, being gifts of nature in their own right as they originate from the ‘fatal apple’, and the suppression of these elements of human nature are ‘tyrannous threats to force [Cain] into faith’. Similarly, within the confines of God’s will, human nature can be labelled as sinful and thus requires a disruption of the natural order to be deemed reverent, for as Adam says, ‘Eve! Let not this,/ Thy natural grief, lead to impiety!’ (3.1. 14-19). The unyielding boundaries of such forms of faith led Coleridge to anticipate ‘the difficulties which would arise from a dogged clinging to theories of plenary inspiration (the belief that the Bible not only contained but was in every part of the Word of God) and literal interpretation.’⁹¹ As such, other Romantic poets sought less intrusive interpretations of the world, for just as some turned to spiritualism, others turned to atheism or pantheism. An example of this is clearly present in Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Queen Mab*, that not only presents an alternative understanding of the natural order, but also criticises the intrusive and demanding God of traditional faith:

Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing Power,
Necessity! thou mother of the world!
Unlike the God of human error, thou
Requir'st no prayers or praises; the caprice
Of man's weak will belongs no more to thee.⁹²

Ultimately, the overarching anxiety that permeates throughout the rise of spiritualism, the fear of the spectre, and crises of faith, is the fear of the unknown, a concern that intrusive supernatural phenomena force us to confront. Spiritualism uses these supernatural forces to rationalise and fill in gaps in the nineteenth-century understanding of the world and possible others beyond life. However, the involvement of

⁹¹ Elizabeth Jay, *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1986) p.54

⁹² Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Queen Mab* (London: John Brooks, 1829) p.74

spiritual entities without the reassurance of understanding the phenomena leads not only to doubts regarding human existence, but also uncertainties regarding our own senses. The spectre thus expands upon the understanding of the natural order of the world whilst also adding further questions to keep human comprehension of life equally distant, if not further, from the truth as before. Faith provides a means of comfort, providing solace in the unknown by suggesting a power that eludes human understanding maintains the natural order, and yet once this is questioned, doubt once again gives rise to anxieties regarding human autonomy when dictated by these forces of faith.

Chapter Three: Science and Madness: Altering Human Perception

The tendency of the present age is to *realism*. The love for the romantic is becoming absorbed in the rage for utility; and many of those feelings and prepossessions—those domestic traditions and household legends, which prevailed even in the days of *our* childhood, are fast vanishing from amongst us.⁹³

In theory, science represents the culmination of ideas that are the furthest away from the ideals of the supernatural, as the supernatural by its very definition represents a force that eludes scientific explanation. Science should thus signify the absence of superstition, eliminated by the principles of rationalism. Whereas the intrusive supernatural acts primarily as an agent of chaos, creating disruptions to social order, science served to identify and reinforce the natural order. Science's 'rational endeavour' was significant in defining the new order of Victorian society as 'the spread of this kind of "useful knowledge" would provide readers of all classes with a standard for measuring the world...' ⁹⁴ Even so, rather than simply discarding the supernatural and progressing into a new scientific age, one in which superstition was forgotten as a primitive belief, it instead became common practise to assimilate these fantasies into the rational thoughts of science. Some argue that the rationalisation of the supernatural changes our understanding of it and thus makes it natural. Alternatively, early science in literature operated in an uncannily reminiscent way to the gothic supernatural, exploring similar recesses of the dark unknown through an inquisitive imagination. Yet imagination can easily give way to madness, another means of rationalising supernatural phenomena as manifestations of faulty minds.

⁹³ W. Cooke Stafford, 'Fairy Mythology', *Hood's Magazine* (1848), Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 330-355 (p.330), in *ProQuest* <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/4446475?accountid=14620>> [Accessed 31 August 2018]

⁹⁴ James A. Secord, *Visions of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) p.2

Detecting and Rationalising the Supernatural:

