

HAUNTINGS: VICTORIAN WOMEN WRITERS AND SUPERNATURAL FICTION  
(1843-1901)

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT:

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This thesis examines ghost stories written by female authors of the Victorian period. I begin by briefly discussing the role of short supernatural fiction as part of the popular Victorian tradition of reading spooky stories together on Christmas Eve while huddled around the Christmas tree. Christmas Eve was considered a time when the veil between the living, natural world and the supernatural, spirit world was thinnest; for Victorians this tenuousness of the division between life and death raised questions of great cultural importance, which were reflected in the spiritualist and mesmerist movements, as well as in common public discourse. I then link the role of the spectral female found in ghost stories to that of the living, breathing Victorian woman by arguing that the developing role of the Victorian woman as moral figurehead of the English household severely limited the female experience to the private domestic sphere. Isolated from the outside world, the home, which is often the site of hauntings within supernatural tales, held the potential to become a prison to women. Seeking to better articulate Vanessa Dickerson's concept of the "feminized limbo," I then perform analytical close

readings of various ghost stories written by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Rhoda Broughton, and Charlotte Riddell, paying close attention to the role of women and the limiting social conditions affecting them which each writer sought to address through her stories.

Through these close readings, it becomes apparent that women writers sought to insert their voices into public discourse concerning gendered cultural conditions which enervated women politically and socially, relegating them to a ghostlike state of social existence. Concluding the article length thesis is an annotated bibliography citing works for continued research intended to expand and further develop the project at a later date, potentially in an English doctoral program.

## Hauntings: Victorian Women Writers and Supernatural Fiction (1843-1901)

Some people do not believe in ghosts. For that matter, some people do not believe in anything . . . I am going to tell what happened to me exactly as it happened, and readers can credit or scoff at the tale as it pleases them. It is not necessary for me to find faith and comprehension in addition to a ghost story, for the world at large. If such were the case, I should lay down my pen. (Riddell "The Open Door" 256)

O, tell us a tale of a ghost! now do!

It's a capital time, for the fire turns blue.

(ANON, "The Vicarage Ghost," *Tinsley's Magazine* (Christmas Number, 1868)<sup>1</sup>

Christmas trees are neither living nor dead. Rather, they are specifically undead, languishing in a state of retarded decomposition, sustained by human care rather than natural processes. Christmas trees transform domestic spaces to accommodate living and expiring organisms alongside each other, blurring the distinction between outside and inside, human and natural environments, the living and the dead. This bizarre phenomenon marks the domestic space as simultaneously natural and supernatural in an uncanny<sup>2</sup> fashion; from the moment a Christmas tree is brought indoors, it undergoes the process of death cultivated by human hands.

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<sup>1</sup> From *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology*, edited by Michael Cox and R.A. Gilbert.

<sup>2</sup> Freud's concept of the uncanny refers to a sense of strangeness or unfamiliarity experienced as a result of something which is familiar with the unfamiliar. The uncanny "can take the form of something unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context" (Royle 1).

On Christmas Eve, Victorian families would huddle together around the Christmas tree<sup>3</sup>, sharing suspenseful stories and a comforting sense of fellow feeling. This tradition, which allowed people to explore the fragility of the veil separating spirits from humans, was bolstered by writers like Charles Dickens, who began publishing ghost stories in popular magazines and journals for mass audiences. The sheer volume of ghost stories printed during the second half of the nineteenth century indicates that Victorians were keenly interested in the division between life and death. Nurturing Christmas trees as they slowly expired within the Victorian home literalized this process of rationalizing death for Victorians by placing it somewhat under their control.<sup>4</sup>

In their anthology *Victorian Ghost Stories*, editors Michael Cox and R.A. Gilbert suggest that the ghost story of the second half of the nineteenth century became more domestic in nature, “blurring”, and therefore destabilizing, the lines between fact and fiction, real and unreal (Cox & Gilbert x). Gesturing toward this observation, Vanessa D. Dickerson determines that the developing role of the Victorian woman as moral figurehead of the English household severely limited the female experience to the private

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<sup>3</sup> In her article “The Ghost Story,” Julia Briggs suggests that Victorians “invented” Christmas over the second half of the nineteenth century (180). During the winter of 1840, Prince Albert sparked the Christmas tree tradition in England when he installed imported spruce fir trees inside the royal home and had them decorated with candles and ornaments. Over the next handful of years, assisted by the British press’s annual publicity of the “royal Christmas tree,” the act of bringing trees inside the domestic space became a tradition adopted first by the aristocratic then middle classes. For information on Prince Albert and the Christmas tree, among other culturally significant customs related to plants, see Marie Claire Lejeune’s “Man & Culture” in *Compendium of Symbolic and Ritual Plants in Europe*.

<sup>4</sup> Culturally, the growing mesmerist movement, active participation in séances, and the multitude of supernatural stories published in Christmas collections in periodicals all attest to a widespread social curiosity surrounding ghosts, suggesting Victorians were seeking ways to manage fears of death and social fragmentation.

domestic sphere. Immured within the Victorian home, the inward, private sphere of the feminine domain literally isolated the female figure from the public world. Expected to contribute to the success of the kingdom by “suppress[ing] her desire and passion, as these would be disruptive to her mission as stabilizer of the home” (Dickerson 4), confinement of the Victorian woman rendered her largely invisible in terms of social discourse, commerce, and the construction of national identity.

The concept of the Victorian woman as the figurehead of the home speaks to a metaphorical image of woman as a ghost or suspended being. Like the Christmas tree, the figure of the Victorian woman confined within the domestic space suffered from a similar enervation, which caused her physical and social identity to atrophy. Outside of the home, women were viewed as responsible for weaving the fabric of a morally stable country. Inside the home, women were in danger of becoming “the effete wife” whose “existence of inactivity had robbed her of all joy in strenuous exertion and endurance in any form” (Schreiner 1145). In her book *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural*, Vanessa D. Dickerson corroborates Olive Schreiner’s claim that the ghost story focuses on the “phenomenon of the suspended being” (Dickerson 8). In ghost stories written by women, the suspended beings in the text are not only actual ghosts, but women themselves. This thesis seeks to uncover the ways in which ghost stories reveal the figure of woman herself as such an object worthy of investigation.

Ghost stories written by women in the late nineteenth century reveal a sense of frustration with a society bifurcated by gender roles and expectations which relocated women to the private home to cultivate the morality of the nation. As Dickerson suggests,

the ghost story also constituted a narrative space where women, as writers and readers, could explore “their own ambiguous states as the ‘other’ living in a state of in-betweenness” (Dickerson 8). Looking at ghost stories by Rhoda Broughton, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Charlotte Riddell, it is possible to see each author’s attempt to insert her voice into public discourse regarding the precarious social positioning of women. Each tale deals with a different type of ghost story—haunted house, haunted person, unsolved murder mystery—yet each subversively speaks to the ghostlike state of the female figure in society. Exploring the role of the Victorian woman as a social ghost within the realm of living Victorians, I will demonstrate how female writers used the supernatural genre to participate in cultural discussions about the existence of ghosts as well as topical material and social conditions affecting women.

Focusing on the Victorian home as a site of supernatural occurrence, haunted house stories contain not only actual ghosts, but ghostly projections of Victorians themselves, used to expose their faults, social transgressions, and cultural mistakes<sup>5</sup>. Rhoda Broughton’s epistolary short story, “The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth,”<sup>6</sup> specifically engages with the relationship between ghosts and female inhabitants of haunted houses. Targeting the relationship between ghosts and women, Broughton’s tale underlines the tacit anxiety that the nineteenth century female herself

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<sup>5</sup> For a larger discussion on the prevalence of the haunted house trope see Melissa Edmundson’s article “The ‘Uncomfortable Houses’ of Charlotte Riddell and Margaret Oliphant.” The article discusses Riddell’s story “The Old House in Vauxhall Walk” and Oliphant’s “The Open Door”, two stories not covered in this thesis but noteworthy in that they contribute corroborative evidence that the haunted house subgenre frequently treated issues of social and economic disparity experienced by women such as property ownership and class.

<sup>6</sup> This tale, written in 1868, was originally published in *Temple Bar*. It was part of a collection of ghost stories by Rhoda Broughton titled *Tales for Christmas Eve* (1873).

may become a ghost trapped within the private sphere. Through a series of letters passed between friends, Broughton grants the female voice access to public discourse as the Victorian home is represented first as an idyllic refuge, then as a haunted site posing danger to women.

Discussing her newly-rented home in terms of its heavenly perfection, Cecilia Montresor expresses rapture upon first moving in, writing to her friend Bessy: “Here we are installed in our Paradise, and have searched high and low, in every hole and every corner, for the serpent, without succeeding in catching a glimpse of his spotted tail” (Broughton 76). Cecilia’s action of seeking the serpent, the agent of evil threatening the purity of the Garden of Eden, prepares the reader for the house to become a site of danger to her. And indeed, the romanticization is short-lived as the house is soon revealed to be haunted and no longer a safe haven for women.

Broughton’s female characters express a range of stances on whether spirits ought to be validated as “real” within Victorian society. As Cecilia becomes frightened by the haunting within the house, her fear speaks to members of society convinced that the veil between human and spirit realms was permeable, allowing the dead to invade the world of the living in threatening and terrifying ways. Through Cecilia’s written statements to her friend, Broughton actually catalogues what may have been a commonly held social stance on the existence of spirits:

You know how firmly I believe in apparitions, and what an unutterable fear I have of them; anything material, tangible, that I can lay hold of—anything of the same fibre, blood and bone as myself, I could, I think, confront bravely enough; but the mere thought of being brought face to face with the ‘bodiless dead’, makes my brain unsteady. (Broughton 78)



Brushing his wife's discomfort and concerns aside, Cecilia's husband seeks to silence her participation in the discussion by merely "pooh poohing" her complaints and deriding her feminine, "babyish fears" (Broughton 78). However, so as not to be discredited, and perhaps to validate the potential multiple viewpoints on ghosts held amongst the female gender, Broughton recreates the belief/disbelief division within her primary female voices. Cecilia's friend Bessy staunchly denies the existence of spirits like Cecilia's husband; the difference here is that Elizabeth does so by engaging in debate with her friend rather than by denigrating her intellect and emotional stability. Bessy's written response catalogues yet another social stance on spirits by declaring her "utter disbelief" in ghosts then launching a logical denial of the existence of ghosts by using terminology such as, "possibility", "abstract", "utterly groundless", "listen to reason" (Broughton 80). Although she is unwavering in the expression of her disbelief, Bessy relies upon reason rather than rejection of her friend's concerns. Broughton's decision to place the focus on the debate between the two women rather than between a woman and her husband validates female capacity to debate logically and intelligently matters of social concern, actively centering the female voice as an integral component to discussion-at-large regarding the spirit world.

However, although the women of Broughton's text are allowed to partake in debate surrounding the supernatural, she still presents the danger of the exercising of a woman's voice through the fate of Cecilia's maid. As readers, we witness the effects of Sarah's ghostly encounter from a limited third person perspective via Cecilia's own confused descriptions as witness. This narrative approach enables Broughton to insert a didactic use of sympathy as Cecilia and the other characters respond to Sarah's

experience. Cecilia describes Sarah as essentially dead herself after witnessing the ghost: her eyes are wide open and “starting out of her head” with a look of “unutterable stony horror in them” and she looks as though one who died in “mortal pain” (Broughton 79). Having fainted, she lays “unconscious” for several hours, no doubt looking as though a recently deceased corpse. Looking on the dead has a deadening effect; although Sarah lives, she seems to permanently suffer the image of the dead imprinted on her person as she is declared to have been driven insane by her experience.

If ghostly encounters have the power to reduce the living to survival marked by “raving mad[ness]”, Broughton’s text calls for the public to seriously contend with issues of supernatural invasions in the natural world. However, Sarah’s case serves more immediately to cull a sense of sympathy as the text elucidates the plight of females who are determined mentally unfit by their family members or employers. As a working class domestic, Sarah likely lodges with the Montresor family. Isolated and removed from her own relations, Sarah has no one to advocate for her or to validate her experience. Her encounter, which strips her of her liveliness and her sanity, yet pointedly leaves her alive, demonstrates more than the fact that the spirit in the text is menacing and perhaps evil. Cecilia’s reaction to Sarah, in which she revived her while “in a vague cold terror” validates the gravity and reality of the situation (Broughton 80).

However, in Bessy’s written rejection of the haunting, she actually sides with the house rather than with her friend’s testimony, debasing Cecilia’s belief in the power of the supernatural. She recommends that Cecilia have her maid’s family history searched for hereditary insanity, turning the young girl’s traumatic experience into an inquest of her mental fortitude. Ultimately, the female human victim is blamed. Sarah’s encounter is

invalidated by the logic of non-believers and dismissive husbands, and she is removed to a lunatic asylum, never to be seen or heard from again.<sup>7</sup> Sarah's interaction with a ghost literalizes her own experience as a socially and politically invalidated member of society, able to be tucked away in an asylum if others deem her behavior unsuitable.

Despite the empirical proof provided by Sarah's altered state that ghostly encounters negatively affect the living, a small party gathers at the Montresor's rented house so that Ralph Gordon may determine for himself whether ghosts exist by staging a ghostly encounter. Ironically confident, Ralph Gordon gallantly offers his "dying speech and confession" before climbing the stairs to receive his haunting (Broughton 81). As the party waits downstairs, their "whole souls seem to have passed into [their] ears" in anticipation of the ringing of a pre-staged warning bell (Broughton 82)<sup>8</sup>; however, when the bell does in fact ring and the two women burst toward the staircase to assist Ralph, his friend stands in their way. Captain Burton claims the sound must have been a mis-ring, for he "knows the sort of fellow" his friend is, and if disturbed (and therefore un-haunted

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<sup>7</sup> This is an interesting, ironic circumstance; in *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge's male character is neither physically affected nor altered by his ghostly encounters. Further, Dickens's character is ultimately strengthened and enhanced by his spectral interactions, rather than imprisoned within a mental asylum. Indeed, Scrooge's erratic and entirely uncharacteristic behavior goes largely unquestioned by the public. It also bears noting that while the recommendation to immure Sarah in an asylum is made by a woman, Cecilia's husband likely would have been the active agent in the literal placement of Sarah into a facility.

<sup>8</sup> Broughton's inclusion of a warning bell might be a reference to the commonly used cemetery bells and security coffins. Fear of premature burial in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries led to the construction of bell and string systems lining coffins so that, in the unfortunate case of being buried alive, the victim could ring the bell and a cemetery grounds person would hear the bell and hopefully be able to safely extract the living from their coffin. In Broughton's text, the bell is to be rung by Ralph Gordon should he need saving from the ghost he hopes to encounter. Edgar Allen Poe's 1844 short story "The Premature Burial" dealt directly with public hysteria surrounding fear of premature burial and use of cemetery bells.

if the spirit is scared or warned off), he would be “annoyed” (Broughton 82). Annoyed, perhaps, but not dead or driven insane. The Captain’s obstinacy ultimately costs his friend his life, for after the second ring of the bell, Cecilia and her female friend explode into the room to find Ralph Gordon in the exact state in which Sarah was found: “rigid, petrified” with “stony fear on his brave young face” (Broughton 82). He declares to have seen the ghost and then drops dead, “not in a swoon or a fit, but *dead*” (Broughton 82, italics original).

This is the end of the narrative. The characters try to revive Gordon, but fail. Cecilia, overcome with emotion, concludes her letter to Bessy with, “This is a true story,” and the tale ends. Yet a lingering question remains to be answered. If Sarah and Mr. Gordon are discovered in the same state, marked by the ghost with the same symptoms, why do they not share the same fate? The fact that Ralph Gordon dies affords him a reputation of bravery and the legacy of challenging death by literally staring it in the face. Sarah’s body resists death from shock, but her senses fail, retreating from the trauma of the experience, and rendering her incapable of effective communication with those around her. As a result, Sarah’s future existence is similar to that of a ghost: she may walk among the living, but she is unable to effectively connect and communicate. Further, the social branding of her trauma as insanity communicates how Ralph Gordon’s literal death reinforces his cultural worth as a male. The resultant message is disturbing: if you are male, it is better that you die after a supernatural encounter than live marked socially as a madman. Women, because they are not valued as essential to the economic or political welfare of the nation, are not granted death, but rather, are further marginalized by their supernatural encounters. Therefore, Broughton’s haunting of the

female figure can be interpreted as a literary caution to women: they may be granted participation in public issues through certain venues (story and novel writing for example), but only at the permission or vetting of the male sector.