Arthur Conan Doyle is a writer whose agenda towards the supernatural existed in flux. Famously a spiritualist, Doyle's personal beliefs and explorations into the supernatural entirely juxtapose those of his most famous literary character of Sherlock Holmes. Doyle himself was reportedly 'interested in Spiritualism as early as 1886' and in '1893, Conan Doyle joined the British Society for Psychical Research, a society formed in Cambridge one year earlier in order to investigate scientifically the claims of Spiritualism and other paranormal phenomena'.⁹⁵ The vast majority of Doyle's written works about his fascination with spiritualism and the supernatural occurred after the conclusion of the nineteenth century; however, instances such as his fascination with the Cottingley Fairies photos were merely later examples of longstanding investigations into such phenomena. Emergences of new areas of science included the likes of philosophers who 'even made fairies the subject of scientific analysis, as 'fairyology' determined whether fairies should be part of natural history or part of supernatural lore: just one aspect of the revival of interest in folklore'.⁹⁶ Rather than the anticipated consequence of scientific investigations into the supernatural, that being the banishment of all creations of superstitious imaginations, science instead seemed to revitalise a second examination of these phenomena. In the case of the fairy, ideas such as Darwin's theories of evolution reimagined the interpretations of the fairy, allowing them to enter 'the evolutionary view of human development', becoming beings that are mostly 'beautiful and remind us of such qualities related to beauty as childhood, nature, frivolity, and freedom from constraint'.⁹⁷ Such intrinsic bonds between fairy evolution

⁹⁵ Andrzej Diniejko, 'Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Victorian Spiritualism', in *The Victorian Web* (14 November 2014) <<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/doyle/spiritualism.html>> [Accessed 31 August 2018]

⁹⁶ Melanie Keene, *Science in Wonderland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p.18

⁹⁷ Roderick McGillis, 'Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature', *Victorian Studies* (2003), Vol.45, No.3, pp. 571-573 (p.572) *ProQuest* <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/212024687?accountid=14620>> [Accessed 31 August 2018]

and that of humans is echoed even in the fantastical works of Barrie, stating in *Peter and Wendy* that, in regards to the fairy language, ‘ordinary children can never gear it, but if you were to hear it you would know that you had heard it once before’.⁹⁸

Yet there is something quite distinct between Doyle’s investigations into the supernatural in comparison to the detective Sherlock Holmes. The traditional detective is a figure who is limited by the nature of their tales, as vampires, ghosts, and similar agencies cannot, *must not* apply in detective fiction’.⁹⁹ Holmes as a character is reliant upon facts, a man who believes ‘It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.’¹⁰⁰ In the case of the fairy, Holmes’s logic would insist that evolution is not enough to prove the existence of fairies as a product of the theory, but rather that a fairy would support the idea of evolution, but only once the fairy is first discovered as an undoubtable fact. The conservative detective simply is not suited for surrendering to the possibility of the supernatural, as that would be an unwinnable conflict for them, as stated in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), “‘There is a realm in which the most acute and most experienced of detectives is helpless.’”¹⁰¹ Unlike the hidden or invisible worlds of spiritualism and the folkloric beings, in ‘the fiction of Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins, and Arthur Conan Doyle, the detective is a master-semiotician, an expert interpreter of a textualized visual world.’¹⁰²

⁹⁸ James Matthew Barrie, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and *Peter and Wendy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.88.

⁹⁹ Srdjan Smajić, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.2

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’, *Sherlock Holmes The Complete Stories* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1989) pp.429-448 (p.431).

¹⁰¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘The Hound of the Baskervilles’, *Sherlock Holmes The Complete Stories* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1989) pp.177-304 (p.192). All further references will be given in the body of the text.

¹⁰² Srdjan Smajić, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.6

The divisions between Doyle and Holmes's attitudes towards the yet unexplained are somewhat subtle, as both appear to be using science to rationalise the phenomena. However, Doyle appears willing to engage with the supernatural on the basis that our understanding of the facts is limited, and that potentially our understanding of the natural world can not accurately categorise all the phenomena of the world. Doyle's investigations suggest that besides expanding human knowledge of the supernatural, his investigations and those akin to it were also attempts to expand their understanding of science, as each expansion in scientific theory 'would provide society with the means to confront what had previously been deemed as unattainable or doubtful.'¹⁰³ In other words, Doyle is of the mind that we do not yet know what is impossible, whereas the crux of Holmes's deductive methods relies upon the principle that 'when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth.'¹⁰⁴ This quote is significant in suggesting that as far as Holmes is concerned he is able to confidently label certain suggested explanations as impossible, in contrast the agnosticism of Doyle.