The preponderant loss of male lives in ghost stories further insinuates the ghost-like state of the Victorian woman as she remains behind to remember and mourn the absent spirit of her recently deceased husband, father, or friend.<sup>9</sup> Prior to any supernatural occurrence, the main female character of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's ghost story "At Crighton Abbey"<sup>10</sup> is depicted as living the spectral existence of having experienced the loss of loved ones. Early in the tale, Sarah bemoans her isolated, fragmented identity: "The dear ones who had given a special charm and brightness to my existence were gone . . . without them actual happiness seemed impossible to me . . . life at its best was calm and colourless, like a grey sunless day" (Braddon 165).

Unlike Dickens's Scrooge<sup>11</sup>, who is described as actively cold, cruel and "flinty" or the "stony" shock written on the faces of Broughton's haunted humans, Sarah Crighton

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<sup>9</sup> All of the ghost stories investigated in this thesis include deceased male characters and women who are marked either by insanity or misery at the hands of supernatural events. While not all ghost stories written by Victorian women, male death/female eternal suffering appears to be a commonly used trope which is, as of yet, unarticulated in scholarship.

<sup>10</sup> Published by popular sensational novelist Mary Elizabeth Braddon in 1891. Although she is mostly known for her novel *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon published several notable ghost stories for Christmas editions of periodicals, among them "At Crighton Abbey", "The Cold Embrace", and "Eveline's Visitant." She also founded and edited the publication *Belgravia* and edited *Temple Bar* (in which Broughton's work was published) for a period of time.

<sup>11</sup> Dickens' establishing character sketch of Scrooge points to a man who has lost his way after the death of his only friend, and who has not only retreated from his social connection to the larger population of London but is in need of external intervention and moral correction. Dickens' explication of Scrooge as an isolated individual unsympathetic to the plight of lower class Londoners exhorts readers to feel a sense of

seems to literalize Vanessa D. Dickerson's concept of the "feminized limbo" of woman's social status. Orphaned at a young age, forced to wander abroad in search of domestic work, Sarah's nomadic lifestyle and unmarried status configure her as a female in an uncertain social position. Self-identified as an "old maid" at thirty-three years of age, unprotected economically by either father or husband, Sarah's identity as an unattached adult female without secure housing places her within in a liminal, largely undefined feminine space. Neither wife, nor mother, she returns to the abbey of her childhood without socially recognized status, drifting as a ghostlike figure. Through Sarah's experience, Braddon comments on the position of women whose past, present, and future are all equally uncertain—without membership in traditional gender roles, Sarah is the perfect vessel for Braddon's social commentary.

She is also a perfect audience surrogate. Although constructed as a marginal figure, Sarah exhibits a strong sense of English nationalism. She expresses an "ardent yearning" to return to her homeland, and although an orphan, she has maintained the easy confidence of class privilege denoted by her "race pride" as a member of the Crighton family line (Braddon 163). It is significant that these descriptions of Sarah's patriotism and class pride directly follow the identification of her as an English woman of uncertain social standing. The effect of this serves to blur the lines between the expression of masculine and feminine gender expectations as Sarah harnesses her identity as a proud, British woman. Declaring her time away from England a "twelve years' exile" which she hopes to end upon return to her Chrighton Abbey, Sarah makes statements much like

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antipathy toward him and to recoil inwardly with thoughts of self-distinction and a desire to define oneself as discretely unlike the other.

what readers might imagine her brother to issue upon his return from employment with the Indian Civil Service (Braddon 165).

However, as soon as Sarah is re-established as an inmate in her former home, her identity as an intrepid female wanderer is subsumed by her (re)placement within the domestic sphere. Commenting on her mundane lodgings at the Abbey, saying that her room is “cheery enough” but also has “a somewhat ancient aspect, which the superstitiously inclined might have associated with possible ghosts” (Braddon 166), bolsters M.R. James’s description of generic expectations that the supernatural “erupt within the familiar” by taking place within a “very mundane and often urban context” (Briggs 181). Pointing to the “prosaic detail of modernity,” Cox and Gilbert describe the important effects of the domestic, recognizable elements of quotidian Victorian life and experience within supernatural writing:

Everyday detail abounds in the Victorian ghost story: details of décor and dress, food and drink, furniture and transport, landscape and architecture, as well as the realities of social and sexual relationships. Despite the pace of change, there were still plenty of apparently settled social structures: marriage, the law, landed and aristocratic society, the Church, the universities, colonial experience. Any one of these could provide an ordered microcosm into which the supernatural could intrude. (Cox and Gilbert vxii)

In short, any aspect of daily life—social, interpersonal, or political—could provide the grounds for narrative suspension and critical observation. Just as Charles Dickens empowers the domestic setting of Scrooge’s private spaces—his bedchambers, domestic living rooms—with enhanced potential for didactic instruction, Braddon adapts Sarah’s private rooms into a space where she can contemplate the issue of supernatural invasion within spaces of the living. Braddon allows Sarah’s voice to initiate and guide the subsequent inquiry and investigation of Crighton Abbey’s haunting. While she herself identifies as a non-believer and skeptic, her offhand remarks about the house, and the

subsequent haunting encounter which she watches from her bedroom window, speak to Gilbert and Cox's determination that the power of the ghost story rests upon the instability of binaries, such as domestic/public, real/ unreal, dream/reality.

The premise of "Crighton Abbey" rests upon the trope of the haunted house with "dark pages" in its history (Braddon 170). For generations, the male heirs of the Crighton family line have fallen to atrocious accidental deaths, disrupting the smooth succession of ownership of the Abbey. Prior to each death, the deceased old Squire Meredith Chrighton appears to a living member of the house, issuing a warning of impending tragedy to the living.<sup>12</sup> Despite the established pattern of this occurrence, the inhabitants of the Abbey outwardly appear to be unconvinced of the efficacy of ghostly prophecy and ignore Sarah's inquiries about hauntings at Chrighton. Her logic is doubted and she is told she is "dreaming" (Braddon 179). However, upon revealing to the head of the kitchen staff, Mrs. Marjorum, that she has witnessed an uncanny vision, the older woman appears incapable of denying the existence of spirits any longer.

An "utter unbeliever in all ghostly things," Sarah's encounter with the spirit world is more uncanny than terrifying. Sarah's commentary that the "unearthly" flash of light she witnesses is a "light that never shone from earth or sky", marking the occurrence as definitively uncanny, is strangely followed by her denial of the supernatural as she claims that there was "nothing supernatural" about the scene (Braddon 178). Within these contradictory statements, Braddon's character illustrates the primary tension surrounding

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<sup>12</sup> Note how the Old Squire is already deceased and that his own death is not attributed to an experience of the supernatural. He performs the hauntings in the text as omens of impending doom to the living male heirs, whose deaths are also not considered supernatural, merely accidental.



the supernatural, which lies within a questioning of that which is real versus that which is unreal, seemingly implausible, or simply too strange to be believed. Situating Sarah as a “disbeliever” allows Braddon to demonstrate the way in which personal experience can not only alter personal perspective, but can provide experiential evidence in favor of the possibility that spirits exist.

Described as “unearthly” and “ghastly”, the scene itself poses no bodily threat. In fact, Sarah views the haunting scene from within the house, completely separated from the activity outside, and, had the Squire not been dead over one hundred years, the vision of him stabling his horses after a hunt would appear entirely mundane. The most interesting aspect of this particular haunting is the manner in which it highlights the separation between genders: the ghost is male and able to exit the domestic space even though his spirit is tied to the succession of the estate whereas Sarah appears trapped within the house, since as a suppliant within her family’s home, she has nowhere else to go. Squire Crighton is also an active figure; although technically deceased, he still participates in the typically male-gendered activity of hunting and moves about his property with the natural ease attributed to the living. Sarah, as recipient of the haunting, witnesses the scene from inside the most domestic of spaces, her sleeping quarters. Her female form reacts violently to the vision, she sweats, turns cold and “pale as a ghost” before seeking counsel and solace among the other people at Crighton (Braddon 179). Once Sarah’s physical form becomes visibly weakened by her experience, Mrs. Marjorum finally disabuses Sarah of her previous accusation that Sarah was just “dreaming,” revealing that Sarah has witnessed the “phantom hunt” which signals the imminent death of the current Crighton heir (Braddon 181).

Although never literally haunted herself, Miss Julia Tremaine appears to be the most haunted character in the text. Betrothed to the young heir of the Abbey, she is beautiful, cold and proud, “the very reverse of sympathetic” with a “superb diamond locket . . . tied round her long white throat” (Braddon 169), and like Ebenezer Scrooge, she appears to be narratively designed to repulse the reader, modeling proper British behavior for English audiences by exhibiting how *not* to behave.<sup>13</sup> Her personality is characterized as abnormal in terms of Victorian femininity, casting her as an outsider at the Crighton home, which metonymically stands in as a microcosm of British society.

While Braddon’s text heavily reinforces the English value system of charitable giving (particularly around the Christmas holiday), Julia Tremaine refuses to join the Crighton family women as they go about the parish gifting clothing and presents to the poor of the neighborhood. Miss Tremaine’s romantic counterpart, the ill-fated Edward Crighton, who embodies the same good natured, sympathetic values inherent in Dickens’s young Fred, provides English readers with an example of proper sympathetic identity as he chaperones and encourages his sisters’ “quiet and friendly” philanthropic work (Braddon 172).

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<sup>13</sup> It is almost impossible not to compare Julia Tremaine with Braddon’s most famous character, Lucy Graham, from *Lady Audley’s Secret*. The two women are strikingly alike in appearance, and somehow manage to infiltrate their way into a familial space where they seem to exist on the outside of its domestic functioning. Additionally, they both serve to unsettle the cultural assumption that Victorian women were capable of assuming the role of moral direction of the home. Lady Audley is a bigamist and murderer who abandons her child, clearly shattering ideas of perfect womanhood and domestic bliss. Miss Julia Tremaine is less overtly constructed as transgressive of Victorian femininity, yet she has the ghost of Lucy Graham about her as her behavior consistently poses questions in the text about the validity of gender essentialism in Victorian culture and literature.

His attempts to bring his betrothed into the charitable holiday spirit are “coolly declined” by Julia, who publicly launches into an invective against the poor, claiming she can neither “get on with them” nor “endure” them, preferring a distant and antiseptic approach to the “just and fair” distribution of the wealthy’s resources to the lower classes (Braddon 173). However, Miss Julia Tremaine is actually not as hard-hearted as she hopes to appear. In Edward’s absence, she bequeaths Sarah with a purse of coins for the needy, commanding her to distribute the money in secret. By constructing a female character willing to challenge public expectations that she perform philanthropy in a particularly coded fashion, Braddon questions traditional Victorian ideology of how a woman should feel and behave. Julia is not uncharitable, but merely expresses philanthropic involvement differently than the Crichton women. Presenting both methods of giving, public and anonymous, Braddon validates multiple ways of being “*simpatica*” (Braddon 173, italics original).

Julia Tremaine’s alternative philanthropic gestures are part of the subtext of “At Crichton Abbey” which presents a social treatise questioning the role of Victorian women within home and society. An interchange between Edward and his soon-to-be-wife explicates the tension in establishing gender roles which Braddon seeks to uncover:

‘But you see, Julia, there are some kinds of people to whom that sort of thing is not a question of endurance<sup>14</sup> . . . who like to make these sons of the soil feel that there is some friendly link between the cottage and the great house. There is my mother, for instance: all these duties which you think so tiresome are to her an unfailing delight. There will be a change, I’m afraid, Julia, when you are mistress of the Abbey.’  
(Braddon 173)

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<sup>14</sup> The “endurance” referenced is the act of participating charitably in one’s public community, visibly and according to publicly ascribed to patterns of behavior.

Braddon's riposte, "You have not made me that yet" insinuates that the idea that Victorian women are *constructed* through instruction by their male counterparts is irrational. When Julia marries Edward, she is expected to alter her disposition and actions to suit her new social position. It is assumed that through marriage, she will naturally adopt the class-based and gender-based ideological viewpoints befitting her role as mistress of an estate. Her testimony that, "It is better that I should not affect any feminine virtues which I do not possess" further separates Julia from the other females in the text, marking her as different, less feminine, even improper (Braddon 173). As Julia resists this ideology, she appears heartless and cruel because she rejects standard conceptions of femininity.

The fact that Julia is often denigrated for lacking traditional femininity or for failing to meet social behavior expectations elucidates the pressures under which Victorian women operated as wives and mothers. As Edward makes plans to attend a hunting party at a friend's estate, he compares the "ugly temper" of his fiancé to that of an unruly horse (Braddon 176). Whether Julia Tremaine's coldness is a reaction to either her inability or her unwillingness to conform to gender norms remains textually ambiguous; however, Braddon's inclusion of gender-related microaggressions<sup>15</sup> write the Victorian female's experience within the home and institution of marriage into existence, and into the public discourse.

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<sup>15</sup> The term microaggression, coined by Chester M. Pierce, then re-coined by Mary Rowe, refers to a critical social theory which identifies unintended discrimination, often marked by casual comments which reinforce hegemonic ideology, particularly related to race and gender. Edward's linking of women to animals denigrates women's intelligence and humanity while reinforcing social concepts of women as male property.

Although Sarah still continues to question whether her supernatural encounter is a dream or a true omen, she is, in a sense, being continually haunted by her experience, which has “taken complete possession” of her (Braddon 183). She implores Julia to assist her in her efforts to deter Edward from leaving the estate to go hunting, hoping that the concern of his fiancé will entice him to remain at home. Despite refusing to “degrade” herself by asking Edward to remain at home, Julia becomes more and more ghostlike over the course of his absence, becoming as “pale as a ghost” (Braddon 185). Typically, in ghost stories, living characters become pale, stony, or visually devoid of life only *after* they have been haunted by a ghostly encounter. Julia, however, is haunted throughout the text by her failure to conform to gender role expectations and is ultimately punished for her transgressions with the loss of her fiancé.

The effect of Julia entering the room just as the news of Edward’s death is delivered intimates that Julia is being punished for not properly fulfilling the role of Victorian wife. Braddon’s active punishment of Julia begs the question: If she were more sympathetic, more docile, more like the woman Edward was trying to “make” her into, could Julia have deterred or prevented Edward’s fate, and spared herself the pain of his loss? Everyone is affected by Edward’s death—his father “buries” himself in his library, his mother continues to run her household “calm and cheerful, doing her duty” despite the “mainspring of life [being] broken” (Braddon 189)—yet it seems that Julia Tremaine never recovers from her loss, but is haunted by it for the remainder of her life. She never marries and never again smiles, although she becomes a paragon of charity in her neighborhood. Braddon’s commentary, “So does a great sorrow change the direction of a woman’s life,” seems to critique the enforcement of gender roles upon Victorian women

and rests with the conclusion that expression of female identity outside of what is socially acceptable results in misery and isolation.

Through Julia's personal experience, Braddon ultimately uncovers the reality that being part of the group requires a domestic conformity that turns women into ghosts by disallowing them expression of transgressive female identities. As a result, Julia Tremaine never truly *lives* throughout the text—she merely exists in a ghostlike state on the outskirts of the Crichton family which becomes more inflexible by the end of the tale. Her rejection of societal expectations makes her cruel, lonely, and incapable of connecting with the living people in her life, and then, the loss of her fiancé solidifies her status as permanently outside of the shelter of the Victorian domestic space. She becomes, as Julia Briggs suggests in her article “The Ghost Story” an abject figure, excluded and marginal (Briggs 176), living as a “Sister of Charity” instead of a wife or mother, living for others rather than herself, a ghost.

Charlotte Riddell's ghost story, “The Open Door,”<sup>16</sup> hardly even contains a ghost, although it falls generically within the haunted house subgenre. A ghost is mentioned at the very end of the story, meagerly described as “an awful figure, with uplifted hand” (Riddell 281); however, this is not the invisible figure haunting the text throughout Phil's experience at Ladlow Hall. Although Riddell includes an actual supernatural figure, this presence wields none of the ghost's traditional literary power: Phil is not killed nor is he either mentally or physically impaired by the encounter. He is, however, knocked

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<sup>16</sup> “The Open Door” was written by Victorian author Charlotte Riddell (1832-1906), who penned over fifty books, novels, and short stories. She also partly owned and edited the popular literary periodical *St. James's Magazine*. “The Open Door” was originally collected in Riddell's text *Weird Stories* in 1882.

unconscious by the living woman with whom he is fighting, and who seems intent on killing him. His unnamed foe is an economically disenfranchised widow<sup>17</sup> desperately attempting to locate and destroy a will which would render her penniless. She is the true ghost of the text, her experience haunting yet indicative of the fragility of the female's economic stability in Victorian England. Figuratively structuring its female character as the active agent performing the haunting, "The Open Door" is primarily an exploration of the desperate measures to which one frantic woman will go in order to protect her economic status, even if it means she must become violent and terrorize the innocent. By creatively focusing on the female experience, Riddell's story illustrates and comments on gendered economic disparity in much the same manner that Braddon's story explicates the limitations of gender role expectations through Julia Tremaine in "At Chrighton Abbey."