The mindset of outright rejecting the mystical is displayed by Holmes in cases of supposedly supernatural origin, as with *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Doctor Mortimer serves as a primary example of a man of science who is anxious in regards to the supernatural, as he believes there have been "“several incidents which are hard to reconcile with the settled order of nature”" (pp.192-193). The unexplainable marvels of the supernatural proves problematic for men such as Mortimer, as it undermines the 'Victorian quest for order behind phenomena purporting to come from the other world- the 'naturalisation of the supernatural' as it was called by one early historian of

¹⁰³Maurizio Ascari, *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction* (Hampshire: Palgrave macmillan, 2007) p.77

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Sign of Four', *Sherlock Holmes The Complete Stories* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1989) pp.97-174 (p.122).

Victorian physical research'.¹⁰⁵ Mortimer is plagued with doubt over what is possible, "I do not know what to believe" (p.193), much like Doyle himself. The reason Holmes is unfazed by the intrusion of the supernatural is because he focuses on the existing facts that would disprove such a notion, 'Holmes shrugged his shoulders. "I have hitherto confined my investigations to this world [...] you must admit that the footmark is material"' (p.193). Holmes disregards the supernatural potential of the beast and instead quickly fixates on the need to "prove the connection between the man [the suspect] and the beast" (p.274). *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, although originally starting out as a story of gothic supernatural intrigue, eventually is unmasked as a cautionary tale of the real threat, 'the dark desires of apparently respectable people.'¹⁰⁶ As with the reference to Spring-Heeled Jack in the first chapter of the dissertation, the supernatural is an easier to accept façade for the truly terrifying potential of human cruelty, something that undermines the desire to believe in the inherent goodness of humanity.

Ultimately, the reason all of this is relevant is because not knowing something in a hierarchy founded upon rationalism and understanding, dismantles the entire system. The supernatural no longer intrudes fully to disrupt the order of things, it need only exist in some form. As such, science instead attempts to intrude on the supernatural, in order to tame and assimilate it into the order of the natural world. For Doyle, the apprehension he has is that nineteenth and early-twentieth-century science is inadequate at truly understanding science. In contrast, to the figure of the detective, the supernatural intrudes upon and disrupts the hierarchy of understanding founded upon the established order as outlined by scientific rationalism. Holmes is not the only example of this, as in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Dupin is similarly blunt in his

¹⁰⁵ Richard Noakes, 'Spiritualism, science and the supernatural in mid-Victorian Britain', *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.23

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction 1800-2000* (Hampshire: Palgrave macmillan, 2004) p.61

outright disregard of any supernatural possibilities, stating “Madame and Mademoiselle L’Espanaye were not destroyed by spirits. The doers of the deed were material, and escaped materially.”¹⁰⁷ The detective’s employment of science is to combat and eradicate the threat that the mere existence of the supernatural poses to sober reason, ‘defusing romance’s mystic potential to remake the present order.’¹⁰⁸

Blurring the Boundaries: Supernatural Science

Yet Victorian culture is full of inventive *re-enchantments* of the world, often creating mysterious and sublime effects out of the very science that was meant to destroy magic thinking...Indeed, one might confidently assert that nearly every allegedly disenchanting scientific or technological advance in the nineteenth century came with a magical or occult double that had the chance to re-enchant the world...¹⁰⁹

Whilst the rigid boundaries of what is possible and impossible provide Holmes with a firmer grasp of the natural order of the world, the common consequence is the disenchantment of the sublime world and the removal of a higher power that can operate by means beyond human comprehension. Doyle was not too different in his thinking, seeming to believe that all that is misunderstood could possibly be comprehended later as science progressed. Science would eventually lead to new perspectives and new possibilities, but this required some engagement with the unknown through imaginative thinking. It is in the mysterious area of the unknown that the supernatural typically dwells; however, similarly it is where scientific minds must delve if they ever wish to progress, as ‘the appeal to wonder and curiosity remains central to any attempt to persuade wider constituencies of the value and importance of scientific investigation. To make such an appeal means engaging the interlocutors’ imaginations in one way or

¹⁰⁷ Edgar Allan Poe, ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’, *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (19 May 2008), in *Project Gutenberg* <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2147/2147-h/2147-h.htm>> [Accessed 31 August 2018]

¹⁰⁸ Ralph O’Connor, ed., *Victorian Science and Literature*, Vol. 7 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012) p.xxx

¹⁰⁹ Roger Luckhurst and Justin Sausman, eds., *Victorian Science and Literature*, Vol.8 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012) p.ix

another.¹¹⁰ It was through these not yet understood ideas, the territories science wished to explore, that tales of gothic science fiction exploited, creating scenarios with a central scientific concept that bordered on being supernatural, being that Victorian or modern science could not yet explain such phenomena. The likes of creating life in *Frankenstein* (1818), or the intense transformation in the *Strange case of Dr Jekyll in Mr Hyde* (1886), are examples of pseudo-science that blur the boundaries between natural and supernatural.