Following Melissa Edmundson's assertion that Riddell was motivated not only to critique economic issues, but also to uncover the "emotional grievances existing behind closed doors," it is no wonder that the mystery of "The Open Door" is fueled by a nameless ghost who turns out to be a living woman (Edmundson 52). Her desperation,

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<sup>17</sup> The nature of this woman's widowhood ought, of course, to be taken into account. Harkening to the Gothic plot formation, the Lady Ladlow murders her husband Lord Ladlow (the ghostly figure in the text) after discovering he has written her out of his will. In order to ensure her financial security, she murders him and seeks to destroy the will reallocating his money and estate to his nephew. While it would be absurd to suggest that Riddell is endorsing murder as a means to establish financial security, she does use the scenario to demonstrate the precariousness of the female's financial position in Victorian England, particularly under the system of coverture. Riddell wrote so frequently of economic issues that Melissa Edmundson terms her a writer of the "financial supernatural" in her article, "The 'Uncomfortable Houses' of Charlotte Riddell and Margaret Oliphant" (Edmundson 65, note 10).<sup>17</sup>

illustrated in great detail by Riddell complicates rather clarifies how the reader is expected to respond to disenfranchised or marginalized figures. The scene in which Phil grapples with Lady Ladlow is uncomfortable to read because it is violent and presents a character who breaks with traditional images of Victorian women as she fights for what she believes belongs to her. Described as a “wild-cat”, she becomes animalistic in her determination: she “bit, scratched, kicked shifting her body as though she had not a bone in it . . . slipped herself free” with the “strength of twenty devils” (Riddell).

Amazed at her strength, the struggle becomes a battle for existence. Her elevated physical strength is ambiguously fueled either by the machinations of supernatural assistance, or more likely, adrenaline laced desperation. Yet, narrated in Phil’s voice, the scene depicts an eerie, distinctly visceral, physical encounter between a human male and human female. After she fires his pocket revolver at him, Phil retaliates with his full force:

I fell upon her—I can use no other expression, for it had become a fight for life, and no man can tell the ferocity there is in him till he is placed as I was then—fell upon her, and seized the weapon. She would not let it go, but I held her so tight she could not use it. She bit my face; with her disengaged hand she tore my hair. She turned and twisted and slipped about like a snake... (Riddell 281)

I include this complete passage because to me it signifies the true horror of the story. The woman, designated as “wild-cat”, “devil”, “snake” is clearly demonized by the text. Her very physicality, and her determination to perform whatever actions necessary to ensure her personal survival are in direct contrast with accepted images of the Victorian woman, who is expected to reign herself inward, embody morality and remain silent. However terrible the judgement passed on Lady Ladlow ought to be, the underlying subtext of the scene forces readers to look critically at the social system which would encourage a



human being to behave in such a manner. Removed from the outside world, pushed into the domestic space with little to no ability to contribute economically to either the family unit or the nation, it is not difficult to imagine the Victorian woman fading into the impotence of ghosthood. Or, in order to avoid such ghosthood, that she might be willing to exhaust even extreme, unthinkable, actions to financially protect herself. “The Open Door” subtly questions the very morality of human survival by probing at these issues.

Riddell’s actual ghost becomes little more than narrative plot advancement, achieving only minimal physical or psychological effect on the other characters. While she appears afraid (there is “horror” in her eyes), Lady Ladlow’s ability to resist the trope of fatal shock<sup>18</sup> is astounding—and ambiguous. Unlike other female figures who encounter the supernatural (such as the women in both Broughton and Braddon’s texts), the dowager seems to register, then immediately reject her shock at seeing the incorporeal form of her dead husband. What Riddell seems to be insinuating here is that Lady Ladlow’s response to seeing Lord Ladlow is different from other characters’ reactions may stem from one of two possibilities: either she herself is essentially already a ghost, and senses a detached kinship with him which shocks, yet does not drive her senseless, or she is so focused on her immediate survival that witnessing the ghost provides the distraction that affords the split instant needed to overpower Phil. Despite the ambiguity

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<sup>18</sup> Fatal shock is a common trope of ghost stories, referring to the reaction of the living human during the moment of the supernatural encounter. Symptoms of fatal shock, (being paralyzed by the encounter, even to the point of madness, permanent alteration of character, even dying of fear) seem to vary depending on the motivation of the author, as in this story where the female character evades death potentially because her economic social position has already rendered her a ghost.

in this moment, it is readily apparent that Lady Ladlow is a figure hell-bent on survival at any cost.

Phil's reaction to the encounter is more standard to the ghost story genre: he is stunned by seeing the ghost and freezes momentarily. However, his physical wounds are the result of human contact. After Lady Ladlow attacks him, he suffers the same symptoms as other affected characters. He "hovers" between life and death for a long period of time, almost becoming the actual border between the living and spirit realms. His shock, equally as ambiguous as the dowager's lack of symptoms, subsides and he recovers.

In Dickensian spirit, Phil, who is originally depicted as a greedy, lazy member of the workforce, becomes a reformed, upstanding and economically responsible member of English society after his ghostly encounter with both Lady and Lord Ladlow. He marries Patty, his childhood love, and they settle down on a farm, having promised to "try to settle down and promise to stick to [his] work" (Riddell 273). Justly punished, Dowager Ladlow flees the country with her maid, just prior to discovery of the legitimate will which would ruin her and expose her alleged crimes. As the male is reformed and the female forced to flee, Riddell's critique is not ultimately of individual characters but of the state of the Victorian social structure which forces women to rely almost completely upon their husbands and fathers for financial protection.

In their text *Victorian Ghost Stories*, editors Michael Cox and R.A. Gilbert surmise that from the 1850s forward, "fiction now had an essential social function" (Cox and Gilbert xii). Though they consider that function to be instruction and entertainment for the increasing literate middle classes, this thesis has expanded discussion on the social

purposes of short supernatural fiction written by women to include insertion of a female voice into the public, ideological sphere. Cox and Gilbert rationalize that women writers took up the ghost story mostly due to “practical—often pressing” need, i.e. financial need (Cox and Gilbert xiv). However, I have argued here that perhaps the reason women “took to the ghost story so successfully”<sup>19</sup> is not simply because they were already writing and publishing within weekly and monthly periodicals or because they needed the money to survive—although both these realities are undoubtedly true. Women took to the ghost story because socially, politically, economically, women of the Victorian period were reduced to a social position uncomfortably akin to ghosthood. This investigation of ghost stories written by Broughton, Braddon, and Riddell bolsters Vanessa D. Dickerson’s determination that women’s writing “constituted both expression and exploration of their own spirituality and their ambiguous status as the ‘other’ living in a state of in-betweeness: between the walls of the house . . . between angel and demon” (Dickerson 8).

Capitalizing on the ghost story’s popularity following Dickens’s publication of *A Christmas Carol*, women writers undertook the task of subversively manipulating the genre to include a discussion of social conditions specifically affecting women. All of the stories investigated in this thesis use female characters to subtly challenge the Victorian

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<sup>19</sup> While I am not disputing in any way the authority of Cox and Gilbert’s scholarship on the ghost story and women writers, there is here perhaps the slightest hint of dismissive tone and gendered language (so challenging to escape from within both linguistic and societal structures embedded within hegemonic patriarchy) which it would be remiss of me to allow to pass without comment. My personal hesitation as a female writer to include even this relatively innocuous criticism of language which recognizes and abets gendered social hierarchies speaks to a sense of the urgency propelling their determination and the risk which these women writers had to undertake in order to insert their own voices into the public literary sphere.

English value system, by exploring issues of economic and social import to women.

Overwhelmingly, the lingering message of each story relates back to the concept of the Victorian woman as a ghost or suspended being existing behind closed doors. However, writing from a position of social marginalization, women ghost story writers have been able to successfully use the genre as a means to speak out and to grant a voice to the domestic ghosts haunting the Victorian literary (and literal) legacy.

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## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY PROPOSED FOR CONTINUED RESEARCH LEADING TO EXPANSION OF THE THESIS PROJECT

Rationale: The purpose of this annotated bibliography is to expand the research for my current thesis titled, “Hauntings: Victorian Women Writers and the Supernatural (1843-1901).” In expanding outward, the scope of this annotated bibliography is threefold: there are sources listed which encourage a wider range of Victorian ghost stories, still specifically written by women; sources focused on exploring Charles Dickens’s influence on the popularity and form of the ghost story as a genre; and more general sources on women writers and social conditions faced by women living in the Victorian period. The expanded section on ghost stories moves beyond the scope of including only ghosts as deceased figures to include texts in which the figure of woman is depicted as still alive, yet experiencing a highly marginalized, or ghost-like, reality. There are sources listed which would allow for a section, or chapter of a dissertation, to be devoted to the ghost stories of Charles Dickens, who it is widely agreed was a key proponent in both the generic qualifications, and popular publication, of supernatural short fiction. Due to personal interests in social conditions and social problem literature of the era, these sources primarily approach Dickens’s writing, and particularly *A Christmas Carol*, through an investigation of his use of narrative sympathy to possibly induce ethical behavior among his readership. Texts listed about women writers and Victorian social conditions, both ideological and material, are designed to grant a wider authority on the period so that I may write with more authority about the relationship between women, the home, and cultural identity. The

overall goal of this project is to allow for continued study in the direction of possibly continuing work in a PhD program on this, or a closely related, topic.

#### ADDITIONAL GHOST STORIES/PRIMARY TEXTS:

Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. "The Cold Embrace." *Victorian Ghost Stories by Eminent*

*Women Writers*. Ed. Richard Dalby. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1988. 44-50. Print. One way this thesis project can be expanded upon is through a comparison of multiple ghost stories written by a single author. Already included in the thesis, it might be helpful to read another of Braddon's ghost stories; both tales could also be inspected alongside *Lady Audley's Secret*. "The Cold Embrace" begins with the betrothal of a young man and his cousin. Directly after placing a ring shaped like an ouroboros (a snake eating its own tale, supposed to be an ancient symbol of eternal return), he tells her he shall be with her always, even after death. However, the young lover then departs for Italy, abandoning all thought of his love and promises to Gertrude, who drowns herself soon after she learns she will be wed to a rich suitor. Continuing carelessly through his adventures as a traveling artist, the young lover is hunted down by Gertrude's cold embrace, which eventually saps the life from him, reduces him to little more than a living corpse, and ultimately causes him to perish "from want of food, exhaustion and the breaking of a blood-vessel" (Braddon 50). The revenge plot of a jilted woman contrasts well with the fate of both Miss Furnivall's from Gaskell's "The Old Nurse's Story," promoting revenge and anger directed at men as a facet of the female experience within ghost stories worthy of further study.

The role of the vengeful female ghost, particularly situated outside of the Gothic mode, presents a valid avenue of continued research as well.

Edwards, Amelia B. "Was It an Illusion? A Parson's Story." *Victorian Ghost Stories: an*

*Oxford Anthology*. Ed. Michael Cox & R.A. Gilbert. Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 1991. 239-256. Print. This ghost story features cross-gendered narration

which is told through the voice of a poor male parson. The tale, which purports

itself as a "true" story, following the pattern of many other ghost stories written

by women during the Victorian period; although tales narrated by female voices

do seem to better serve the goal of inserting the female voice into cultural

discussion about the existence of the supernatural within the natural world.

Although the story centers on male characters instead of female characters (who

make up the bulk of my thesis's textual analyses), male characters sustain the

same physical and psychological effects of ghostly interactions as women: stony

horror, questioning of their senses, fear of irrationality or dreaming, dialoging

about the existence of ghosts. In challenging my own arguments, this story forces

an analysis of the differences and similarities between Edwards's tale and stories

already selected for my study. Further research questions might include: Why

does Edwards's story center on male characters when so many stories by women

elect to focus on the female figure? In what ways does the story destabilize

feminist readings of ghost stories by women? In what ways does the story work to

expand or de-gender the effects of supernatural events on living humans and how

does this destabilize culturally understood gender divisions, if at all?



Gaskell, Elizabeth. *The Grey Woman, and Other Tales*. Freeport, NY: Books for

Libraries Press, 1971. Print. Although this tale is not technically marketed as a ghost story, it is a Gothic tale bearing a ghost-like character. The story centers around a young, new bride named Anna, who is brought to her mysterious husband's castle, where she is promptly imprisoned like a piece of his property. Harkening to the ancient Bluebeard myth, Anna's husband commands her never to enter a certain wing of the house. Together, Amante (Anna's hired maid) and Anna accidentally stumble upon proof that her husband is a highwayman and murderer, and they flee the castle for Anna and her unborn baby's safety. Along the way, Amante and Anna are forced to present themselves as a married couple (Amante cross-dresses as a man—which offers a plethora of opportunities to analyze gender-bending and class relations) as they try to survive. Despite not having a literal ghost figure in the story, the tale offers room for an analysis of social conditions, ideologies, and material realities faced by women (both married women and unmarried, lower class working domestics) which might shed light on the motivation and psychology of characters in other tales. The story also allows for inclusion of texts in which women are reduced to ghosts as either angels in the house, or cast out as economically disenfranchised figures who end up being ghosts in the larger social realm. Additionally, since Gaskell's novella length and short stories are often overlooked in larger scholarship centered on her writing, this also presents an opportunity for a feminist recovery of her short works.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. "The Old Nurse's Story." *Victorian Ghost Stories: an Oxford*

*Anthology*. Ed. Michael Cox & R.A. Gilbert. Oxford: Oxford University Press,

1991. 1-19. Print. Originally written for publication in Charles Dickens's *Household Words* Christmas issue (1852), Gaskell's ghost story draws heavily from the Gothic mode. Brought as an orphan to a haunted old manor house, the young Rosamond and her nurse begin to witness strange events: a piano that plays itself, ghostly handprints, and an unseen child spirit to whom Rosamond is strangely attached. By the denouement of the tale, it is revealed that a pair of sisters were both courted and then abandoned by a foreign man; one of the sisters, Miss Maude, secretly married and bore a child to this man. Punished for disgracing her family, Maude and her young child were cast out in the winter, and both died. The tale, which subtly demonstrates that female transgressions of conduct and family expectations are duly punished. Yet, interestingly, Miss Grace, the surviving Furnivall sister, ends up dying at the end of the text as well, after her entire family reappears in ghost form to reveal the entire imbroglio to the old nurse, who narrates the tale. In terms of the thesis, this tale allows me to further expand on the relationship between female social gender roles and how dangerous, even fatal, feminine transgressions could prove during the Victorian era.

Patmore, Coventry. *The Angel in the House*. *Project Gutenberg*. Cassell & Company, 1891. Web. 20 April 2015. Coventry Patmore's poetic homage to the perfection of his wife Emily illustrates the commonly held ideology that Victorian women were the moral center of the nation. Written and revised between 1854-1862, Patmore's poem became immensely popular in the second half of the nineteenth century, circulating during the same time period as the ghost stories which this

thesis investigates. Interestingly, Patmore's themes of honoring woman as the idyllic "angel" in the house, determining women as the center of moral education, and as submissive, gentle figures sits in opposition to the expression of women's social position in ghost stories written by Victorian women. This text could prove useful as an ideological counterpoint in the cultural discussion about the role of women. It could be possible that female ghost story writers, who depict the figure of woman as entrapped within the home, could be writing against Patmore's adoration of submissive femininity. Although this poem would be most useful in constructing the social ideology women writers sought to weaken, and therefore, is only helpful in a small way, it helps to have a background on male ideas of gender and the role of the "perfect" woman.

#### EXPANDED SECTION ON CHARLES DICKEN'S GHOST STORIES:

Jaffe, Audrey. "Spectacular Sympathy: Visuality and Ideology in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*." *PMLA*. 109.2. (1994): 254-265. Print. This article by Audrey Jaffe will be crucial in the expansion of the thesis project to include a section on Dickens's foundational role in the popularizing of Victorian ghost stories. Centering her analysis on the relationship between nineteenth century theories of sympathy and the construction of identity in England, Jaffe proposes a valid explication of *A Christmas Carol* which highlights the use of sympathy within the text. Jaffe contends that Dickens used spectacle to forge a connection between his readership and his main character, Ebenezer Scrooge, in hopes of indoctrinating literate English citizens with dominant values of the period. Of Dickens's technique, Jaffe writes: "As a model of socialization through spectatorship, the narrative posits the

visual as a means toward recapturing one's lost or alienated self—and becoming one's best self" (255). In this sense, readers would be sympathetically repulsed, or drawn, toward modeling Scrooge's behavior at various points in the tale, taking part, albeit tacitly, in his cultural rehabilitation. Towards the end of the essay, Jaffe gestures towards, but does not explicitly deal with, the role of women in Scrooge's identity construction. In terms of the topic of my thesis, which is primarily focused on female writers and the ways in which their ghost stories are constructed partly in difference to Dickens's generic model, this article helps to solidify what Dickens's writing does in terms of national identity—which opens wide an opportunity to pose and expand on the logical pursuant question: how did Victorian women writers deal differently with the construction of national identity? Or, more manageably perhaps, how did women writers make use of sympathetic didacticism or spectacle in their ghost stories in order to instruct and guide the behavior of their readership? This essay points to the possibility that a section devoted to Dickens and a close reading of his uses of sympathy could be beneficial as a precursor to a discussion of women's ghost stories, or even posed as a companion essay to enhance lay reader's historical knowledge of the development of the nineteenth century ghost story.