The gothic was a popular motif of fictions centred around both supernatural and scientific themes, both exploiting the terror and possibilities of the unknown, occupying ‘the temporary intervals when knowledge is controversial or in flux.’¹¹¹ However, as much as science was making vast amounts of new revelations founded upon facts and proof, the actual distinctions between real science and pseudoscience were not always common knowledge, as ‘Pseudoscience [was] embraced...by exact proportion as real science [was] misunderstood’¹¹² This likely contributed to the popularity of early gothic science fiction, as the delight in terror from these texts had the additional benefit of being received as plausible. Shelley’s *Frankenstein* explored such concepts with the possibilities of alchemy, with Victor’s early passions leading him to claim ‘My dreams were therefore undisturbed by reality; and I entered with greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher’s stone and the elixir of life.’¹¹³ Victor’s former ambitions even included occult interests, as the ‘raising of ghosts or devils was a promise liberally accorded by my favourite authors, the fulfilment of which I most eagerly sought’ (p.24).

¹¹⁰ Ralph O’Connor, ed., *Victorian Science and Literature*, Vol. 7 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012) p.xii

¹¹¹ Roger Luckhurst and Justin Sausman, eds., *Victorian Science and Literature*, Vol.8 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012) p.xviii

¹¹² Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a candle in the Dark* (London: Headline, 1997) p.19

¹¹³ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.23. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

These previous aspirations are still possibilities of science to Victor, despite their paranormal context, and it soon becomes clear that Victor, like many critics of nineteenth-century science, is displeased by the disenchanting consequences of the works of some philosophers, lamenting that ‘It was very different, when the masters of the science sought immortality and power; such views, although futile, were grand: but now the scene was changed’ (p.29). It is ultimately this style of lofty, almost supernatural state of science, that Victor wishes to return to with his goal to create life; however, in doing so through means of science he is still naturalising the supernatural. Victor’s creature reduces the act of creation to a simple use of scientific tools, as he recounts his experiment by stating ‘I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet’ (p.38). This act is indicative of one of the anxieties the sciences created in its usurpation of supernatural phenomena, being that of materialism, as ‘The study of chemistry, it was feared, could easily lead to materialism-the doctrine that everything in the universe, including mental and spiritual phenomena, was the result of matter in motion.’¹¹⁴

The concept of matter in motion is similarly used as the motif of the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, as the story explores the possibility of chemically induced transformations of the human body. The act of shapeshifting is a common trope of supernatural fiction, with creatures such as changelings or the materially ambiguous character of Gil-Martin in Hogg’s *The Private memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). This was similarly a typical gothic trope, as it frequently represented ‘human bodies as between species: always-already in a state of indifferention, or undergoing metamorphoses into a bizarre assortment of human/not-human

¹¹⁴ James A. Secord, *Visions of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) pp.7-8

configuration.’¹¹⁵ However, Robert Louis Stevenson appropriated the supernatural occurrence as an act of scientific experimentation. Like Frankenstein, Jekyll, in the form of Hyde, lambasts the limited views of rational science, and exhibits his concoctions effects, first declaring ““And now, you who have so long been bound to the most narrow and material views, you who have denied the virtue of transcendental medicine, you who have derided your superiors— behold!””¹¹⁶ Of particular note in Jekyll’s claim is the ‘transcendental’ quality of the elixir, referring to its superiority over the rest of known science, making it somewhat supernatural by comparison. However, the unnerving aspect of Jekyll’s invention is that Stevenson is praying upon anxieties of the unknown, in this case, the uncertainty of human identity to the Victorian scientist. Kelley Hurley observed that, to Victorians, matter was ‘no longer subordinate to form...attempts formally to classify matter...the attempts to stabilize the meaning of “human identity,” [were] provisional and stop-gap measure at best. [...] bodies [were] without integrity or stability: they [were] instead composite and changeful.’¹¹⁷

However, beyond changes to the material form, Jekyll’s claims extend into the realm of the spiritual, as he suggests his drug impacts the soul, ‘I not only recognised my natural body from the mere aura and effulgence of certain of the powers that made up my spirit, but managed to compound a drug by which these powers should be dethroned from their supremacy’ (p.86). The association made between the soul and the state of the body in this claim brings the spirit closer to being rationalised by science, especially in regards to the concepts of good and evil. Jekyll and Hyde are often perceived as representations of good and evil, especially in regards to their appearances,

¹¹⁵ Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.10

¹¹⁶ Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (18 December 2011) p.80, in *Project Gutenberg* <<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/42/pg42-images.html>> [Accessed 02 September 2018] All further references will be given in the body of the text.

¹¹⁷ Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.9

as ‘evil is written upon the face of Hyde and signs of ‘deformity and decay’ upon his body, pointing to ways in which the developments of criminal anthropology could be reassuring.’¹¹⁸ The idea of the morality of one’s soul being scientifically traceable in the appearance of an individual was just another means by which theories such as evolution were disenchanting concepts such as the spirit within every person. Criminal anthropology made inquiring deep into the character of one’s soul unnecessary, as an individual’s nature could be determined merely by surface level examinations, such as in the case of Edward Hyde, who Mr Enfield describes by saying “‘There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something down-right detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity...’” (p.10).

Similar themes of the distinguishable criminal class are explored in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). Vampirism is another popular gothic motif typically attributed to tales of dark fantasy, yet the vampire is also a monstrous entity that Stoker exploits to explore the ideas of criminal anthropology. Stoker’s interweaving of the supernatural and science was present in his life outside of writing, as he, like Conan Doyle, was member of the Society of Psychical Research. Anne Stiles observed that ‘while Stoker’s interest in the occult was not unusual in and of itself it is surprising how few critics (Greenway excepted) have emphasised the importance of physical research in *Dracula*’.¹¹⁹ It was with this physical research that he conceived the figure of the Count, the fiendish yet plausible and not so distant other. The narrator references the Count’s appearance by stating ‘I seemed to see the high lights of the Count’s evil face,

¹¹⁸David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) pp.22-23

¹¹⁹ Anne Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brian Science in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) p.76

the ridge of the nose, the red eyes, the red lips, the awful pallor.’¹²⁰ Like Stevenson, Stoker normalised the concept of evil by giving it a physical and distinguishable form, using ‘physiognomic theory [that was used] to support criminal profiling and justify racial discrimination: proponents pointed to the size of the forehead, the shape of the nose, or the set of the eyes to make broad generalizations about intelligence and tendency toward criminal behaviour in disadvantaged populations’.¹²¹ Yet, in this regard, the Count has been exposed by science, making his threat as an invasive supernatural force dwindle as he becomes easier to identify.

However, the reassurance science might provide in this case is not so comforting when used to examine the rest of the Count’s supernatural traits. The vampire was a curious figure for its seemingly supernatural ability to influence its victims, much like a snake, ‘by a sort of mesmeric or hypnotic process that was itself a matter of intense interest and debate in the nineteenth century.’¹²² The curious thing about the use of mesmerism in *Dracula* is that although Helsing is quick to accuse the Count of wickedly using hypnotism, ‘he who have hypnotised her first, and who have [drank] of her very blood and [made] her drink of his’ (Chapter XXIV), Van Helsing himself relies upon the method in his hypnosis of Mina to combat Dracula:

The Professor made a few more passes and then stopped, and I could see that his forehead was covered with great beads of perspiration. Mina opened her eyes; but she did not seem the same woman. There was a far-away look in her eyes, and her voice had a sad dreaminess which was new to me. (Chapter XXIII)

¹²⁰ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (August 16, 2013), Chapter IV, in *Project Gutenberg* <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/345/345-h/345-h.htm>> [Accessed 02 September 2018] All further references will be given in the body of the text.