Greiner, D. Rae. "Thinking of Me Thinking of You: Sympathy versus Empathy in the Realist Novel." *Victorian Studies*. 53.3. (2011): 417-427. Print. Greiner's article presents a theoretical conversation about the use of empathy versus sympathy in literature of the Victorian period. Offering historical information about the prevalence of sympathetic thought in Victorian culture, Greiner proposes that for

realists, the use of sympathy actually denies the ability for readers to experience empathy with literary texts. Distinguishing the two states of relating, empathy is a marked “feeling with rather than feeling for others” and sympathy is a more removed emotional state which is derived from observation. Audrey Jaffe’s explication of Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* relies almost solely on Dickens’s technical manipulation of reader sympathy through visual spectacle. Greiner’s article seems to corroborate a reading of sympathy in Dickens by insinuating that the figure of Scrooge becomes an audience surrogate for the reader, which allows the text to be used as a cultural teaching tool employed in the construction of national identity. Greiner argues that realism relies on sympathy rather than empathy, drawing on the historical influence of Adam Smith’s theory of moral sentiments as well as the formal protocols determined as part of the process of sympathetic understanding, which may be summarized as the following: imaginatively tracing reader’s mental movements, reflecting upon situations that give rise to their emotions, gauging the appropriateness of their feelings (Greiner 419). The article is helpful to my project in two ways: 1) If I were to add a section or companion reading on Dickens, an evaluation of his use of sympathetic didacticism would be crucial to understanding his motivation as an author invested in social instruction, and 2) using a critical lens of sympathetic theory to evaluate the motivation of Victorian women writers could be crucial in attempting to validate the literary value of ghost stories, which, although popular, have been largely omitted from the cannon and literary scholarship. It would be interesting also to investigate whether ghost stories made use of realism in their

construction alongside the obvious employment of the supernatural and fantastical elements inherent in their generic makeup.

Harrison, Mary-Catherine. "The Paradox of Fiction and the Ethics of Empathy:

Reconceiving Dickens's Realism." *NARRATIVE*. 16.3. (2008): 256-278. Print.

This article by Mary-Catherine Harrison explores in great detail the relationship between empathy and novel reading. The main thrust of her argument is that a synecdochal model of interpretation is a critical tool in evaluating Victorian novels, which she then applies to Dickens's writing. First, Harrison presents arguments against literature as capable of building empathy, by beginning with our natural responses to instances of distress: 1) We feel distress, 2) we then attempt to act on said distress. She then applies this logic to the process of encountering distress in literature, arguing that when reading, our brains separate out what we know to be real from the unreal, which makes an empathetic response impossible. She suggests that while we may "want to intervene in a literary text . . . we cannot," which leads those critical of literary empathy toward the determination that narrative empathy is little more than escapism (Harrison 262). Then Harrison turns her attention to Dickens, providing an analysis of his use of metaphorical relationships, claiming that increased sympathetic feeling derived from reading his novels allowed readers to intervene on behalf of real people whose problems/needs resembled those of characters in his texts who were in need of support (Harrison 262). The article then itemizes the ways in which Dickens's literature is emblematic of social problem literature directed at the instruction of Victorian citizens so they would develop more ethical social

behavior. This article would be invaluable if I were to present a section on Dickens's didacticism and then apply this information to a similar investigation of ghost stories written by women to determine if Victorian women writers employed similar moments of ethical instruction.

#### EXPANDED SECTION ON WOMEN WRITERS AND VICTORIAN SOCIAL CONDITIONS:

Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. Print. While this entire text is helpful to understanding the impact of gender and class on cultural ideology as well as the publication of written texts, Armstrong's second section on "The Rise of the Domestic Woman" is most relevant to expansion of this thesis. Armstrong focuses heavily on the history of conduct books for women, particularly in the eighteenth, and leading into the nineteenth centuries. Armstrong demonstrates how the effect of such conduct books, which instructed women on topics ranging from social decorum to economic household management, changed cultural interpretations of the domestic home and, consequently, the role of women as well. She writes: "...the household ceased to display the value of the man's income and instead took on the innermost human qualities of the woman who regulated the domestic economy" (Armstrong 87). In terms of my thesis, Armstrong's analysis of the impact conduct books had on shaping cultural concepts of domesticity and male and female gender roles within such conceptions, is crucial in helping to build a theoretical rationale for my argument that women in the nineteenth century (in England in particular, given the parameters of the thesis) are relegated to the

domestic sphere, which enervates them, reducing them to a ghostlike state of existence. Armstrong's text articulates the historical proof of social acculturation which might result in such a feminized reality which women writers would want to expose and respond to in their published ghost stories.

Bann, Jennifer. "Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency: The Changing Figure of the Nineteenth-Century Specter." *Victorian Studies*. 52.4. (2009): 663-685. Print. In this article, Jennifer Bann deals with the changing identity of the spectral figure in literature of the nineteenth century. She contends that the ghost of the early half of the nineteenth century is presented as a "restricted figure" who is only able to act through the agency of the living, such as the figure of Jacob Marley, whose salvation lies in the actions of Ebenezer Scrooge and his ability to become a reformed and improved Englishman. In the latter half of the century, she argues that a shift occurs in the agency of literary ghosts and that this is a result of wider cultural understandings and opinions regarding the supernatural in England. The remainder of the article, which would be very helpful in expanding the thesis project, focuses on the cultural impact the mesmerist and spiritualist movements had on literary ghost stories. One of the main points presented in the essay is that the spiritualist movement served as a source of transformation of ghostly identity: the movement culturally humanized spirits and also made them more powerful. She writes: "spiritualism newly imagined spectrality as something inherently powerful and transformative" (Bann 665). Chronicling the historical growth of spiritualism, Bann suggests that the main tenet of the movement was the belief that the dead can, and want, to communicate with the living and that these



attempts at communication ought to be honored by the living. Her argument also gestures toward the literary impact social movements in the Victorian period had on written ghost stories from 1850 through the end of the century. Primarily, later in the century fictional ghosts gain a greater sense of agency and power as they become less constrained by conventional genre expectations. This is partially due to an increase in psychological focus, which expands the complexity of ghostly characters, who want the same things in death as they did in life, only now have perhaps more power to achieve their desires. This article, although it doesn't place primacy on the point, can be read alongside Vanessa D. Dickerson's *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide*, to achieve a more full understanding of the role of women as leaders in the spiritualist movement, which would facilitate a cultural reading of the power women writers attributed to ghosts as reflective of cultural reality.

Freeman, Nick. "Sensational Ghosts, Ghostly Sensations." *Women's Writing*. 20.2.

(2013): 186-201. Print. This article opens with the overlap between sensation novels and ghost stories written by Victorian women, and the ways in which they seem to conform to social ideas about the "angel in the house" while simultaneously working through the supernatural and sensational literary forms to "bring dislocation and menace to the very heart of the family home" (Freeman 186). Freeman makes parallels between ghostly characters in stories and the Victorian woman's role within the home by drawing on the work of Vanessa Dickerson, who is referenced already in the submitted thesis. Freeman quotes Clare Stewart, who writes that, "the supernatural was essential to the ghost story, which became an ideal discourse for hidden agendas and deeper levels" (Freeman

187). It is these “deeper levels” which are of interest in expansion of the thesis project, and Freeman’s subsequent close readings of ghost stories by Ellen Wood, Amelia Edwards, and Rhoda Broughton (whose ghost stories are already included in the thesis) offer a great area of expansion. Using the ghost story as a means to discuss topical issues of concern, the three stories in this article deal with a plethora of issues: the factory as a “site of horror” in Edwards’s work, for example could be used to demonstrate that women ghost story writers were interested in social problems literature similarly to Dickens. The article offers a solid starting point and guide for further investigation of women’s subversive uses of both the sensational and supernatural genres.