¹²¹ Sara Davis, ‘The Science of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*’, *The Rosenbach* (November 3, 2017), <<https://rosenbach.org/blog/the-science-of-bram-stokers-dracula/>> [Accessed 02 September 2018]

¹²² Valerie Pedlar, *The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006) p.150

The distinction between Dracula and Helsing's methods of mesmerism are never fully explored in the text; however, this serves only to blur the boundaries between the intrusive supernatural and intrusive science. The plausibility of wielding dominion over someone's mind no longer feels like the weapons of monstrosities isolated to fiction, but rather an eerie foreshadowing of the eventual assimilation of the supernatural in the natural order of society.

The rise of scientific attempts to replicate what were previously perceived as supernatural phenomena, as well as the imaginative possibilities of pseudoscience used in early science fiction, when considering Doyle's approach to the yet unknown, poised science to be as terrifyingly intrusive as manifestations of the supernatural. The terrifying concepts of these tales was that they could become real; in fact, it was science's very role to strive to conquer the impossible. 'Most major scientific theories rebuff common sense. They call on evidence beyond the reach of our senses and overturn the observable world. They disturb assumed relationships... When it is first advanced, theory is at its most fictive.'¹²³ The terror caused by possible science allowed gothic literature to replace haunting spectres with the trauma of science gone too far, as shown by Victor's Post-traumatic Stress, 'When I was otherwise quite restored to health, the sight of a chemical instrument would renew all the agony of my nervous symptoms' (p.48). He begins to feel intruded upon by this force. Supernatural forces would not be halted by science, but rather have the door to the common order of society opened, and thus the terrifying yet distant supernatural would become dangerously real and close.

¹²³ Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots* (London: Routledge, 1983) p.3

Manifestations of Madness:

As displayed in *Dracula*, supernatural forces possess the terrifying potential to influence or damage the state of its victim's mind; however, the mind is already a vulnerable piece of human identity, and when compromised it may be its own worst enemy, serving as a gateway to supernatural manifestations. Much like the previously mentioned rationalisations of science, the study of the mind was yet another means of explaining supposed encounters with the supernatural. Such phenomena, rather than being studied in a material way, were examined as mental manifestations, as

‘Apparitions and spectral illusions were widely discussed in early and mid-nineteenth-century mental philosophy in relation to the involuntary functions of the mind, including dreaming, somnambulism, reverie and more serious cases of mental derangement. Dicken was well read in such material.’¹²⁴ The intrusion of supernatural elements is made easier when it is so readily dismissed as madness by an outsider's perspective, yet it is all the more chilling for the haunted madman, as they struggle to distinguish the difference between external and internal threats. The experience is made all the more difficult when the truly lonely state of madness is acknowledged, for unlike the communal relationship with the supernatural that people of faith or cults of spiritualists enjoy, manifestations of madness occur in isolation, haunting an individual. Furthermore, the not yet fully understood nature of the mind in the nineteenth century made combatting these intrusive apparitions difficult once the victim had already succumbed. It was for this reason that madness became popular subject of sensational and gothic fiction, as ‘To those writers whose literary imagination was fired by the

¹²⁴ Louise Henson, ‘Investigations and fictions: Charles Dickens and ghosts’, *The Victorian Supernatural*, eds., Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.45

desire to arouse horror and terror, madness presented a ready-made locus of the horrible and the terrifying in human existence.’¹²⁵

Charlotte Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) explores the vulnerability to supposed supernatural disturbances when the mind begins to falter. Gilman’s narrator exhibits symptoms of monomania, in which ‘delirium is limited to one or a small number of objects, with excitement, and predominance of a gay, and expansive passion.’¹²⁶ This affliction manifests in the form of her obsession with the wallpaper, ‘It dwells in my mind so!’¹²⁷ The narrator’s fixation is particularly noteworthy as it far predates any supernatural occurrences, instead disturbing her with its mere presence, listing its faults by stating:

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate, and provoke study, and when you follow the lame, uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions. (p.8)

Although the wallpaper would eventually display characteristics of a supernatural phenomenon, as ‘The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out’ (p.29), the narrator appears to possess a decent intuition that foreshadows supernatural intrusions, including when she first describes the house, ‘I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity’ (p.1). This could be a reference to the greater intimacy women supposedly had towards the occurrences of the occult and spiritualism. Similarly, women were believed to be more vulnerable to states of hysteria, with critics such as Elaine Showalter observing that ‘There is a

¹²⁵ Valerie Pedlar, *The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006) p.18

¹²⁶ Valerie Pedlar, *The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006) p.2

¹²⁷ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1899) p.22. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

‘fundamental alliance’ between women and madness, the argument runs, with women being ‘typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature, and body, while men are situation on the side of reason, discourse, culture and mind.’¹²⁸ The narrator’s husband, John, embodies the male disconnect from the spiritual, being a man who is ‘practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition. And he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures’ (pp.1-2). The consequence of this is that the boundaries between spiritual and insane seemed to have been blurred by unempathetic men, resulting in many feminist critics drawing attention ‘to the way in which the connection between madness and morality has wrought madness into yet another weapon in patriarchy’s defensive armoury’.¹²⁹ The association with the supernatural, easily labelled as madness, merely provided the patriarchy with an excuse to view the female figure as the ‘other’, and thus seek methods of containment and control, as the narrator references in regards to John, ‘If a physician of high standing, and one’s own husband, assures friends and relative that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression, - a slight hysterical tendency, - what is one to do?’ (p.2).

An important ingredient in intensifying the sensations of madness is the feeling of isolation and loneliness. The narrator laments that she will often cry at nothing, and cry most of the time’ but only when she is alone, to which she remarks ‘I am alone a good deal just now’ (p.21). Even the support provided to her for her recovery is somewhat limited, as the narrator remarks about John ‘He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any silly fancies

¹²⁸ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, v1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p.62

¹²⁹ Valerie Pedlar, *The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006) p.13

run away with me' (p.27). John's desperation to see his wife exhibit 'self-control' is because he believes it would negate the effects of her supposed hysteria, as 'Self-control facilitates the adjustment between the individual and the rest of society, counteracting the natural human tendency towards egoism.'¹³⁰ However, the reversed perception of this idea is that is self-control permits one to engage with the rest of society, then the lack of it would result in the individual being ostracized by society for fear of their egotism destabilising the social order.

As observed by Plato, madness 'occurs when the normal equilibrium is disturbed, and in particular when reason is no longer in charge.'¹³¹ As previously discussed, the purpose of the supernatural is to usurp and destabilise the natural order, and additionally, chaos makes the infiltration of supernatural apparitions and beliefs even easier. As such, within the destabilised minds of those afflicted by madness, it is little wonder that the products of their insanity take the forms of supernatural phenomena. Charles Dickens observed similar cases in his visits to American asylums, writing that the inmates often suffered 'the most dreadful visitation to which our nature is exposed.'¹³² The narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* suffers an even worse affliction, for not only is she visited by these supposedly supernatural apparitions, 'The front pattern *does* move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!' (p.42), she becomes so destabilised by her madness that the supernatural intrudes into her very identity, as she believes she is one of the women from the wallpaper, 'I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper as I did?' (p.52)

¹³⁰ Valerie Pedlar, *The Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006) p.161

¹³¹ Robin Downie, 'Madness in Literature: Device and Understanding', *Madness and Creativity in Literature and Culture*, eds., Corinne Saunders and Jane Macnaughton (Hampshire: Palgrave macmillan, 2005) p.54

¹³² Charles Dickens, *American Notes (1842)* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) p.1

Ultimately, madness and the seemingly supernatural repercussions of the affliction, serve similar purposes to other uses of the supernatural, subverting the natural order, except in this case it damages the stability of an individual. Unlike the supernatural phenomena that influence the order of all of society, madness is limited to an individual, and rather than undermining entire hierarchies it simply works to banish the madman from them. The exception to this comes in the trope of the mad scientist, a figure perceived to be insane, yet in contrast they have a desire that juxtaposes their impact. The mad scientist, as with most scientists, is ‘attempting to trace order, or repeatable patterns, in the apparent randomness of what we observe.’¹³³ However, as previously mentioned with *Frankenstein* or the character of Dr Jekyll, science is just as capable of destroying the natural order in its attempt to define it, the consequence of which is an uncertain reality in which scientific and supernatural phenomena become difficult to distinguish.