Holstein, Suzy Clarkson. “Finding a Woman’s Place: Gaskell and Authority.” *Studies in the Novel*. 21.4. (1989): 380-388. Print. In this article, Suzy Clarkson Holstein engages with previous Gaskell scholarship undertaken by Margaret Homans and Patsy Stoneman by expanding their conversation regarding Gaskell’s position as a Victorian writer. She specifically treats the question: “What space, then, does Gaskell occupy (and more importantly, where are her characters) in relation to authority?” (Holstein 380). The “authority” referenced here is the system of patriarchy which constrains the role of Victorian womanhood to the moral and patrilineal protection of the nation. Holstein’s findings encourage a reading of Gaskell’s writing as representative of a redefined patriarchy in which women, particularly daughters, are not struggling against the restrictions of patriarchy, but rather are “learning to survive without the protection and shelter of “fathers,” literal or symbolic” (Holstein 382). Holstein explores this assertion in several of

Gaskell's works, paying particular attention to *Cranford*, *North and South*, and *Wives and Daughters*. Her interpretation of these novels relies heavily on her assumption that Gaskell's characters struggle with the tension between absolute truth and the desire (arguably maternal in nature) to protect individuals they care about. Because the essay seems to strive to prove that women and men perform gender identity expression in non-normative ways, and that this somehow presents Gaskell as a writer who uses her "feminine abilities" to "merge into a 'masculine' basis for authority: the scientific method" (Holstein 386). In this respect, the article feels underdeveloped: it is too short to clearly make her argument effectively, and this is perhaps also because she relies too much on interacting with previous scholars' work on Gaskell. However, the source may be useful in thinking of Gaskell's "The Grey Woman." Holstein brushes aside Gaskell's Gothic tales as primarily demonstrative of women trapped inside edifices embodying the "tyranny of men"—yet, I would argue that "The Grey Woman" uses the Gothic mode to further explore the necessity of female autonomy, especially when they have sustained highly pressurized circumstances, such as Anna experiences when she must flee her husband's castle with her maid in order to protect the future life of her unborn child. I could potentially extend Holstein's concept of authority in terms of its development under pressure and out of necessity.

Langland, Elizabeth. "Patriarchal Ideology and Marginal Motherhood in Victorian Novels by Women." *Studies in the Novel*. 19.3. (1987): 381-394. Print. Operating under the belief that modern feminist criticism has largely ignored the relationship

between mothers and sons in Victorian literature, Elizabeth Langland sets out to outline the role of womanhood in the Victorian era by providing analysis of novels written by women. The first section of the article focuses on the cultural debate over the role of women from between 1840-1860. Arguing that “the Woman Question” was a legitimate topic of debate fueled by texts like Coventry Patmore’s *The Angel in the House* (1854-62), Langland chronicles four myths about Victorian womanhood. Together, these myths promoted “woman’s moral efficacy in the world at the same time as they limit her sphere for action in that world,” and focus on woman’s “salvatory potential” that characterized women as essentially nurturing and redemptive figures (Langland 382). Focusing her textual analyses primarily on Anne Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot, Langland exposes the patriarchal controls inherent within the Victorian family structure. Ultimately, she argues that Victorian women writers explored women’s social position within the cult of motherhood, which “continuously demanded the mother’s displacement by patriarchy’s dutiful daughter and effectively blocked a woman’s influence in the world” (Langland 392). In terms of expanding the thesis project, the article is helpful in that it provides historical information in support of women writer’s awareness of, and writings about, social conditions affectively limiting women to the private sphere of the home, wherein I argue they become ghostlike and marginalized. Since the article treats the writing of Elizabeth Gaskell specifically, it can be useful in an analysis of Gaskell’s ghost stories, “The Old Nurse’s Story” (1852) and her longer Gothic story “The Grey Woman” (1861), both of which deal with the role of women as mothers and wives. “The

Grey Woman” does not directly involve a ghost; however, it is logical to attribute a ghostly identity to the main female character, Anna, who is forced to flee her new home and role as bride. Observing her experiences following her flight from her home with the assistance of her maid allows for both an analysis of women’s role as ghost in Victorian society alongside the intersections of class among women who work together.

Thompson, Nicola Diane. “Lost Horizons: Rereading and Reclaiming Victorian Women Writers.” *Women’s Studies*. 31.1. (2002): 67-90. Print. Beginning with an assertion about the current reception of Victorian women writers in academia today, Thompson states that the Victorian women writers valued today are those whose work lends itself to easy alignment with contemporary feminist ideology, and largely, are already “known” women writers rather than those who have been overlooked or excluded from the literary cannon. This article launches an historical approach to conceptualizing the divide between canonical and non-canonical, yet topically popular, Victorian women writers. Thompson points out repeatedly that popular women writers of the time have not been taken seriously in academia, with an underlying judgment statement that this is to the detriment of our overall understanding of women’s contributions to writing. Her stance also purports that such a myopic focus has led to an incomplete analysis of the woman question. This last point appears ironic considering that popular Victorian women writers dealt with, “apparently ‘trivial’ subject matter, usually dealing with women’s lives and questions to do with women, if not the woman question itself”—presumably, literature treating these “trivial” topics would lead to a more

comprehensive feminist understanding of the writing of the period (Thompson 74). To support her claims, Thompson presents a recovery-based literary analysis of the body of writing by Charlotte Yonge, a popular writer whom Thompson believes has been incorrectly cast as “anti-feminist” from the eyes of contemporary feminist definitions and motivations. Thompson proposes an interesting perspective on Margaret Oliphant, who many feminist critics have classified as overly conservative and even ‘anti-feminist.’ However, Thompson mentions an essay written by Oliphant titled “The Grievances of Women” which was published in 1880 and presents a sympathetic perspective of women’s work. This essay could be interesting and useful when looking at the ghost stories of Oliphant, and particularly if I related her ghost story “The Open Door” to my existing discussion of haunted house ghost stories such as Charlotte Riddell’s story of the same name. Oliphant’s essay also suggests that more work needs to be done to link together the theoretical, or social, writing of Victorian women writers with their short fiction and novels in order to ascertain a complete understanding of each author’s oeuvre. Discounting one or the other seems to be somewhat negligent, and may be partially responsible for rejection out of hand of certain popular writers from the cannon and academic classroom. Interestingly, this relates to the concept of marginalizing women as writers such that they become ghosts, forgotten in the past by scholars who determine them to be not feminist enough for contemporary discussion, when in fact, we ought to be uncovering as much information as we can and dealing with our findings in a critical, yet unbiased, manner.

Penzoldt, Peter. *The Supernatural in Fiction*. New York, NY: Humanities Press. 1965.

Print. Penzholdt reinforces the historical information put forth by Dorothy Scarborough in regards to the “modern” ghost which takes the form of short stories from the nineteenth century on, rather than plays or novels. Penzholdt’s text is divided into categories by section, and among these, the sections on “The Ghost”, “The Wraith”, “The Supernatural in Science Fiction” and “The Psychological Ghost Story” are most relevant to this project. However, my main criticism with this text is that it is incredibly male-centric and hardly treats supernatural writing by women. If the text did not have an entire chapter dedicated to Charles Dickens, “The Ghost Story with a Moral—Dickens and Stevenson,” the source would be informative, yet not crucial to my research. As stands, it is only useful if I expand a section specifically focused on Dickens.

Scarborough, Dorothy. “Modern Ghosts.” *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction*.

New York, NY: GP Putnam’s Sons, 1917. 81-130. Print. This text, which was originally published in 1917, reads as dated and out of touch with a modern readership of ghost stories. However, it is valuable precisely because of its chronological proximity to the tales published in the nineteenth century. The author, Deborah Scarborough, writes in an accessible, conversational tone which belies her wealth of knowledge (and opinions) regarding ghost stories stretching across several centuries. In terms of this project, she is perhaps most helpful in terms of mining new stories to investigate. Here, I have discovered a short list of stories which are relevant to a continued discussion of women and their role in society. To this end, the ghost stories of Italian-born, American male author F.

Marion Crawford, could provide an interesting transatlantic perspective on anxieties about the role of women. His story, “The Screaming Skull” (1908) demonstrates male anxiety over the (re)vengeful power of victimized women. This story could pose an interesting counter-perspective to “The Cold Embrace” by Mary Elizabeth Braddon—they both feature jilted, vengeful female figures, and provide an opportunity to view each character’s actions as reactions to pressurized social circumstances indicative of the difficulty of living as a woman in Victorian England. Although this story would require extending beyond the 1901 time limit, it might be worthwhile to wrap around the turn of the century to observe which trends remain relevant to early twentieth century tales. Scarborough’s text provides a spectrum of stories useful to constructing a historical explanation for shifts in the supernatural genre which is useful as well.