¹³³ Robin Downie, ‘Madness in Literature: Device and Understanding’, *Madness and Creativity in Literature and Culture*, eds., Corinne Saunders and Jane Macnaughton (Hampshire: Palgrave macmillan, 2005) p.53

Conclusion:

Disrupting a Destabilised Society

The intrusive supernatural, throughout its various appearances in nineteenth-century literature, is often accompanied by the presence of a disruption to the natural or social order of society. It has been argued multiple times by critics and scholars that the incorporation of supernatural elements is the catalyst to these disruptions, being by their very nature and unnatural occurrence within a natural system. However, as the concept of the supernatural has gradually transitioned from a superstitious belief in a sincere phenomenon into a series of metaphors and distorted parallels of real-world anxieties, the ability to create a genuine disturbance is removed. Instead, the supernatural is in fact a creation or response to a preceding disruption elsewhere in nineteenth-century society.

Marquis de Sade theorised that the rising popularity of gothic fiction and its reliance upon supernatural motifs was all a consequence of the disturbance the French Revolution created around the world, remarking that:

This genre was the inevitable product of the revolutionary shocks with which the whole of Europe resounded [...]it was necessary to call upon hell for aid in order to arouse interest, and to find in the land of fantasies what was common knowledge from historical observations of man in this iron age.¹³⁴

As de Sade's observation would suggest, the supernatural manifested in the wake of the French Revolution, exploiting an existing disruption to the social order rather than creating one itself. Similarly, the uses of the intrusive supernatural explored throughout this essay depict the same method of invasion, with the supernatural elements following in the shadows of chaos within the social and natural order.

¹³⁴ Donatien Alphonse François, 'Reflections on the Novel', cit and trans. M. Praz, Introductory Essay, *Three Gothic Novels*, ed. P. Fairclough (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968), pp.7-34, p.14

This is typical for the creations of folklore, existing primarily as metaphors for cultural anxieties. In the narratives of the stories themselves, the supernatural elements are unquestionably the causes of the troubles that emerge; however, in evaluating the subtext or context of what these fairy tales represent, the supernatural creation would not exist without first receiving some inspiration from nineteenth-century social anxieties.

The presence of the supernatural in early science fiction similarly makes a case for the idea that the disruption must first open the way for the supernatural phenomena. The great irony is that science, in its attempt to rationalise and define human existence, consequently 'only served to aggravate a sense of alienation and further disturb notions of human identity'.¹³⁵ During an era willing to question yet not always definitively answer, the natural order temporarily entered a state of malleability, and it was in this vulnerable state that the supernatural phenomena invaded. Similarly, the age of religious doubt and the rise of spiritualism, disturbed the stability of faith and the understanding of the afterlife, bringing the once otherworldly afterlife into a state of shared existence alongside life. However, the significant difference between scientists and spiritualists is that while spiritualism simply reinterpreted the natural order, science stood to physically alter it. Spiritualism lends greater power the intrusive capabilities of the supernatural, whereas science merely provided a changing understanding of the world that some writers used as a gateway for supernatural motifs.

As for madness, it is by its very nature a disturbance. Although it is not uncommon for a supernatural phenomenon to inflict madness upon an observer, it seems the supernatural is more commonly depicted in nineteenth-century literature as a consequential manifestation of insanity. Disruptions within human senses provide

¹³⁵ David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p.20

breaches by which ghostly apparitions might trespass, and 'seeing is hardly a guarantee of anything except individualized and isolated experience'.¹³⁶ The fact of the matter is that if the supernatural phenomena the observer is seeing are real, then they are not truly mad. Therefore, any genuine madman or madwoman must first have a disturbance of the mind in order to allow the manifestation of the unnatural, again categorising the supernatural as a by-product rather than a cause.

As terrifying as the intrusive supernatural might seem, the acknowledgement of its dependence on a preceding destabilisation of the natural order displays its relative weakness as an invasive force. However, despite its reliance upon a pre-existing phenomenon to emerge, the intrusive supernatural is still an unnerving aspect in nineteenth-century literature, as unlike phenomena of unknown origin, these apparitions were rationalised and understood, and yet those plagued by them were still equally powerless to remove them once they had invaded. A madman being self-aware of the cause of the supernatural manifestations that haunt him would not be enough to banish them from his mind. Instead, the intrusive supernatural in literature drew attention to greater social issues requiring attention, yet the sufferer might be as equally unable to rid themselves of such problems, much in the same way that they would be helpless against tyrannous supernatural forces.

Word Count: 17103

¹³⁶ Ruth Robbins, 'Apparitions Can Be Deceptive: Vernon Lee's Androgynous Spectres', *Victorian Gothic*, ed. by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000) pp.182-200 (p.183)

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